

How does the BPS school choice process work?

NOVEMBER 2011

A Brief History of BPS School Choice

In 1988, the Boston School Committee adopted the Controlled Choice Student Assignment Plan. It organized elementary and middle schools into three zones – East, North, and West. The High School Zone was citywide. Students could apply for schools within their zone of residence as well as several citywide schools. Racial/ethnic “ideal racial percentages” were established in each zone, reflecting the zone’s student population.

Since then, the plan has received many modifications. These two are the most significant:

- In 2000-2001, race/ethnicity was eliminated as a factor in assigning students.
- In 2006-2007, the formula used to make assignments was replaced by a new algorithm. It assigns students to their highest ranked choice for which they have the highest priority.

School Choice Today

For elementary and middle schools, the district is organized into three geographic zones (the same zones created in 1988):



High school students may apply to any school in the city.

Families applying for elementary or middle school may apply to:

- any school in their assignment zone
- any “citywide” school
- any school within their “walk zone,” including those outside their assignment zone

The Boston Public Schools uses a mathematical formula, or “algorithm,” to assign students to schools.

In each school, seats are filled based on a combination of factors for each applicant, including:

- Registration period (“round”)
- Priorities (sibling, walk zone, etc.)
- Family preferences (school choices)
- A random number assigned to each student

When the number of applications for a school exceeds the number of available seats, students are assigned in this order:

1. Sibling + walk zone
2. Sibling
3. Walk zone (a priority for 50% of seats)
4. Random number

What are “priorities”?

Sibling priority. To help keep families in the same school, siblings are assigned first. It is important to understand that siblings are not *guaranteed* an assignment in the same school. Sometimes, all the school’s seats are already filled by current students.

Walk Zone Priority. Families get “walk zone priority” to any:

- elementary school within 1 mile of home
- middle school within 1½ miles of home
- high school within 2 miles of home

Students who live in the school’s walk zone have priority for half the school’s seats. The other half of the seats are open to students from the entire geographic zone, including those in the walk zone.

Additional priorities. Students completing grade 1 at the early education schools and centers have priority for grade 2 seats in other schools after siblings and walk zone students are assigned.

Grade 5 students at the six Roslindale K–5 schools have priority for grade 6 at the Irving after siblings are assigned. Students in dual-language programs at the S. Greenwood, Hernández and Hurley have priority for the new Margarita Muñiz Academy. Students eligible for Advanced Work Class have priority for AWC in their current school before students who apply from other schools.

What is a “random number”?

- Every student applying for schools is given a “random number” generated by computer. (A lower random number is “better” than a higher number.)

- The random number can be thought of as a “tiebreaker” among groups of students who have the same priorities to the school of choice.

Wait lists

- If there are more applicants for a school than available seats, students will be placed on wait lists.
- Students can be on up to three wait lists.

- School wait lists are unlimited in length.
- A student’s rank on the wait list is based on his/her priorities for that school, random number, and the registration period in which the family applied.
- Wait lists expire in January of the following year.
- Any Boston resident may remain on a school’s wait list after the school year begins, even if the student does not attend a Boston Public School.

Choosing and Registering for School

Students must apply for school if ...

- ▶ they are new to the Boston Public Schools
- ▶ they are in their current school’s highest grade. Kindergarten, grade 6 (the start of middle school), and grade 9 (the start of high school) are called the “transition” grades.

For the best chance of getting the school you want, we urge families to apply during the first registration period for their child’s grade.



Applying for school, step by step:

1 Learn about your school choices.

- Visit the BPS website and click on “What are my schools?” for a customized list of your school options.
- Go to the **Showcase of Schools** for your zone. The Showcase has displays by many schools all under one roof, and you can talk to many principals and teachers.
- Visit schools during **School Preview Time**. This is the best way to get a sense of a school’s “climate” and expectations for its students.
- **Learn more** about each school. *Introducing the Boston Public Schools*, available in January, has information about each BPS school and the school registration process. School Report Cards have detailed information about each school. They are available at the Family Resource Centers and on-line at bostonpublicschools.org/schools.

2 Gather the documents you will need to register.

New-to-BPS students must present these documents:

- Child’s original birth certificate (with raised seal), passport, or Form I-94
- Child’s up-to-date immunization record. Contact BPS Health Services, 617-635-6788, if you have questions.
- Parent/guardian photo identification
- A transcript from the child’s last school (grade 1-12, if applicable)
- Two pre-printed proofs of the parent/guardian’s address. A list of acceptable proofs is at bostonpublicschools.org/register.

3 Fill out and return the application.

New-to-BPS students must apply at a **BPS Family Resource Center**. Current BPS students will receive their application from the school.

IMPORTANT: For the best chance of an assignment to one of your top choices, apply during the first registration period for the grade your child is entering:

- January 3–February 3, 2012 for the “transition” grades
- February 8–March 23, 2012 for all grades
 - ▶ Pre-register at **BPSExpress!** Visit the BPS website and click “On-Line Pre-Registration” – available December 15. (You will still have to go to a Family Resource Center, but pre-registering will save time once you are there.)

Assignment notices are mailed about six weeks after the close of each registration period.