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BESTS Policies

- The Belin-Blank Center reserves the right to modify or waive these policies. The Belin-Blank Exceptional Student Talent Search (BESTS) is subject to the Belin-Blank Center’s [privacy policy](#).
- In all cases except I-Excel dates coordinated by the school or ACT registrations coordinated by the school, the Belin-Blank Center will not share scores unless given explicit written permission by the parent. While the Center does not offer school score-sending as a service, we recommend that families share scores with educators at the child’s school, particularly those involved in making decisions about the child’s academic progress. For I-Excel and ACT registrations coordinated by the school, the school contact organizing testing will have access to the scores resulting from the test date and will be able to distribute scores to families.
- Discounts for Free/Reduced Price Lunch are at the discretion of the Belin-Blank Center, which may request verification of eligibility. The number of partial fee waivers for Free/Reduced Price Lunch is limited per academic year on a first-come, first-served basis. If this reduced fee is still too great a financial burden, the Center will work with the family to make a financial arrangement that allows the student to participate.
- Students may test through BESTS a maximum of once per academic year.
- Your child’s data may be used in aggregate and unidentifiable form to contribute to norms.

I-Excel

General Policies

Calculators on I-Excel

Students may use any calculator during the Mathematics section of I-Excel unless it has features described in the Prohibited list. The following types of calculators are prohibited:

- Graphing calculators.
- Calculators with built-in computer algebra systems.
- Handheld, tablet, or laptop computers, or other similar device.
- Electronic writing pads or pen-input devices.
- Calculators built into cell phones or any other electronic communication devices.
- Calculators with a typewriter keypad (letter keys in QWERTY format). Note: Letter keys not in QWERTY format are permitted.

- Online calculators or calculator applications on the same machine as the I-Excel test. Students should use a separate calculator, not one on their computer.
- The following types of calculators are permitted, but only after they have been modified as noted:
 - Calculators with paper tape: Remove the tape.
 - Calculators that make noise: Turn off the sound.
 - Calculators with an infrared data port: Completely cover the infrared data port with heavy opaque material such as duct tape or electrician's tape.
 - Calculators that have power cords: Remove all power/electrical cords.

Scientific calculators are allowed but not recommended, as younger students may find them confusing or distracting. If the school is providing calculators for all students, check all calculators before the test day to be sure they are working properly and have the specified functions: addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, and square root keys.

Can Third Graders Take I-Excel?

I-Excel can be a very challenging test for 3rd graders, but some students are quite successful. Even if your child has already earned a high score on the Iowa Assessments, it is hard for us to predict how your child might do on I-Excel. There are likely to be questions on I-Excel that your child has never encountered. If he or she becomes very frustrated and upset in those types of circumstances, we advise waiting until next year. However, if your child is the kind of student who is willing to take on a challenge, your child can be permitted to test.

A few 3rd graders have taken I-Excel in the past, but this is not an opportunity offered to a large number of 3rd graders. The content is quite challenging -- it is actually 8th-grade-level content.

One thing that might help you in making your decision is to have your child take the sample test. You can request access to the sample test by emailing assessment@belinblank.org.

If you decide to test, we recommend talking with your child about it ahead of time and explaining the following things to him or her:

- This test was designed for 8th graders.
- We don't expect young students to get everything right.
- The test will be several hours long, and students will be expected to concentrate for the duration with a short break halfway through the test.
- Many students don't even have enough time to finish all of the questions on the test.
- Taking I-Excel is a chance for students to show what they know, but also what they don't know, and it can help us to have a better idea of the types of things that might challenge them more in school.

The information families and teachers receive from testing is very helpful. The report is quite detailed, and it contains information about additional resources.

If you decide not to have your child test this year, consider participating next school year. Students are welcome to test in the fall; they do not have to wait until spring.

Preparing for the Test

There are a few things students (and parents) should know before the test:

- To participate, students must have at least one score in the 95th percentile or above on a core subject of a grade-level test, such as the Iowa Assessments. By definition, an above-level test was designed for older students, so it is best-suited to students who are maxing out grade-level tests in at least one subject.
- Sometimes even if students meet the 95th percentile guideline on a grade-level test, they or their parents may be nervous about taking such a challenging test (the I-Excel content is designed for 8th graders). The guideline is intended to prevent students from being overly stressed or frustrated by the testing experience. Students can try out sample questions for free to gauge the level of the test and whether it is a good fit. Just contact assessment@belinblank.org to request a link to the sample test questions.

- We recommend that students take a look at the sample items to get comfortable with the format of the test. Beyond that, we **do not** recommend that students study for the test; the most useful scores result when students understand the format but do not study for the test. A link to the sample test is in your registration confirmation email. If the student is already registered, use the email address associated with the registration to access the sample items; or contact assessment@belinblank.org to receive the link and a temporary access code.
- Important for students to know:
 - This is a challenging test that was originally designed for 8th graders!
 - Students should do their best, but it is very common not to finish one or more sections of the test, and it's highly likely they won't know everything on the test. This is expected and okay.
 - The fact that they are taking this test alone is proof that they are doing very well.

Testing Over Two Sessions

Testing may be split over two days, shortening the amount of uninterrupted time needed. This can make scheduling easier. If testing is split over two days, the first 2 sections will be administered on the first test day, and the second 2 sections will be administered on the second day. Other arrangements for splitting the test are not permitted. Testing must be completed within one week. For more details about how to test over the course of two days, contact assessment@belinblank.org.

Special Accommodations

Special accommodations will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Please direct inquiries to assessment@belinblank.org.

After the Test

- Once fees are paid in full and any irregularities have been resolved, scores will be released within two weeks.
- **Scores will not be released until all fees are paid in full.**
- Please note that results will be sent from the IDEAL Solutions[®] for STEM Acceleration system. The email will be sent from info@idealsolutionsmath.com and the subject will be "[IDEAL Solutions Web Application] (YourChild's Name) Report - (TheDate), with the items in parentheses being specific to your child.
- The results can be helpful for curriculum planning. One option, depending on the results, may be [subject acceleration](#). Additional options include [whole grade acceleration](#) or [early entrance to college](#).
- Students in Iowa who score highly on an above-level test may be eligible to take courses online through the [Iowa Online AP Academy \(IOAPA\)](#), which provides above-level coursework online without a course fee (currently available in Iowa only). Only educators may register students for IOAPA.

Teacher-Arranged Testing

Teachers can arrange testing dates with the Belin-Blank Center between October 1st and June 10th. Other [blackout dates](#) apply. We recommend planning 5-6 weeks or more before you'd like to test.

- An educator may set up a test date with as few as four students (or, for a higher fee, 1-3 students). Prices are listed at belinblank.org/talent-search.
- Iowa educators can easily create a list of qualifying students using Iowa Testing Programs' [handy online tool](#).
- [Download a sample letter](#) to invite students to participate (assumes you have already set up a test date).
- Email assessment@belinblank.org to get started.
- Educators arranging test dates and any staff that assist them agree to abide by the rules and procedures in the I-Excel administration manual and understand that deviation from this manual can jeopardize the reliability of the results.
 - In particular, it is important to follow the manual's instructions for timing and the break halfway through the test.
 - Monitoring the students closely during testing is also crucial.

- Belin-Blank Center staff will monitor test dates electronically and may follow up with the educator who arranged the test date to resolve any anomalies.

Payment/Refunds

- Refunds are available for students if we are notified by email **by one day before the testing session window opens**. Refund requests received the day of the testing window or later will be denied. Special circumstances may apply.
- Payment options: individual parent checks, group check/payment order from the school, individual parent credit card payments. The teacher selects this option during registration.
 - If the school opts to allow parents to pay via credit card, unpaid registrations will be dropped one week before the test date.
 - If the school opts to pay via check or payment order, the educator will receive an invoice approximately a week before the test date. In this case, payment may be settled after the test date, and scores will not be released until payment is received in full.
 - Checks should be made out to BESTS and, if a check is for an individual student, include the child's name in the memo line.

Retesting/Missed Test Date

- Retesters (students who were absent due to illness or other unforeseeable circumstances) must complete their tests within seven days of the original testing date. This is defined as the first date that students began testing. No additional fees will be assessed in this case.
- If a student cannot finish testing within seven days, the registration must be moved to a new test date in order for the student to test. The fee associated with moving to a new test date is \$25, payable by the school or the parent. **If the student is not tested within the testing window of the new date, no refunds will be available, either of the original fee or the retest fee. Test dates moved more than twice may be subject to an additional \$25 fee.**
- **If a student registers, ultimately does not test, and did not cancel their registration by the day before testing window opened, no refunds are available.**

Parent-Arranged Testing

Open Testing

The Belin-Blank Center occasionally hosts group test dates on the University of Iowa campus in Iowa City, IA. This type of test date is open to all qualifying students and only requires that parents drop off and pick up their child at the designated times.

- Costs and the date of our annual open testing will be posted on our website by spring of a given academic year. Payment is by credit card only.
- Unpaid registrations will be dropped one week before the test date.
- Refunds are available for students if we are notified by email **by one day before the test date**. Refund requests received the day of the test or later will be denied. Special circumstances may apply.
- Scores are generally released within two weeks of the test date.
- Makeups are not available for open test dates at the Belin-Blank Center. **If a student registers, ultimately does not test, and did not cancel their registration by the day before testing window opened, no refunds are available.**
- Please note that results will be sent from the IDEAL Solutions[®] for STEM Acceleration system. The email will be sent from info@idealsolutionsmath.com and the subject will be "[IDEAL Solutions Web Application] (YourChild's Name) Report - (TheDate), with the items in parentheses being specific to your child.
- The results can be helpful for curriculum planning. One option, depending on the results, may be [subject acceleration](#). [Whole grade acceleration](#) may also be a good fit.

- Students who score highly on an above-level test may be eligible to take courses online through the [Iowa Online AP Academy \(IOAPA\)](#), which provides above-level coursework online without a course fee (currently available in Iowa only). Only educators may register students for IOAPA.

Individual Testing

For this option, parents must find a licensed educator who agrees to proctor a test (roughly a two-and-a-half-hour time commitment). Acceptable proctors include full-time teachers, tutors, and college professors. The proctor must be a college graduate. The proctor cannot be a relative.

- Please specify at the time of signing up whether you would like the proctor to have access to the scores.
 - Costs are listed at belinblank.org/talent-search.
- In most cases, we plan three weeks or more ahead of the test date.
- To set up the testing, email assessment@belinblank.org with the proctor's information (first name, last name, and email address), as well as when you would like to test.
- Testing dates occur between October 1st and June 10th. Other [blackout dates](#) apply.
- Payment/Refunds
 - We strongly recommend handling payment by credit card, which requires that the proctor select the parent pay option when setting up the test date.
 - Refunds are available for students if we are notified by email **by one day before the testing session window opens**. Refund requests received the day of the testing window or later will be denied. Special circumstances may apply.
- Retesters (students who were absent due to illness or other unforeseeable circumstances) must complete their tests within seven days of the original testing date. This is defined as the first date that students began testing.
- **If a student registers, ultimately does not test, and did not cancel their registration by the day before testing window opened, no refunds are available.**