

Good Morning Philly



The Philly School Guide

How school selection in Philadelphia actually works. Every system, every deadline, every trap. Free, in plain English.

PREVIEW EDITION · VERIFIED AUGUST 2026

The District posts the new year's dates around September. Until then, this guide shows last year's dates, clearly labeled, so you can see the shape of the year. Built from the District's and the City's own public records. Not affiliated with the School District.

The 60-second version

Philadelphia doesn't have one school system. It has four, running on separate tracks with separate deadlines. That's the whole reason this is confusing, and the whole reason families miss things.

1

Your catchment school

Guaranteed by your address. You don't apply, you register.

2

District choice schools

Citywide and criteria (magnet) schools. Apply through School Selection. It's a lottery.

3

Charter schools

Apply through Apply Philly Charter. Also a lottery. (15 "Renaissance" charters carry a catchment.)

4

Private & parochial

Apply to each directly. Real financial aid exists.

THE ONE THAT BURNS PEOPLE

There are **two separate applications, and they close on different days**. The District's School Selection is one. Apply Philly Charter is another. Handling one is not handling both.

One home address gives your kid **up to three assigned schools**, one each for elementary, middle, and high. They aren't always the same building. Look yours up free at atlas.phila.gov.

The year, in one picture

September the District window opens. **Late October** it closes. **November** brings preliminary results. Then **January** is a pileup: final eligibility, lottery results, the deadline to accept, kindergarten registration opening, and the charter deadline all land within about two weeks. **February** brings charter results and waitlists.

Which year are you in?

Most of this comes down to one question: what grade is your kid going into? Three moments force a real decision.

Starting kindergarten

THE ORDERING TRAP

Your catchment school will take your kid, guaranteed, and that registration opens in **January**. But if you want a *different* kindergarten (a magnet, a citywide school, or a charter), you apply the **fall before**, months earlier. Wait for January registration and the choice window is already closed.

Age rule: your child has to **turn 5 on or before September 1**. No exceptions.

Rising 6th grade

This only matters if your catchment splits (a K-5 that feeds a separate middle school). If your elementary and middle assignments are the same school, you're K-8 and your kid just stays put. If they're different, 6th grade is a decision year, and a real entry point for some magnets.

Rising 9th grade

Universal and highest-stakes. Your neighborhood high school is guaranteed by the feeder pattern. But 9th grade is also when the selective schools admit their biggest class, and that application happens in the **fall of 8th grade**, leaning on your kid's **7th-grade record**. Both applications, District and charter, run that same fall.

The calendar

Partly posted. The application window and the full charter timeline are **confirmed** for 2027-28. The mid-cycle dates aren't posted yet, so those rows are marked (estimated) from last cycle. Confirm at philasd.org before you act.

District School Selection

Sept 8, 2026, 4 pm	Application window opens
Oct 30, 2026, 11:59 pm	Window closes (a week later than last year)
Late Nov 2026	Preliminary eligibility posts (estimated)
Mid-Jan 2027	Final eligibility (estimated)
Late Jan 2027	Lottery results, your offer (estimated)
Late Jan 2027	Deadline to accept your offer (estimated)
Early Feb 2027	Waitlist offers begin, then every Monday (estimated)

Kindergarten

Jan 2027	Registration opens (est.)
May 2027	Recommended done by (est.)
Sept 1	Age cutoff (turn 5 by)

Apply Philly Charter

Sept 18, 2026	Opens
Jan 15, 2027	Deadline
Feb 8, 2027	Results
Feb 22, 2027	Accept by

THE JANUARY COLLISION

The charter deadline is **January 15, 2027**, kindergarten registration opens around the same time, and your District lottery result and accept-by deadline land within the following two weeks. Four clocks, one short stretch, and only one of them reminds you.

Waitlist offers expire in **3 days**. Watch your email in February.

How to apply

District: School Selection

- **Rank up to 5 schools.** The District's advice: don't limit yourself, fewer choices lowers your odds.
- Criteria schools look at **grades, attendance, and standardized test scores** from the best of the prior two years. **New for 2027-28:** grades count only **English (or Reading), math, and science**. Social studies no longer counts.
- **New:** every criteria-based applicant must upload report cards or transcripts **and** the Common Transcript Form.
- **IEP, 504, or English Learner?** Ask for an **Individualized Review** inside the application. It lets you waive one criterion and have a team look at the whole child. Most families don't know it exists.
- **The top mistake, per the District:** editing your application and forgetting to resubmit. If you change anything, submit again.

Charters: Apply Philly Charter

- **Rank up to 15 schools.** "Rank and Match" gives you one best offer.
- Siblings of current students get priority where seats allow (Philadelphia residents).
- Renaissance charters: in-catchment kids enroll first-come, not through the lottery.
- Accepting a seat is not the same as finishing enrollment.

Registration: catchment & kindergarten

Through Online Registration (OLR) via Infinite Campus, or in person. Proof of residency: a **deed, mortgage statement, or current lease plus one other approved document**, or **three** others if you have none of those, all dated within 90 days. Plus your child's birth certificate, immunization records, and your photo ID.

Won't count: a driver's license, voter card, library card, membership ID, mail to an old address, or letters from friends or family.

The criteria schools

Forget the "tiers" chart you may have seen online. The District publishes no such thing. Each school sets its own bar, straight from the District's own criteria sheet. **"95% attendance" means 9 or fewer unexcused absences; "90%" means 18 or fewer.** Meeting a bar gets you into the lottery, not a seat.

School	Grades	Attend.	Test %ile	Extra
Central	A's and B's	95%	80th, ELA & math	none
Masterman	A's and B's	95%	80th, ELA & math	Algebra I (for 9th)
Academy at Palumbo	A's and B's	95%	65th, ELA & math	none
Carver Eng. & Science	A's and B's	95%	65th, ELA & math	none
Parkway Center City	A's and B's	95%	65th, ELA & math	none
Northeast Magnet	A's and B's	95%	65th, ELA & math	none
Bodine	A's and B's, one C	90%	50th, ELA & math	none
Science Leadership Academy	A's and B's, one C	90%	50th, ELA & math	project presentation
SLA at Beeber	A's and B's, one C	90%	50th, ELA & math	project presentation
GAMP (music)	A's and B's, one C	90%	50th, ELA & math	audition
CAPA	A's and B's, one C	90%	50th, ELA & math	audition
Arts Academy at Benjamin Rush	A's and B's, up to two C's	90%	50th, ELA or math	audition
Franklin Learning Center	A's and B's, up to two C's	90%	50th, ELA or math	audition or portfolio
Hill-Freedman	A's and B's, up to two C's	90%	50th, ELA or math	none
Girls' High	A's and B's, up to two C's	90%	50th, ELA or math	none
Motivation	A's, B's, and C's	90%	50th, ELA or math	none
Parkway West	A's, B's, and C's	90%	50th, ELA or math	none
Parkway Northwest	A's, B's, and C's	90%	50th, ELA or math	none
W.B. Saul (agriculture)	A's, B's, and C's	90%	50th, ELA or math	none

ZIP preference (new list for 2027-28): 19132, 19133, 19135, 19138, 19140, 19141 get priority at Palumbo (9th), Carver (7th & 9th), Central (9th), Masterman (5th & 9th). This list changes every year. **Heads up:** Lankenau, Parkway West, and Parkway Northwest are criteria schools that are also closing (see next page).

What's changing: the closures

On **April 30, 2026**, the Board of Education voted 6 to 3 to adopt a plan called Accelerating Opportunity. It closes **17 schools**, modernizes many more, and merges a few. Nothing changes before the 2027-28 school year, and every affected community gets a planning year.

The 17 schools closing

Elementary / K-8

Blankenburg, Fitler, Robert Morris, Overbrook Elementary, Pennypacker, Welsh, Waring

Middle

AMY at Northwest, Harding, Stetson, Tilden, Wagner

High

Lankenau, Parkway Northwest, Parkway West, Penn Treaty, Robeson

Confirmed mergers (by name): Robeson into Motivation, Lankenau into Saul, and Elkin Elementary feeding into Conwell.

For the River Wards

- **Penn Treaty** (the Fishtown 6-12 neighborhood school) is closing, phased. It stops taking new 6th and 9th graders.
- **If you're in the Penn Treaty catchment:** for **high school**, the catchment merges into the Kensington campus (Kensington High, Kensington CAPA, Kensington Health Sciences). For **middle school**, students go to **Hackett or Ludlow** depending on where they live.
- **Moffet** shifts K-5 to **K-4**; its fifth graders move to Ludlow, and its catchment then feeds Ludlow for middle school. Elementary catchments don't change.
- **Hackett** expands to K-8 and becomes its own middle-school catchment. **Ludlow** came off the closure list.
- Bodine is *reported* to be moving into the Penn Treaty building (from Inquirer reporting, not the vote document).

Is your school on the list? Nothing changes until 2027-28, so you have time, but start now. **Check the proposed 2027-28 catchment map at explore.avela.org/fpp**, it's the only tool that knows about the closures, and the District doesn't link it from its own facilities page. The regular school finder still shows today's answer.

Red flags & gotchas

The whole guide in one checklist. If you read nothing else, read this.

- ☐ **The ordering trap.** Want a non-catchment kindergarten? Apply in the fall, not at January registration.
 - ☐ **Two systems, two deadlines.** The District and the charters are separate applications that close on different days.
 - ☐ **Resubmit after edits.** Change your District application and forget to submit again, and your changes don't count.
 - ☐ **The 3-day waitlist window.** Waitlist offers expire in three days. Watch your email in February.
 - ☐ **Magnet conflation.** A top-rated school on Zillow is not automatically a school your kid can attend.
 - ☐ **Your assigned school can be a charter.** 15 Renaissance charters carry a catchment.
 - ☐ **Eligible is not admitted.** Meeting a criteria school's bar puts you in the lottery. It's not a seat.
 - ☐ **You can't opt out of the PSSA** and still apply to a criteria school. That choice gets made in the spring.
 - ☐ **The Common Transcript Form is new and mandatory** for every criteria-based applicant, alongside report cards.
 - ☐ **Don't rank your catchment school.** You already have that seat. It wastes one of your five.
 - ☐ **Sibling preference stops at the criteria schools.** It helps at catchment and citywide schools only.
 - ☐ **Pre-K now DOES give kindergarten priority.** New for 2027-28. If you read otherwise anywhere, it's out of date.
 - ☐ **The default lookup tool still shows today.** The 2027-28 map at explore.avela.org/fpp is the one that knows.
 - ☐ **Always confirm with the District.** Before you act on a date, confirm it at philasd.org.
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Decision worksheet

Fill this in as you go. It turns "figure out Philly schools" into a handful of small boxes.

1. Which year are you in?

☐ Starting kindergarten ☐ Rising 6th grade ☐ Rising 9th grade

2. Your assigned schools (from atlas.phila.gov)

Elementary	Middle	High

☐ Is any of them on the closure list? If yes, note your next options.

3. Schools you're considering (and are you eligible?)

School	Type	Meet the bar?
		Y / N / not sure
		Y / N / not sure
		Y / N / not sure
		Y / N / not sure

4. Rank your top 5 (District), in true preference order

Rank honestly, you can't game the order. Just make sure at least one is a realistic pick you'd be happy with.

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

5. Your dated to-do list

☐	Fall: submit School Selection application (and resubmit if you edit it).
☐	Fall: submit Apply Philly Charter application, if you want charters.
☐	January: register for kindergarten, if that's your year.
☐	January: accept your District offer by the deadline.
☐	February: watch email for charter results and waitlist offers (3 days to respond).
☐	Anytime: gather residency documents (deed/lease + one more, dated within 90 days).

Confirm every date against philasd.org, because the official 2027-28 dates post around September.

Glossary & official links

Catchment. The neighborhood zone that guarantees your kid a seat, based on your address.

Citywide school. A District school open to anyone by lottery, no academic criteria.

Criteria school (magnet). A District school with an academic bar. You apply and have to qualify.

Renaissance charter. A charter that carries a neighborhood catchment, so in-zone families enroll first-come.

Feeder pattern. The chain routing your address from elementary to middle to your neighborhood high school.

School Selection. The District's fall application process for citywide and criteria schools.

Apply Philly Charter. The common application for most charter schools.

Rank and Match. The charter system that gives you one best offer from your ranked list.

Deferred acceptance. The lottery method the District uses. It rewards ranking your true preferences.

PSSA. Pennsylvania's state test, used in criteria-school percentiles.

Official links

- School Selection: philasd.org/studentplacement/school-selection
- Kindergarten registration: philasd.org/studentplacement/kindergarten-registration
- Find your school (City Atlas): atlas.phila.gov
- District school finder: philasd.explore.avela.org
- Apply Philly Charter: applyphillycharter.org
- The closures & facilities plan: philasd.org/fpp

Made by **Good Morning Philly**, a free Monday newsletter about the neighborhood. This is a guide, not enrollment or legal advice, and it's not affiliated with the School District. Always confirm with the District before you act. Found something wrong or confusing? Email hello@morningphilly.com.