



The Unofficial Guide to Enrollment in Seattle's Public Schools

2009-2010 *

Introduction

Seattle Public Schools (SPS) offers us a choice of schools for our children. Choice is popular, but adds a great deal of complexity to the enrollment process. There is no option to simply walk to your neighborhood school and enroll your child for the next year. Instead, enrollment requires a more involved process that may start as early as October the prior year, with a deadline for on-time enrollment in March (usually February, but it is later for 2009-10 due to late-breaking program changes and closures). You then wait about two months to receive a letter that lets you know to which school your child has been assigned.

The intent of this guide is to help parents approach the process with a feeling of confidence. We call it "Unofficial" as it is a compilation of hard learned parent know-how about the system but is not sanctioned or recognized by SPS. *Community & Parents for Public Schools of Seattle* (CPPS) will work to continually update this guide.

Overview

SPS enrollment operates as a Choice System. You may select, and list in order of your preference, any schools within the district. You are NOT guaranteed a seat at the school closest to your home. Instead, you are guaranteed a seat at a school within your cluster (see page 3 for how to determine your cluster.)

SPS operates different school models: Traditional and Alternative, with some schools designated as Magnet.

Traditional -- The majority of schools in the SPS district are traditional. While each school may have a distinct culture, the instruction is pretty traditional.

Alternative -- An alternative school offers an instruction methodology that differs from traditional, such as self-directed, expeditionary learning, or arts-focused.

Magnet -- A magnet school has a specialty such as languages, music, or math and science. This specialty is incorporated into the entire curriculum at the school.

Note: In the current draft of this guide, we focus mainly on Traditional and General Education. The tie breakers for entrance, operations, and transportation availability for Alternative schools vary from that of Traditional, as do admissions for Special Education and Advanced Placement. If you want to share a specific experience that differs from this guide, please contact enrollment@cppsofseattle.org. Over time, we hope to have all this information available.

* **DISCLAIMER:** Many parents have contributed to the current draft of this guide and it represents our best understanding of how the enrollment process works. However, we cannot guarantee that is 100% accurate. When in doubt, be sure to consult with the SPS enrollment office. If you do find any mistakes, please let us know so we can fix them. (Last updated: Feb 6, 2009.)

Key Dates

Pre-Registration: Oct. 2008 – Nov. 30, 2008

You may complete all of the paperwork, such as the application, residency proof, and vaccination record, and turn it in early. The district uses this information for capacity planning, so anyone who has a child that will enter SPS for the first time, regardless of grade, is encouraged to complete the pre-registration process.

You will be mailed a personalized application by mid-January of 2009. You can then verify that the information is correct and list your school choices on the application. **Be sure to turn in your application, with your completed school and wait list choices by March 31, 2009.**

Early Sibling Assignment: Oct. 2008 – Nov. 30, 2008

If the child you wish to enroll has an older sibling who attends the school this year and will also attend the same school next year, then you will have either *Sibling Preference* or *Sibling Linkage*.

The following must all be true to qualify for *Sibling Preference*:

- Child applying is for an entry level grade for the school
- Older sibling currently attends the school
- Older sibling will attend the school in 2009-2010

Sibling Preference is gold – you are guaranteed admission to the school for 2009-2010! If you have Sibling Preference you may complete the application and the assignment process in its entirety at any time from October 1 through November 30, 2008. Please note that this only applies to entry level grades for the school.

If you do not qualify for Sibling Preference, but do have an older sibling attending the school, then you still have *Sibling Linkage*. This is silver vs. gold. You are not *guaranteed* assignment for the younger sibling but will still qualify at the first tie breaker level both for admission and composition of the wait list, and therefore have very good odds of admission.

Pre-Registration Forms: <http://www.seattleschools.org/area/eso/forms/preregearlysib0910.htm>

Additional Info on Pre-Registration/Early Sibling Assignment:

<http://www.seattleschools.org/area/eso/PreRegEarlySib0910.pdf>

Open Enrollment for 2009-2010: March 2 – March 31, 2009 by 8PM

You may turn in all of your completed application paperwork at any time during the open enrollment period. There is no advantage to turning in your paperwork on March 2 vs. March 31, but it is CRITICAL that you turn in your completed paperwork by March 31, 2009 in order to have the best chance possible to gain admission to your preferred schools.

It is also strongly encouraged to turn in your paperwork in person at the John Stanford center, or another accepted venue to submit applications. Obtain a receipt. This may be a saving grace for you vs. faxing or mailing your application paperwork. It is not unheard of that things get “lost.” For your utmost benefit you need to have documented proof that your paperwork was submitted and accepted by the deadline.

School Tours – Open Houses

Most tours/open houses are conducted in January, February, and March.

The enrollment center maintains a compilation of all the open houses on their web site:

<http://www.seattleschools.org/area/eso/schooltours.html>

You might also want to check directly on individual school web sites for additional information. In your favorite search page (i.e. Google), search for the name of the school you are interested in. For example: Bryant Elementary Seattle. This is to search for the home web page for the school in which you have an

interest. Most schools do have a calendar that you can look at. Search the months of January, February, and March for Open Houses or Kindergarten Tours, dates and times.

Prep. Work

Learning more about the schools, the district, and the enrollment process may aid in preparing you for what is to come.

Determine your “Reference School” and “Cluster”

Your *reference school* most often is the school that is closest to your home. Reference school is one of the tie breakers for admission, so this is useful information to know. Seattle schools are grouped into nine geographic *clusters*: North, Northeast, Northwest, Queen Anne/Magnolia, Central, South, Southeast, West Seattle North, and West Seattle South. Each "cluster" has four or more elementary schools. Cluster is primarily used to determine transportation eligibility. If you don't know your reference school or cluster, check out these maps: http://www.seattleschools.org/area/m_schools/index.dxml.

If the maps are confusing, just call [enrollment services](#) at (206) 252-0760 and give them your address. They will tell you your reference school and cluster.

Read through the Enrollment Guide

Enrollment Guides for the 2009-10 school year will be posted online about the third week in February. Application forms for 2009-10 will be available online at the beginning of March.

Resources to research schools.

Websites that have been found to be useful are:

Great Schools: www.greatschools.net

The Great Schools site is nice because in addition to test scores and other data there are also parent reviews. However, they don't seem to have the most accurate information on class sizes.

School Digger: www.schooldigger.com

School Digger ranks a school against the other schools in the state. More accurate and up-to-date in regards to class sizes.

The Seattle Times School Guide: <http://community.seattletimes.nwsources.com/schoolguide/>

You can view this online, or purchase a hardcopy. Contains lots of information about all of the schools in the Puget Sound area.

Participate in School Tours

As much as you might read or speak with other parents, there is nothing like a school tour to get a read on the vibe of the school and principal. Trust your instincts to know which would be the best school for your child.

Especially if you live in the NE, QA/Magnolia or Central clusters, try to attend as many Open Houses as possible. If your reference school is full, you may be assigned to any of the schools in your cluster.

Half-Day or Full-Day Kindergarten?

The majority of schools offer full-day Kindergarten classes. Since the State only funds for half-day Kindergarten, most schools charge tuition to attend the full-day class. Tuition generally ranges from about \$170 to \$270 a month. The rate varies from school to school.

If you prefer to attend a half-day class, there is no tuition charge. Consult the Enrollment Guide for schools that offer half-day. If you are interested in a school that does not list a half-day option, consult the principal. Most schools will work with you to improvise a half-day class.

Completing the Paperwork

Get your forms

You may download and print the needed enrollment forms from the SPS website:

<http://www.seattleschools.org/area/eso/story.dxml>

-or-

You may obtain printed forms at the Enrollment Center which is located at the district main headquarters:

John Stanford Center
2445 Third Ave. South (3rd and Lander)
Seattle, WA 98134

The enrollment center is immediately to the left as you enter the front doors.

Listing Your School Choices

In the section where you list your school choices you may list up to ten schools. If you want to provide more choices, you may attach additional choices to your application. If there is a school you particularly do *not* want to attend, be sure to fill all ten spaces with school choices you would prefer!

You may list any Kindergarten school in the district in your choices, however distance is one of the tie-breakers for traditional schools, so listing a school far from your home directly impacts your ability to gain admission.

If the option of bus transportation is important to you, then keep your choices within your cluster. Transportation for traditional schools is only provided within your cluster to schools other than your reference school.

You do not improve your odds of gaining entrance to a school if you list it as your first choice.* The series of tie-breakers will determine your ability to gain entrance. If you would like to try for a long-shot with your first choice – go for it!

***Enrolling two or more children at the same time (not twins of multiples):**

When enrolling more than one child you have what is called *Sibling Linkage* available for your first choice school – and only for your first choice school. If one of the children gains admission to your first choice school then the other may also gain admission through Sibling Linkage – as Sibling is the first tie-breaker, or you may have a high place on the wait list. Past the school you list as first choice, the linkage is no longer in effect and the children will each be processed as unrelated individuals – with the loss of the first tie breaker. To qualify for sibling linkage, be sure to list all other siblings that are currently attending the school, or for which you are also enrolling in the Sibling portion of the application – which was previously Section 4 of the application.

Twins/Multiples – New for 2009/2010

There is a Twins/Multiples option to guarantee that your twins or multiples will be assigned to the same school. To take advantage of this guarantee you must list the twin/multiple in the **Sibling section** of the application. If you do not do this they will each be processed as individual, unrelated children with no guarantee of admission to the same school.

Wait List

Your choice of school for wait listing was previously located in **Section 6** on the application form.

If you would like to be on the wait list for the school you have listed as your first choice, you may leave this section blank. The default is to be assigned to the wait list of your first choice school.

If you wish to be on the wait list of a school other than your first choice, list it here. This may pose a problem for you if you are trying to enroll more than one child at a time, or are listing a school which an older sibling does not attend. This is because *Sibling Linkage* is only in effect for your first choice school. Sibling is the first

tie breaker and is used as the first determinant in ordering the wait list; without it, your place on the wait list will be below other applicants with at least another sibling newly enrolled, or in attendance at the school.

If you choose to change your wait list choice past the open enrollment deadline, then you will move to the bottom of the wait list you request. Past the enrollment deadline, waitlist tie-breakers only apply to any other student that enters the wait list on the same day. There is no re-ordering of those already on the wait list.

Double – Triple – Quadruple Check Your Application!

If you make a mistake in filling out your application, you are stuck with it. There will be no sympathy, or corrections made for you once your application has been processed. The Enrollment office will go strictly by the documented procedures. For your own benefit, review your paperwork thoroughly before you submit it.

How Your Application is Processed

All of the applications turned in by the deadline of March 31 at 8 pm are processed all in one group.

How it works...This is taken directly from: *The REAL Truth About Seattle Public Schools Kindergarten Assignments* by Chris MacGregor, Senior Software Engineer, who analyzed the assignment software.

<http://www.cybermato.com/projects/school-assignments>

“The order in which the forms are processed does not matter. The kids are assigned a random "lottery" number for each school they listed. If kid C is processed after kid B, but C (per the various criteria, siblings, cluster, distance, and if all else fails, lottery number) has a higher priority for a school to which B is already assigned, then B will get "bumped" out and C gets into that school. Then, if that happens, kid B gets processed again, starting with the next school on their application, and may in turn bump out kid A who is already assigned to that school, etc. Allowing for that "bumping" process ensures that the order doesn't matter, because this way even if your application happens to be the very first one fed into the computer and the very first one that it looks at when doing the assignments, you could still wind up with your last choice (or not even that one), if other kids have higher priority per the specified criteria. It's a well-designed, fair system. Note that forms received after the deadline are processed separately, and basically only have a shot at whatever slots are left after all the forms received before the deadline are processed and all those kids are assigned to schools. So don't be late!”

Tie-breakers (in order they are applied):

- 1. SIBLING**
- 2. REFERENCE SCHOOL**
- 3. SPECIAL PROGRAM PREFERENCE** - 2009-2010 only (described below)
- 4. DISTANCE** - measured in a straight line from your residence to the school (aka “as the crow flies”)
- 5. LOTTERY NUMBER**

As described earlier in this document, you might have either:

- Sibling Preference*** – you are guaranteed a seat at the school for 2009/2010, or
- Sibling Linkage*** – you are given first preference for assignment or wait list.

Sibling Linkage requires:

- An older sibling currently attends the school
- If more than one child is being enrolled, one of them gains entry through the assignment process for the upcoming year
- Valid for schools listed as a first choice only

SPECIAL PROGRAM PREFERENCE

There is an additional tie-breaker for 2009-10 enrollment only, as a result of a Board motion passed on 1/29/09 as part of the adoption of the “Capacity Management” plan that closed 5 existing programs. This third-level tie-breaker (behind Sibling and Reference School, but ahead of Distance - for any school requested)

only applies to “non-graduating” students currently at one of the programs to be closed: T.T. Minor (K-4th grade), African American Academy (K-7th), Cooper (K-4th), Meany (6th -7th), and Summit (K-11th).

Wait List

Wait lists are composed at the same time that all of the applications received by the Open Enrollment deadline are processed. The waitlist is ordered using the same process and tie-breakers that are used for admission.

You will only be placed on a wait list if you are assigned to a school listed lower in preference than the school you list as your wait list choice. For example, if you are assigned to your first choice school and have listed your third choice school for wait list, you will not be listed on the wait list.

Mandatory Assignment

If, after going through all of the choices you list on your application, you still do not gain admission to a school, you will be given what is called a mandatory assignment. This is an assignment to a school closest to you, within your *cluster*, which has space available.

The district does not guarantee you a space at your reference school or the school closest to you. The district only guarantees you a space at a school within your cluster that is nearest to you and has space available.

Assignment Letters

Approximately, two months after the Open Enrollment deadline you can expect to receive an assignment letter for your child that will let you know to which school you have been assigned.

CPPS and Additional Enrollment Help

We hope this document has taken the mystery out of SPS enrollment. If you have corrections or additional questions, contact us at enrollment@cppsofseattle.org. Usually if one person has a question, there are many others with the same question. We'll use our contacts with the district to get an answer to the question and post it to our web site: www.cppsofseattle.org/enrollment.html. If you have additional information you'd like to share with other parents, please send that to us also. We're always looking for more help with writing guides like this. And, we'd love to translate this to other languages if we can find volunteers or funding.

In addition to this guide, CPPS is assembling other enrollment aids on our web site:

- **Cluster Guides:** School choice options, listed by cluster.
- **School and Program Ambassadors:** Parent volunteers available to answer other parents' questions about enrolling in their school or program.
- **Enrollment Coaching:** For those who need additional parent-to-parent help navigating the process.

For more details, see: www.cppsofseattle.org/enrollment.html.

Community & Parents for Public Schools (CPPS) of Seattle is a non-profit started by Seattle parents, working together to ensure excellent public schools for all Seattle children. There are few things more important to the health of our city than the education of all our children. Active parent participation in the district and in the schools makes a big difference. Join us!

If you liked this guide, please consider a donation to help us continue our work. More information on CPPS, including membership and donation information, can be found at www.cppsofseattle.org, or contact us at enrollment@cppsofseattle.org.

Good luck with enrollment!