

Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten Enrollment, Promotions, and Retentions Frequently Asked Questions for Parents and Guardians

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Pre-Kindergarten Enrollment and Promotion

1. How can I enroll my child in Pre-Kindergarten?

The District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) offers free, high quality, full-day Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) education to three- and four-year-old children across all Wards in DC. Every compulsory age student who lives in Washington, DC, has at least one right-to-attend DCPS school per elementary, middle and high school— a school where they can enroll at any time based on the student’s address. However, since three- and four-year-olds are not required to attend school, Pre-K3 and Pre-K4 are non-compulsory grades and DCPS cannot guarantee a seat for every Pre-K student at their in-boundary school.

The Pre-K enrollment process begins with the My School DC (MSDC) common application, and placements are determined through a fair and equitable lottery system managed by the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). To enroll three- and four-year-olds in school for the first time, all families must apply through the MSDC lottery. Please visit www.myschooldc.org or call the My School DC Hotline at 202-888-6336 for more information.

2. What are the age requirements for Pre-K enrollment?

For purposes of enrollment into Pre-K and Kindergarten programs, DCPS adheres strictly to the age requirements defined in local regulations (5-E DCMR § 2004):

- A student who is or will become three (3) years of age on or before September 30 of a school year is eligible for Pre-K3 in that school year.
- A student who is or will become four (4) years of age on or before September 30 of a school year is eligible for Pre-K4 in that school year.
- A student who is or will become five (5) years of age on or before September 30 of a school year is eligible for Kindergarten in that school year.

3. I’m worried about my child’s development and I’m not sure if they are ready for Pre-K. What should I do?

If you are concerned about how your child is walking, talking, playing, learning, or behaving, don’t wait for Pre-K to start to see if they will grow out of it. If your child is two years eight months, please contact DCPS Early Stages at (202) 698-8037 or www.earlystages.org for a developmental screening. If your child is younger than two years eight months, please contact OSSE’s Strong Start, the DC Early Intervention Program, at (202) 727-3665 or www.eip.osse.dc.gov.

4. I think my child should skip a Pre-K grade. Can I enroll them in the next grade?

As explained in question #2, DCPS adheres strictly to the age requirements defined in local regulations and therefore does not allow promotions to occur from Pre-K3 into Pre-K4 or from Pre-K4 into Kindergarten unless the age requirements are also met. This means that students who are new to DCPS and receive a Pre-K3 or Pre-K4 seat via the MSDC lottery must complete their grade of enrollment before being promoted to the next grade level at the end of the school year. Please note: Families who apply for and receive a Pre-K lottery seat for a child with a birthdate that does not align with these age cutoffs – for example, applying for a Pre-K4 seat for a Pre-K3 aged child – will forfeit the seat and be directed to reapply for the correct grade through MSDC.

Kindergarten Enrollment and Compulsory Education

5. When is a child required to attend school?

Under DC law, all children residing in DC are required to attend school at an educational institution beginning the school year in which the child is (or have become) age five by September 30. This requirement is called compulsory attendance. DC Code § 38-202(a). The only exception to required attendance at an educational institution is for parents and guardians who seek to homeschool a child and file an intent to homeschool with OSSE. Please see <https://osse.dc.gov/service/homeschooling-district-columbia> for more information about homeschooling requirements.

6. How can I enroll my child in Kindergarten?

Students who are five years old or who will turn five years old on or before September 30 have a right to attend Kindergarten in their in-boundary DCPS school and can apply for seats in out-of-boundary schools through MSDC. Find your in-boundary school: <https://enrolldcps.dc.gov/node/41>.

7. I don't think my child is ready for Kindergarten. Can I wait to enroll them at age 6?

Children must be enrolled in and attend an educational institution beginning the school year in which they are (or have become) age five by September 30. Under DC law, an educational institution means a DCPS school, a DC public charter school, an independent school, a parochial school, or a private instructor. DC Code § 38-201(2A).

However, attending a child development center, private preschool, home daycare, or another early childhood program does not meet the compulsory education requirement.

8. I think my child should skip Kindergarten. Can I enroll them in 1st grade?

As explained in question #2, DCPS adheres strictly to the age requirements defined in local regulations and therefore does not allow five-year-olds to enroll in First grade unless they have already completed Kindergarten.

However, for students enrolled in grades Kindergarten through five, there is a process to consider a mid-year special promotion after the start of the school year. You may contact your child's principal after the beginning of the school year to learn more.

Promotion and Retention in Pre-K and Kindergarten

9. My student attended DCPS Pre-K and I want them to repeat the grade. Can that happen?

DCPS does not generally support retaining pre-kindergarten students or permitting students to repeat Pre-K3 or Pre-K4. However, Pre-K3, Pre-K4, and Kindergarten students may be retained if they do not meet promotion requirements (DC Official Code § 38-781.01(a)) or may be provided an option to repeat Pre-K3, Pre-K4, or Kindergarten if they meet proficiency requirements in core subject areas but are not functioning at a skill level deemed ready for promotion in the areas of physical, social, or emotional development (5-E DCMR § 2201.6). In the rare instances where it may be appropriate, the decision that a Pre-K student should repeat a grade must be made by the student's principal (DC Official Code § 38-781.01(b)(1)) and the parent must agree. Students will not be retained without parental consent and parental requests for retention will not be granted without the principal's agreement.

10. My child is enrolled in Pre-K, but I am worried about their progress or development. Should they repeat a grade?

If you are worried about your child's learning, development, speech, or behavior, you can make a referral (or request) for a special education evaluation. You can make this request to your child's teacher or principal verbally or in writing. The school will determine whether they think a special education evaluation is necessary and will seek your consent before proceeding.

11. If my Pre-K student is retained or will be repeating a Pre-K grade, will they be able to stay at their current DCPS school?

Since all Pre-K3 and Pre-K4 seats are allotted through the MSDC lottery process, all Pre-K3 and Pre-K4 retention/repeating decisions may have enrollment implications.

If your child's school has an available Pre-K seat in the grade your child will be repeating, your student may enroll in that seat without going back through the MSDC lottery process.

If your child's school does not have an available Pre-K seat in the grade your child will be repeating, your child will be prioritized if enrollments shift over the summer. If a seat does not become available for your child, the school will work with DCPS Central Office to assign your child to an available Pre-K seat at another DCPS school.

12. My student attended Pre-K at a non-DCPS school and I want them to repeat the grade. Can that happen?

Parental requests to repeat a Pre-Kindergarten grade that was attended at a non-DCPS school will not be granted by DCPS. Students will be enrolled based on the age requirements explained in question #2.

Additional Resources

- Find Your In-Boundary School: <http://enrolldcps.dc.gov/node/41>
- My School DC: <https://www.myschooldc.org/>
- DCPS Enrollment and Lottery Handbook: <https://enrolldcps.dc.gov/node/66>
- DCPS Early Stages: (202) 698-8037 or www.earlystages.org
- OSSE Strong Start, the DC Early Intervention Program: (202) 727-3665 or www.eip.osse.dc.gov
- [SY21-22 Retention and Promotion Guidance](#)
- [OSSE Homeschool Program: https://osse.dc.gov/service/homeschooling-district-columbia](https://osse.dc.gov/service/homeschooling-district-columbia)
- Questions about this guidance document: dcps.earlychildhood@dc.gov