

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

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 would or would 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 would be eligible for free or reduced price meal benefits
- No - I would not be 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 would or would 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 would 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 students who would and would 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.

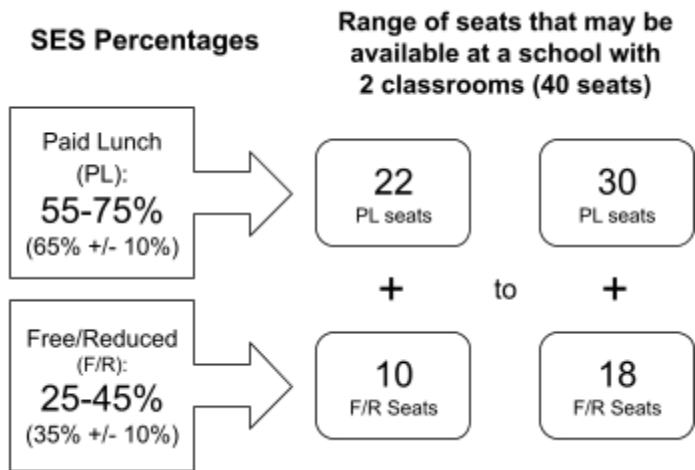
For the 2026 K Lottery, the target SES percentages will be 65% Paid Lunch and 35% Free/Reduced Lunch.

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 75% 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 45% 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:

- 22 Paid Lunch & 18 F/R Lunch seats to
- 30 Paid Lunch & 10 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, +/- 10%.

Section 2: Lottery Numbers & 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 PK-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 did not select the sibling school as your 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.**
 - ◆ ***Please note:*** *Proximity bonus points are not available for specialized schools and programs, including Tobin Montessori and the language immersion programs at Amigos, King Open, and MLK.*
 - ◆ 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 Mandarin 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 could differ 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, the Lottery assigns students 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 determine if there are seats available at the 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 Lottery 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 be assigned to one of their three school choices. Students in this situation will be mandatorily assigned to a fourth school where there is space available in their SES assignment category.

Initially, directly from the Lottery results, students who were not assigned to any of the three schools a family chose will be placed on three waitlists, and students who were assigned to the third choice school will be on two waitlists. Students assigned to a family's second choice will be placed on one waitlist.

Once your child has been assigned to school, they can only remain on one waitlist. If your child is assigned to your third-choice school or to none of your choices, you must select one waitlist on which you want them to remain.

We strongly encourage you to read the [Waitlists & Transfers: PK - 5](#) section of our website in order to familiarize yourself with what can be a complex process.

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 inform you about your waitlist 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 e-mail you to discuss whether you would like to transfer schools, and we will work with you throughout the process.

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.

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.

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 as possible before 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 your child being 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.

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 *

** Please note that seat availability at Tobin Montessori is exceedingly limited due to students who joined the school at three years old matriculating through fifth grade. Zero to five seats become available for kindergartners each year.*

It's important to keep an open mind as you research your school options. We encourage families to learn about a variety of schools.

Every family will have distinct 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.