

How the Kindergarten January 2024 Lottery Works: A Detailed Guide for Families

Student Registration Center

We hope that the following questions and answers will help families better understand how school assignments are made during the Kindergarten (K) Lottery, and how the waitlists are created through this process.

This guide uses a Questions & Answers format to provide details of the following topics:

1. Controlled Choice & Socioeconomic (SES) Balancing
2. Lottery Numbers & Bonus Points
3. Mandatory Assignments & Waitlists
4. General Advice on Making Your Choices

Section 1: Controlled Choice & SES Balancing

Why do we have Controlled Choice in Cambridge?

Cambridge Public Schools has been implementing the Controlled Choice Plan for over 40 years, and its primary purpose is to integrate and diversify all of our schools and programs. We do not integrate based on race or ethnicity, but on the basis of socioeconomic status (SES), as measured by the percentage of students who do and do not qualify for the federal Free or Reduced Price Meals Program. The goal of the Controlled Choice Plan is to help us achieve a diverse student body that reflects the diversity of the city in all of our schools.

How does SES factor into the registration process?

When registering for school, you are asked to complete a Controlled Choice Form. Your answers will help us determine in which assignment category your child's registration form belongs: Free/Reduced Lunch (F/R) or Paid Lunch. Each school will have a set percentage of seats available in each of these two categories.

The Controlled Choice form offers three options:

- Yes - I am eligible for free or reduced price meal benefits
- No - I am not eligible for free or reduced price meals benefits
- I decline to disclose this information

If the Controlled Choice form is left blank, or the family selects "I decline," the application will be categorized as a "Paid Lunch" application.

This system is completely voluntary and we rely on families to state honestly whether you believe that you do or do not qualify for this program. The Controlled Choice Form isn't used for any other purpose than for making school assignments. By voluntarily disclosing whether or not families qualify for this program, you can help our system remain equitable.

How is SES Balance Defined and Applied to the Lottery?

SES balance is defined based on the 3-year average of the percentage of K that do and do not qualify for Free or Reduced Price meals. This calculation is made on October 1 of each year, and is used to define a demographic range that is close to that average.

In other words, it is like taking a snapshot of what the SES balance of the K cohort looks like after school begins, and then averaging the last three years of this data. This average SES composition for our K is applied to the Lottery pool in January.

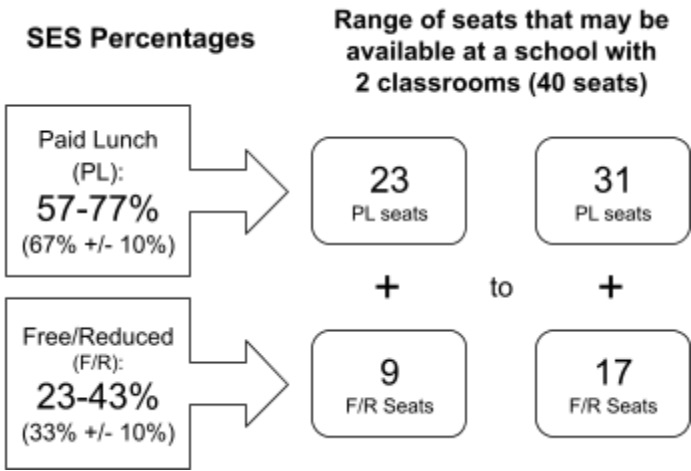
For the 2024 K Lottery, the target SES percentages will be 67% Paid Lunch and 33% Free/Reduced Lunch.

To allow for more flexibility and help more families receive one of their school choices, the Controlled Choice Plan allows assignments to be made, as long as the percentage of students in each category is within 10% of the average.

⇒ This year, this means we can assign up to 77% of seats to families in the Paid Lunch category at any particular school, but we cannot exceed this amount. Or, we could assign up to 43% of seats to students in the F/R Lunch category.

What this means is that in a school with 2 K classrooms, there are 40 seats total. The SES breakdown of those seats could range from:

- 23 Paid Lunch & 17 F/R Lunch seats to
- 31 Paid Lunch & 9 F/R Lunch seats



The exact percentage and number of students in each category will depend on the applications received for the school. In making school assignments, a computer program will match students to seats that are divided into Paid and Free/Reduced categories based on the district average, +/- 10%, as explained in the next section.

Section 2: Lottery Numbers and Bonus Points

What makes Cambridge's Assignment Process a "Lottery?"

After all the applications are received in January, the SRC compiles all the data and sends it off to an outside Lottery consultant who uses a computerized system to assign random numbers to all applications. This is very similar to any other lottery system, where the higher your number, the better. What makes this more complex is that the system also adds additional "bonus points" based on program priorities, as explained below.

What are Bonus Points?

The lottery gives bonus points for each School Choice where one of the following factors applies:

1. **Sibling bonus points** are added if the child's brother or sister is enrolled in Grades K-4. This rule is intended to keep siblings together in the same elementary school. Siblings participating in the K Lotteries receive 2 million bonus points added to their random number if they choose their sibling's school. If they also qualify for proximity or program language bonus points, then an additional 1 million points are added.
2. **Please note:** *The only circumstances under which your child would not be assigned to the sibling's school, would be if (1) we do not know about the sibling, (2) you do not want to enroll your second child in that school and choose the sibling school not as first choice and it filled with families who chose it first choice, and/or (3) the very rare occurrence in which the number of rolling up incumbents and incoming siblings exceed the number of available seats, in which case like all other seats, you'd need a favorable lottery outcome.*

- ◆ Sibling only = 2 Million
- ◆ Sibling + Proximity = 3 Million
- ◆ Sibling + Program Language = 3 Million

3. **Proximity bonus points** are added for the two schools that are closest to the family's home. This rule is intended to increase the number of families who can be assigned to a school within walking distance from home. Families are not required to select one or both of their proximity schools - this is optional. **Please note that having proximity bonus points (1 million points) does not guarantee that your child will be assigned to your proximity schools even when you select one as your first choice.**

- ◆ Proximity only - 1 Million

- 4 . **Program language bonus points** are added based on a test of the child’s fluency in the language of a two-way immersion school or program. Specifically, language bonus points only apply if you select Amigos School, the Chinese Immersion Program at Martin Luther King, Jr. School, or the Ola Portuguese Immersion Program at King Open School. This rule is intended to ensure that two-way immersion schools have a high enough percentage of students who speak the program language; **however, having program language bonus points (1 million points) does not guarantee that your child will be assigned to an Immersion Program even if you select one as your first choice.**

◆ Program Language only = 1 Million

Do registrations receive the same bonus points for all choices?

Bonus Points, if applicable, are added to the random number to create the Applied Random Number, which will be different for each of your choices.

For example, let’s say that you choose Schools A, B, and C. In the example below, your Lottery number is 548 and you have an older child at School A. Your child speaks the program language of School B. The bonus points will be applied to the total point score differently for School A and School B. You will not receive bonus points at School C.

Choice Number	SCHOOL CHOICES	Random Number	Type of Bonus	Bonus Points	Applied Random Number (total score for each choice)
1	School A	548	Sibling	2,000,000	2,000,548
2	School B	548	Program Language	1,000,000	1,000,548
3	School C	548	NONE	N/A	548

Where does the Parent/Guardian Choice come in?

The goal of Controlled Choice is to achieve socio-economic balance, while also maximizing the number of students who are assigned to one of their choices. To do this, students are assigned to a school by looking first at the Applied Random Number for each application’s first choice.

The Lottery will take the application with the highest Applied Random Number and see if there are seats available at their first choice school. Unless they choose Tobin Montessori (which may have zero open seats), this student will almost certainly get into their choice of school.

The Lottery then moves down the list of applications from highest to lowest Applied Random Number until there are no seats remaining. Keep in mind that for a seat to be available, it must match the student's assignment category (Free/Reduced or Paid).

Some schools will fill up entirely with families who selected the school as their first choice. When this happens, no one who listed the school as their second choice will be able to be assigned.

When all first choices have been considered, the computer will move on to match as many of the remaining applicants as possible to their second choice school. Finally, the process is repeated for third choices.

Section 3: Mandatory Assignments & Waitlists

What if my student doesn't get into any of our school choices?

All students will be assigned to a school, but not all will be assigned to one of their school choices. Each year, approximately 5-15% of our K Lottery applicants will not receive one of their three choices of schools for a complex variety of reasons. Students in this situation will be mandatorily assigned to a fourth school where there is space available in their SES assignment category. In addition, they will be placed onto the waitlists of their three schools of choice.

It is very important to us that families understand the Lottery rules and have access to historical results from the Lottery, so that they will be fully informed of likely outcomes based on their school choices.

To ensure families are fully informed, the Student Registration Center will review all applications to identify those that are at higher risk of resulting in a mandatory assignment. SRC staff will call these families to ask them to weigh their possible feelings if their child is not assigned to one of their choices. Some families are comfortable with the risk, and others decide to change their choices.

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With all the preparation and hope that families invest in the registration process, when a family's child is not assigned to one of their choices they may feel anxiety, frustration or sadness. The SRC staff will provide as much information to you as possible about your options and the likelihood of receiving an offer off the waitlist. Often, seats will become available between the release of the K Lottery results and the start of school in September. If a seat becomes available and you are next on the waitlist, the SRC will contact you to discuss whether you would like to transfer schools, and we will work with you throughout the process.

How are Waitlists Ordered?

Students who do not get into any of their choices are automatically placed on the waitlist for each of the schools they chose. Students who get into their third choice of school are placed on the waitlist for their first and second choices. Those who get into their second choice are placed on the waitlist for their first choice school.

The order of the waitlist is derived from the Applied Random Number assigned during the Lottery, but applications are reordered into groups so that mandatory assignments will have a better chance of getting into one of their choices. There is additional reordering, as well, as follows:

Top of the Waitlist: First Choices

Applications that selected the school first are re-organized into three sub-group and then rank ordered by Applied Random Number within each sub-group, as follows:

- Unassigned students who listed School A as their first choice, but did not get into any of their choices are first in line on the waitlist.
- Applicants who listed School A as their first choice but were assigned to their third choice are listed next.
- Applicants who listed School A as their first choice but were assigned to their second choice are the last set of applications in this group.

Middle of the Waitlist: Second Choices

Those who selected the school as their second choice are added to the waitlist behind all of the first choice applicants. These second choice applicants are re-arranged into two subgroups and rank ordered by Applied Random Number as follows:

- Unassigned students who listed School A as choice 2 and did not receive any of their choices.
- Students who listed School A as choice 2 but were assigned to their third choice.

End of the Waitlist: Third Choices

Applicants who selected School A as choice 3 and received none of their school choices will be the last group of students added to the waitlist for School A.

If you are on more than one waitlist, your waitlist position will be different for each school, based on the order you listed it on the application.

IMPORTANT: Families *must* list three choices on their registration form. Any family who lists only 1 or 2 choices, and who becomes unassigned, will be placed at the end of the waitlist regardless of the applied random number. It is *imperative* to list three choices. Per Controlled Choice Policy, you must sign a release if you elect not to choose three schools on the registration form.



Please note: *The transfer policy is currently under review due to the need to further stabilize enrollment across schools for purposes of the Cambridge Preschool Program implementation. Currently, under CPS policy, students may be on another school's waitlist and, if space opens up in a particular school year before the Friday before the December break, transfer to that school. We do anticipate that families who are unsatisfied with their K assignment next year will continue to have the opportunity for children to be placed onto waitlists for other schools, but the specifics of how long a family may stay on the waitlist, and how late in the year a student may be permitted to transfer, are the elements of the policy that are subject to change. Additional information about this will be forthcoming, but we encourage families to learn about each of our school communities and note that close to 85-95% of our families typically are assigned to one of their three choices of schools.*

*In other words, please do not stress about transferring from one school to another when your child has not yet been assigned to their first CPS school. Each of our schools are strong, vibrant communities and it is our goal to ensure **each child who enrolls finds an education home at the school to which they are assigned.***

Special Note Regarding the Waitlists for Immersion Programs:

During the K Lottery, Program Language bonus points are assigned to enable students who speak the program languages and pass the Program Language test an opportunity to be assigned to the programs. Program Language bonus points function similarly to proximity bonus points - they provide a boost to the children's chances to be assigned.

During the K Lottery, there are no quotas or maximum allowable number or percentage of students who can or can't be assigned with the Program Language bonus points. After the K Lottery, the SRC must calculate the percentage of students who are and who are not classified as program language speakers.

If a program has 50% or more than 50% program language speakers, then the next available seats will be offered to non-program language speakers until the percentage of program language speakers and the percentage of non-program language speakers each reaches 50%.

CPS waitlists are complex. We hope to help families understand how waitlists are organized for a school. Please don't hesitate to ask us any and all questions that you may have. Please feel free to call or e-mail Kathy Sampson with any waitlist and school assignment related questions at 617-349-6067 or ksampson@cpsd.us.

EXAMPLE OF A WAITLIST

Let's imagine a waitlist with six students who chose School A as their first choice, four who chose it second, and two who chose it third. There is also one student who only listed 2 schools on their registration form. The order of the waitlist can be seen below:

First, Second, or Third Choice?	Which school choice were they assigned to?	Applied Random Number from the Lottery	Waitlist Position	Name
First Choice	Did not get into any of their choices	500	1	Grace
		12	2	Francois
	Got into their 3rd choice	1,000,242	3	Mariah
		301	4	John
	Got into their 2nd choice	2,000,001	5	Kian
		548	6	Jane
Second Choice	Did not get into any of their choices	24	7	Bettina
		6	8	Nia
	Got into their 3rd choice	1,000,36	9	Oliver
		15	10	Curtis
Third Choice	Did not get into any of their choices	3	11	Lenora
		1	12	Andres
Did not list 3 choices	None of their choices	204	13	Henry



Remember: School assignments must follow the Controlled Choice Plan; therefore, in some cases a seat will remain open after the Lottery, but a waitlist will be started because students on the waitlist are in a different assignment category (either Free & Reduced Lunch or Paid Lunch) than the open seat's assignment category. **In the case of Immersion Programs, assignments off the waitlists also follow rules regarding the percentage of students who do and do not speak the Program Language. Immersion Programs have four assignment categories: Free & Reduced Lunch/Bilingual, Free & Reduced Lunch/Non-Bilingual, Paid Lunch/Bilingual and Paid Lunch/Non-Bilingual. It is important to understand that at any given time, there may be four students whose waitlist number is 1 in each assignment category.**

Section 4: General Advice On Making Your Choices

How should I think about my First Choice?

Your first choice school is most important because the Lottery system will prioritize making as many first choice assignments before even considering second or third choices. Some schools will become filled based only on first choice applications.

All CPS schools are good schools, and we encourage you to get to know several of them before making your choices.

If you are hoping to increase your chance of getting assigned to your first choice, you might want to apply to a school or schools where your child will receive Bonus Points; however, this is optional. Your first choice should be the school that you feel would be the best fit for your family.

**Your First
Choice is Most
Important.**

What about my Second and Third Choices?

You may want to think about what combination of choices will be most likely to result in a Mandatory Assignment. For example, if all of your choices contain one of the following risk factors, you may want to switch one of them to a safer choice:

- Choosing none of your Proximity Schools
- Choosing Tobin Montessori

Should Anyone List Tobin Montessori as a Choice?

This is exceedingly risky, because the age of entry for Tobin Montessori is three years old. In general, there are zero seats available for our kindergarten applicants to Tobin Montessori.

As a result, kindergarten applicants who select Tobin as a choice are placed onto its M5 (Montessori five-year olds) waitlist. The M5 waitlist usually has over 20 students on it, and an average of 5 seats may open up for students on the waitlist. The vast majority of families who select Tobin as one of their choices will be unassigned to any of their school choices through the K Lottery.

Selecting Tobin as a first choice when there are generally zero seats available means that your child will be shut out of an opportunity to be assigned to that choice. This could impact the possibility of being assigned to your second or third choices, as many schools are filled at that

point. If you have a compelling need for your student to attend the Tobin Montessori, we strongly encourage you to select schools for choices 2 and/or 3 where you have bonus points, or schools that historically have more seats available following the lottery.

There are so many hidden gems in Cambridge Public Schools—it’s important to keep an open mind as you get to know what each school is like. We encourage families to learn about a variety of schools.

Every family will have your own priorities and preferences – there is no “right” way to participate in the Lottery. If you have any questions, the Student Registration Center is here to help.