



How to Apply to Kindergarten

The start of Kindergarten is an exciting time for families, but did you know that the process of selecting one should start nearly a full year in advance? Finding a great Kindergarten program is one of the most important ways to set your child up for academic success, so we have compiled some helpful resources to make this process easier.

Why Kindergarten?

Though Kindergarten is not mandatory in Pennsylvania, it is a vital part of a child's education and adult success. Research has shown that students who have participated in a high-quality Kindergarten program are more likely than their peers to go on to college and ultimately find higher-paying jobs in adulthood. Students who complete Kindergarten begin first grade more prepared than their peers and have had time to socialize and adjust to an academic learning environment.

We encourage families to consider a variety of school options for Kindergarten: public neighborhood, public charter, private independent and private Catholic.

Kindergarten Eligibility

To register for a public school, your child must be 5 years old by September 1st of the year they would start school. If your child will be 6 on September 1st, you can provide a written request to enroll them in Kindergarten instead of first grade.

All parents are eligible to enroll their children in a public Kindergarten class. Because spaces in popular neighborhood and charter schools tend to fill up quickly, all parents should start the Kindergarten application process a year in advance. By starting earlier, you provide your child with more school options.

Application Timeline for Kindergarten

For Kindergarten students starting in the 2021–22 school year:

September–January

- ▶ **Check out K-8 school options on *phillyk8fair.com*:** Learn about charter, District and private school options by visiting the Philly K-8 School Fair website. Visit *phillyk8fair.com* for more information, including school types, application information, and helpful resources to choose and apply to a K-8 school.
- ▶ **Complete private school financial aid applications:** Most private schools accept applications through the spring, but their financial aid can be exhausted as early as the winter before. Private schools can be a great option for families, but if your enrollment is dependent on financial assistance, begin that discussion by meeting with the school's financial aid office and completing your application in the fall. You can apply to as many schools as you want, then decide later which school is right for your child.
- ▶ **Apply to District schools outside of your neighborhood school:** If you would like to attend a District school other than your assigned neighborhood school, you must fill out a separate application form online at *schoolselect.philasd.org*. This application opens September 18, 2020 and closes on November 6, 2020. Because some schools have limited space (or are overenrolled), the District releases a list of schools with Kindergarten seats available to children who live outside of the schools' neighborhood catchment. Visit *greatphillyschools.org* to find a list of these schools.
- ▶ **Apply for scholarships with the Children's Scholarship Fund:** If you are interested in private schools, the Children's Scholarship Fund Philadelphia provides free, lottery-based scholarships for parents of K-8 students. The scholarships last four years and can be applied to many private schools. Visit *csfphiladelphia.org* to learn more and complete a short application. For the best odds, apply by the priority deadline on November 15, 2020. A second lottery will be held for applications received up to March 1, 2021.
- ▶ **Apply to charter schools:** You can apply to most charter schools on one website: *applyphillycharter.org*! Participating charter schools will accept applications through Apply Philly Charter beginning September 25, 2020, through January 25, 2021. Not all charter schools accept applications through Apply Philly Charter and may have different application deadlines. Visit *greatphillyschools.org* for more information.

February–May

- ▶ **Apply to private schools:** Priority admissions deadlines for most private schools fall in this time. A parent interview or school visit may be required. Many schools require application fees. If paying the fee is a hardship, ask if the school offers waivers.
- ▶ **Receive your District application results:** If you applied for schools other than your neighborhood school by completing an online application, you should receive your results in January (see timeline details at *greatphillyschools.org*). Some schools receive more applications than they have space and might not be able to offer you a spot. If you are accepted into any school other than your neighborhood school, you must confirm that you want to attend the school within a week.
- ▶ **Register for your District neighborhood school:** District schools have limited space for Kindergarten. To ensure a space at your neighborhood school, register as early as possible. Registration typically opens in January and closes at the end of May, but popular schools often fill up early. If your school's Kindergarten class is full, you will be placed on a waitlist and assigned to a nearby school with space. Learn more about how to register at your District neighborhood school on page 3.
- ▶ **Attend open houses:** District schools offer open house dates for prospective families. You can find a list of open house dates at *greatphillyschools.org/events*.
- ▶ **Charter schools hold lotteries and notify parents of acceptances:** Each school holds its own lottery; many are public and open for you to attend. In February, families who applied to charter schools through Apply Philly Charter will be able to log in to the site to view the outcome of their application(s). Families will also be contacted directly by schools. Charter schools not participating in Apply Philly Charter may also notify families during this time. If your child is placed on a waitlist, you may receive an offer later in the year. Speak with the school directly about your chances.
- ▶ **Early registration closes for District schools:** Kindergarten registration typically closes at the end of May. After the end of May, you can still register for Kindergarten by visiting your neighborhood school — as long as there is space available. Visit your school's front office or call to speak with the secretary to ensure that there is room for your child. Learn more about how to register at your District neighborhood school on page 3.

Visit greatphillyschools.org for more information about schools.

How to Register for Kindergarten at Your Neighborhood School

1 Identify Your Options

Though Kindergarten is not required, the District provides free Kindergarten for Philadelphia families. GreatPhillySchools offers the starting point for your school research and a reference to help you understand and compare your options. Visit greatphillyschools.org to learn more.

All families are eligible to enroll their child at a District neighborhood school. First, identify your catchment school by entering the student's home address in the Find a School search feature on greatphillyschools.org.

If you would like to attend a District school other than your assigned neighborhood school, you must fill out a separate application form online through the School Selection Process. The deadline to complete this form is November 6, 2020. Visit schoolselect.philasd.org for more information. If your child is offered a seat, you will need to follow all steps to register and enroll in the school.

2 Gather Your Documents

To register for Kindergarten, you must provide the following documents:

- **Proof of your child's age:** Examples include birth or baptismal certificate, passport, prior school records indicating date of birth.
- **Proof of address (2 documents):** Examples include a lease, deed, valid state drivers or photo identification, or utility bills with your name and address. For more examples, visit bit.ly/SDP-Kinder.
- **Immunization records:** Ask your child's physician for these records. Students are exempt from this requirement if a physician provides a written statement that immunizations would be detrimental to the health of the child and/or the parent/guardian submits a written document objecting to immunization on religious grounds or strong moral/ethical conviction.

- **Registration forms:** These forms can be filled out at the school or completed at home. Visit philasd.org/studentplacement to access the EH-40 document online.

Though not required for registration, schools may request:

- Valid photo ID of the parent or guardian, such as a drivers license, passport or state photo identification card.
- Child's previous school information, if applicable.

3 Register Online

To register, visit philasd.org/thriveatfive to complete the online process. Be prepared with scanned copies of the necessary documents you'll need to upload.

For questions about registration, you may email the Office of Student Placement and Enrollment at osep@philasd.org. For questions pertaining to school supplies and other school related concerns, please contact your neighborhood school.

Special Education and Accommodations

If you believe your child may need special learning accommodations, speak directly to the school. Many schools – including private schools – will work with your child to determine the best methods of support. In some cases, this may mean working with you to draft an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Transitioning from an Early Intervention Program

Children planning to attend a District or charter school may be eligible to transition preschool special education services prior to starting Kindergarten. The transition process begins one year before your child is eligible for Kindergarten (or 1st grade if the child does not attend Kindergarten).

The goal of the Early Intervention transition process is to determine the levels of special education services your child will need for Kindergarten by the beginning of the school year. As the District evaluation process can be lengthy, eligible children can have an established IEP that will provide support first while seeking a reevaluation with the District or charter school.

Private schools have their own independent process to establish the level of supports offered to students needing special education services. For more information, contact the school directly.

For eligible preschool children ages 3 to 5 years old living in Philadelphia and areas of Delaware County, Elwyn SEEDS provides Preschool Early Intervention testing and coordinates support services. When children with Early Intervention services are of school age, Elwyn SEEDS coordinates the Transition to Kindergarten process, which begins a year prior to starting Kindergarten.

1. **Complete the Intent to Register Form.** This form will be shared with families who have children eligible for Kindergarten or 1st grade. By indicating your plan to register your child at a District or charter school, Elwyn SEEDS sends your child's preschool evaluation and IEP to your District or charter school and proceeds with the transition process.

2. **Receive Notice of Transition Process Options.** After reviewing your child's documents, the District or charter school will notify the parents in writing with the options available. These options are (a) adopt the Early Intervention IEP for school, (b) adopt the Early Intervention IEP with revisions, or (c) conduct a reevaluation to establish a new IEP.
3. **Attend the Transition Meeting.** The purpose of this meeting is to discuss your child's options in person with the Early Intervention staff and District/charter staff.
4. **Register at your Neighborhood School.** Your child must be registered and enrolled in a District or charter school. Read about the timeline on page 2 and how to register at your neighborhood school on page 3.
5. **Complete the Permission to Re-Evaluate Form (PTRE).** While eligible children must have an IEP in place by the beginning of the school year, the District will also require a reevaluation. After receiving this signed form, the District can begin the reevaluation process.

IMPORTANT NOTE: As the services available at different schools vary, your student could be placed at a different school to receive the appropriate supports in his/her IEP.

For more information:

- Elwyn SEEDS, elwyn.org/services/early-learning, **215-222-8054**
- Office of Specialized Services, philasd.org/specializedservices, **215-400-4170**
- The Office of Dispute Resolution, odr-pa.org, or call ConsultLine at **800-879-2301**
- Education Law Center, elc-pa.org, **215-238-6970**

Frequently Asked Questions

How old does my child need to be to register?

To register for a public school, your child must be 5 years old by September 1st of the year they would start school. If your child will be 6 on September 1st, you can provide a written request to enroll them in Kindergarten instead of first grade — or you can skip Kindergarten and enroll directly in first grade.

What paperwork is required to register for Kindergarten at my neighborhood school?

See page 3 for the list of required documents to register at your District neighborhood school.

What paperwork do I need to apply to Kindergarten at a charter school?

You do not need to submit registration paperwork to apply to a charter school. Most charter schools accept a simple online application through Apply Philly Charter (applyphillycharter.org) for entry into their lottery. Only if you are offered a seat and want to attend the school are you expected to provide paperwork. Increase your options by applying to more schools; you'll have a chance to choose once you know whether or not your child has been accepted.

Should I register at my District neighborhood school?

Yes. The District provides free Kindergarten for Philadelphia families — but the space available at each school varies. When a school runs out of space, the District will place your child on the waitlist for your local school and refer you to a nearby school that still has space.

Registration typically opens in mid-January and closes at the end of May. Registering early assures your child a spot at your local school, even if you are still considering other options. Most charter school decisions will not be made before February, at which point your neighborhood school may already be full. Read more on how to register at your neighborhood school on page 3.

Is private school an option for me?

Private schools can seem out of reach for many families, but there is a wide range of tuition rates — and financial aid — available. Visit greatphillyschools.org to find out a private school's average tuition rate, but avoid sticker shock! Some of the most expensive schools are also the biggest providers of financial aid, making it possible for families with varying levels of income to attend. Some schools even offer a tuition-free experience for all of their students.

The fall before school starts is the best opportunity to apply for financial aid. Families who meet certain income requirements can also apply for lottery-based K-8 scholarships through Children's Scholarship Fund Philadelphia. Families who are selected receive tuition assistance for four years. The deadline to apply is March 1, 2021. Visit csfphiladelphia.org for more information.

Do schools accept more applicants in Kindergarten than in other grades?

Applying in Kindergarten gives you the best opportunity to be selected for a school of your choice. Consider, for instance, a charter school that includes grades K to 5. In Kindergarten, the school holds its lottery for all 50 spaces it has available. The school expects about 44 of those students to continue on to first grade, leaving only six spaces available for new families. Similarly, District schools typically have fewer spaces for transfer students in higher grades.

Some schools, including many private Catholic schools, begin in pre-K, making it even more important to consider your options early.

Do schools provide transportation for Kindergarten?

Unfortunately, because Kindergarten is not mandatory in Pennsylvania, schools are not required to provide transportation unless it is included in the child's IEP. District schools do not provide transportation for Kindergarten, and most charter schools begin busing in first grade. A small number of charter schools, however, will allow younger siblings to ride on buses with older siblings. This is decided on a case-by-case basis, making it important to ask the school directly. Private schools typically do not provide free transportation.