



# ***NEW YORK CITY MIDDLE SCHOOL APPLICATION PROCESS***

## ***GUIDE FOR AGENCY STAFF SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE***

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## I. UNDERSTANDING THE NYC MIDDLE SCHOOL APPLICATION PROCESS

**Middle school is a crucial time for all students, including students in foster care.** Attending a quality middle school can set a student up for success in high school, college and beyond. Students who develop good attendance and study habits as early as sixth grade improve their odds of high school graduation. In spite of this, few students in foster care take advantage of the middle school options available, and foster parents and foster care staff are often not aware that 5th graders should apply to middle school. Through their work with students and families during the middle school selection process, **Education Specialists can ensure that every young person in care has a fair chance at a quality middle school experience.**

This guide is designed to help you assist students and families in preparing a strategic middle school application. It supplements the information available in the New York City Department of Education's (DOE's) middle school directories, [www.schools.nyc.gov/enrollment/enroll-grade-by-grade/middle-school](http://www.schools.nyc.gov/enrollment/enroll-grade-by-grade/middle-school), and the excellent tips and resources available at [www.insideschools.org](http://www.insideschools.org). The guide offers a brief overview of the different middle school admissions methods, suggests some characteristics to look at when considering middle schools, and provides information on middle school advising for students with disabilities. At the end of the guide, you'll find a Middle School Application Checklist and a worksheet you can use when meeting with families.

**Summer is a good time to identify all students at your agency who will need to complete a middle school application.** Applications are due in early December for the next school year. Most of these students will be first-time, rising 5th graders who attend DOE elementary schools.

*There are a few additional groups of students who may also need support with the middle school selection process, including:* students who attend charter schools, students who may be repeating 5th grade, and students who reside outside the city but may be returning to the city for 6th grade. A handful of DOE elementary schools serve students through grade 6, and *6th graders* who attend those schools will also need to complete a middle school application. Some *rising 4th graders* may want to apply to charter middle schools, many of which serve students in grades 5-8. Once you have your list of students, you're ready to begin!

### MIDDLE SCHOOL ADMISSIONS METHODS

**New York City DOE uses a variety of admissions methods to match students with middle schools.**

School options vary enormously depending on the district where the student lives or attends elementary school. Some districts have zoned schools and limited options outside of the zone, while other districts have no zoned schools and grant students equal access to any school in the district, regardless of where they live. In addition to district schools, there are schools that are open to all students in a particular borough, like Brooklyn or the Bronx, and other schools that are open to all students across the city.

Each school's listing in the middle school directory includes the programs available in that school and the admissions method used for each program (some schools have multiple programs with different admissions methods). The table on [Page 3](#) can help you figure out what kinds of schools to direct students toward, and what you and the student need to do to complete a successful application.

*Note that, while the DOE has done away with Limited Unscreened schools in high school admissions, these programs still exist at the middle school level.* For students who may struggle to get into a screened program, attending a middle school fair or visiting limited unscreened schools can significantly expand their middle school options, especially if they are zoned for a low-performing middle school.

## MIDDLE SCHOOL ADMISSIONS METHODS TABLE

ADMISSION METHOD	WHO SHOULD APPLY	APPLICATION PROCESS TIP
<b>Zoned</b> Heavy priority or guaranteed admission to students who live in a geographic area with a zoned middle school	Students who live close to a highly rated middle school.	If a student does not live near a highly rated zoned school, they may want to leave it off the application all together.
<b>Unscreened (Open)</b> Random Lottery	Anyone! Depending on the quality of the school, a good option for students who may have struggled in 4th grade.	Check the number of applicants per seat to gauge the student's chances of getting into the school
<b>Limited Unscreened</b>	Anyone may apply.	Students who attend an open house, school tour, or visit the school's table at a fair will get priority in admissions.
<b>Screened or Composite Score</b> Top tier, competitive programs; base admissions on the student's academic record and/or additional assessments and interviews.	Students with strong academic records in 4th grade. Including: grades, attendance, and state test scores.	Check the school's criteria before listing it on the application. <i>Some schools may weigh certain criteria more heavily than others.</i>
<b>Screened Language</b>	English Language Learners (ELLs) Especially students who are looking for dual language or bilingual classroom settings.	Often, schools will offer multiple programs, including screened language and open admissions programs. ELLs may want to apply to both programs.
<b>Test-Based</b>	Students with strong academic records who do well on standardized tests.	Some borough- and city-wide schools require applicants to take their own placement test, while others just look at grades or state test scores.

## ADMISSIONS PRIORITIES

Each DOE middle school has admission eligibilities and priorities that determine the order in which students are matched to the school. Some programs are only open to students who live or go to school in a certain borough or district. Other eligibility requirements might be based on gender or home language.

Each student's middle school application is personalized, and students will only be able to apply for programs they are eligible for, based on their address, home language, and other personal information. The middle school directories list the eligibility and admissions priorities for each program.

**Continuing 5th Graders Priority:** Continuing students who attend a K-8 or K-12 school have a *guaranteed match to the school* if they list it on their application and are not matched to a higher choice. They are considered first for any open seats.

**Geographic Priority:** Priority to students who live in a specific district, borough or geographic area. Note that, for some addresses, a student may be zoned for a different district for elementary school than they are for middle school.

**Zoned Priority:** *Priority – or in some cases, a guaranteed match – to applicants who live in the zone.* Many districts in NYC no longer have zoned middle schools. To find out if a student has a zoned middle school, enter their address into the DOE's "Find a School" search function at [www.schools.nyc.gov/find-a-school](http://www.schools.nyc.gov/find-a-school).

**Priority for attending an information session:** Connected to the **Limited Unscreened Admissions method**. Students who sign in at an open house, school tour, or school's table at a fair are put in a higher priority group. Some screened schools also prioritize students who attend a school event or sign in at a fair.

## CHOOSING AND RANKING SCHOOLS

Students get to list up to 12 middle school programs on their middle school application. Some schools offer multiple programs, and students may want to apply to different programs at the same school. While it's often a good idea to fill out the entire list, students should never include a school with poor outcomes or a school that they don't want to attend. The best way to rank schools is in order of preference, with a student's true first choice school at the top of the list, so long as the student qualifies academically to attend (*i.e., a screened school that a student clearly doesn't have the test scores for should not be at the top of their list*).

Students will receive an offer from the highest-ranked school that admits them, and will be placed on waiting lists at higher-ranked schools they didn't get into. If a student lists their zoned school at the top of their application, or an in-district school with a lot of open seats due to low demand, this is likely where they will end up receiving an offer for admission.

### Factors to consider when helping a student pick and rank the best middle schools for them:

#### SCHOOL SAFETY AND OTHER FACTORS

In the "Performance" section of the middle school guide, you can find a key indicator of school safety, which is the percentage of students who feel comfortable in the hallways, bathrooms, locker room, and cafeteria. This is a critical metric for many students in care, for whom a toxic school culture – especially one that includes bullying – can be particularly detrimental, while a safe and supportive school can be a huge protective factor.

Academic factors listed in the middle school directory, which also give some indication of a school's quality, include the percentage of students who pass core courses and the percentage who earn a 3 or 4 on state exams. Another good way to measure a schools' performance, especially for schools where many students may enter middle school several years behind, is to look at how well the school helps lower-performing students and students with disabilities make academic gains. You can find this information on the DOE's website by searching for the school in the "Find a School" function, going to the schools' webpage, and clicking on the "School Quality Snapshot." In addition to academic achievement, the Snapshot has information on student attendance and teacher performance.

#### EXTRACURRICULAR AND ACADEMIC OPPORTUNITIES

If you want to dive deeper into a school, check out the extracurricular and academic opportunities that the school offers, listed in the "Academics" and "Activities" sections of the middle school directories. If a middle school offers multiple Regents courses to 8th graders, multiple foreign languages, or helps prepare students

for the Specialized High School Admissions Test, it can be a sign that the school is academically rigorous. In other cases, you may find that the student you're working with is particularly interested in a certain afterschool club or activity that connects them to school and helps motivate them to do well.

#### SIZE OF THE SCHOOL

It's useful to look at the size of the school when considering a student's potential comfort there. Large schools have more programs and extracurricular opportunities but may feel overwhelming to certain students. Small schools sometimes can offer more individual attention, but may lack certain resources (*i.e., they might have to share staff or some of their physical facilities with another school, or may not offer the full range of classes that a larger school can*).

Discussing the size of a potential middle school in relation to the student's current school can be a good strategy for helping them visualize what their middle school experience could be like.

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## LOCATION AND COMMUTE

This may seem obvious, but always look to see where a school is located relative to where the student will be living during middle school! Map out the commute with the family and discuss how the student will get to school each day. While some middle schools offer general education busing to 6th graders who live more than 1 mile from school, others do not. The DOE expects all 7th and 8th grade students to travel independently on public transportation, unless special education transportation is mandated on their IEP. Encourage foster parents to travel train students on public transportation, when appropriate. The summer can be a good time for students to practice traveling independently before school starts.

It's also important to consider the likelihood that a student might undergo a change in foster care placement return to their parent or transition into kinship care during the middle school application process. Students can appeal their middle school match if they move during the admissions process, but their school options at that point will be limited.

If a student is very likely to move before middle school, consider applying to a school closer to their new home. You may need to work with the DOE Office of Student Enrollment, especially if their new placement will be in a different school district or borough.

## GRADE 6-12 SCHOOLS

Some students may want to consider applying to schools that serve students in grades 6-12. Many of these schools have strong academic programs, offer smaller settings with more individualized attention, and grant priority to continuing students during the high school application process, guaranteeing admission if the student decides to continue at the school. Some are also single-sex schools, such as the Young Women's Leadership Schools and the Eagle Academies for Young Men.

## OPTIONS FOR GIFTED STUDENTS

New York City offers several options for incoming middle school students classified as gifted and talented.

**Mark Twain Intermediate School for the Gifted + Talented** in Brooklyn is open to students citywide. In order to enroll, students must attend an audition to demonstrate outstanding talent in one of the school's areas of focus, including art, athletics, music, writing, math + computers, science, media, and drama. More information on applying to Mark Twain can be found on their website: [twain239.com](http://twain239.com).

**Other citywide gifted and talented programs (NEST+M, TAG, etc.)** give priority to continuing 5th graders but also accept new middle school students through the regular admissions process. These schools may consider a potential student's academic record and may require an additional math or writing assessment and/or an interview.

**Other screened programs look at the student's academic record**, giving different weights to each component. Some also require a placement test, interview, audition or assignment.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

When working with a student on middle school admissions, have a physical or electronic copy of the **Middle School Directory** handy. Since middle school admission options vary significantly by district, the DOE has developed separate directories for each of the 32 geographic school districts in the city, which are available online at: [www.schools.nyc.gov/enrollment/enroll-grade-by-grade/middle-school](http://www.schools.nyc.gov/enrollment/enroll-grade-by-grade/middle-school).

To determine which district a student lives in, search for their address in the “Find a School” search function on the DOE website. Students who attend school in a different district from the district in which they live may also apply to schools in the district where their elementary school is located. The student’s online application should reflect their eligibility in both districts, but check with the student’s guidance counselor if you are unsure.

**The DOE hosts district middle school fairs in early fall for most of the districts in the city.** These fairs provide a great opportunity to meet staff from different schools, sign in to get priority at Limited Unscreened schools, and start narrowing down a student’s list of potential schools for their application. Check the DOE’s [website](#) for the schedule, which is usually posted at the beginning of the school year.

**Once a student has developed a preliminary list of schools, it’s important that they visit their top choices** to get a feel of the school, learn about the services available, test out the commute and ensure it is a right fit. Encourage birth and foster parents to visit schools with students and accompany students or families when needed. The DOE has a [calendar](#) of school open houses and tours on the middle school page of its [website](#), or you can call individual schools directly to ask about upcoming tours.

**InsideSchools offers rich and comprehensive information about school performance and safety**, as well as in-depth reviews of each school by InsideSchools staff. It is always a good idea to double-check a student’s target middle schools on [insideschools.org](http://insideschools.org).

## II. MIDDLE SCHOOL SELECTION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

**For the most part, the middle school admissions process for students with IEPs or 504 plans will look similar to the process for other students.** Each NYC DOE middle school program sets aside seats for students with disabilities, and students with IEPs or 504 plans can apply to any NYC public middle school program unless their IEP indicates a ***District 75 placement***.

**Students in District 75 schools do not participate in the regular middle school admissions process. Instead, they will receive a placement in May or June from the D75 placement office.**

In general, the transition to middle school is a good time to meet with the student's IEP team and decide whether District 75 is a fit for the student going forward. *This determination should be made well before the middle school application is due!* If there is a chance the student will be moving to a District 1-32 school for middle school, speak to the student's guidance counselor and make sure they complete a middle school application, just in case.

**District 75 inclusion programs** can provide a happy medium between a separate District 75 school placement and integration into a community school environment. For other students, the DOE's specialized programs for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or Intellectual Disabilities (ID) may be a good fit, or they may require a nonpublic or therapeutic school. Refer to the [Special Education section of the Education Specialist's Manual](#) (Coming soon!) for more information and next steps.

**Students with accessibility needs** should check the middle school directory or the Building Accessibility page on the DOE website to determine whether a school meets their accessibility needs: [schools.nyc.gov/BuildingAccessibility](https://schools.nyc.gov/BuildingAccessibility)

**Students with IEPs or 504 plans** can receive accommodations on any tests or auditions related to middle school admissions, just like they would in school. Accommodations should be requested in advance from the school the student is applying to.

**All middle schools are required to provide the services and accommodations indicated on a student's IEP or 504 plan.** With that said, not all schools are equal in their ability and track record for supporting students with disabilities. *It is particularly useful for students with disabilities to visit schools before listing them on their application,* and parents and agency staff should reach out to target schools to learn more about how the school supports students with disabilities.

**For students currently in general education classes with SETSS or related services, or students in Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) classes,** they should expect that whatever middle school they apply to offers, or will be able to offer, the program recommended on their IEP. *Once the student is admitted, it's a good idea to reach out to the IEP coordinator or school-based team at the new school to make sure they can provide all the student's services, especially less common related services like physical therapy, hearing education, etc.* It's unlikely the school will have anyone on staff and they may need to contract the service out to an independent agency, so the sooner they know about it, the better.

**For students in 12:1 or 12:1:1 settings, bear in mind that some middle schools, especially smaller ones, do not offer self-contained 12:1 or 12:1:1 classes.** Consider the student's ability to function in a larger setting, such as an ICT, with SETSS, a 1:1 para, or other supports. It's best to reach out to schools and discuss your student's special education needs as soon as they are matched to a middle school, rather than waiting until September, so the school can begin planning for their arrival.

*Generally, students should still fill out the middle school application, even if they currently need or may need a temporary school placement, such as an intensive day treatment or residential program.* Students in these school placements do not automatically lose their middle school offer – they can enroll in the middle school they were matched with until the end of their 6th grade year.

### III. CHARTER SCHOOLS

Charter schools are independent public schools founded by not-for-profit Boards of Trustees. They operate under a contract (or "charter") of up to five years. Many charter schools have unique educational approaches that may include longer school days, a longer school year, or themed programs.

While many charter schools offer rigorous academic instruction, many also have strict discipline codes or promotion policies and may not be the right choice for some students in care. Similarly, some charter schools are designed to support students with special education needs, while others struggle to provide special education services and are not a good fit for students who need substantial supports. Before enrolling, make sure to visit charter schools with families to learn more about their discipline and promotion policies and their approach to providing special education services, to ensure the school is a good fit for your student.

For more information about charter schools in New York City, visit: [www.nyccharterschools.org](http://www.nyccharterschools.org).

#### ENROLLMENT METHODS:

##### OPEN ENROLLMENT

Charter schools must admit students of all kinds.

They cannot exclude students based on:

- disability
- race
- creed
- gender
- national origin
- religion
- ancestry
- intellectual ability
- measures of achievement or aptitude
- athletic ability

##### LOTTERY AND ENROLLMENT

The deadline to apply to most charter schools is April 1st, but some schools may have a later deadline.

*For information about a specific charter school and its enrollment deadline, contact the school directly.*

If the number of students who apply to a charter school is greater than the number of available seats, schools will use a random selection process, such as a lottery.

If a student misses the charter school's deadline, they can still apply, but they will be placed at the bottom of the waitlist.

Each school has its own application form, but many use the NYC Charter School Center's Common Application. *Contact the school directly for more information.*

##### ENROLLMENT PREFERENCES

Charter schools give enrollment preferences to:

- returning students
- siblings of current students
- students living in the same community school district as the school

Charter schools may also give preferences to the following groups, if the school's authorizer allows it:

- English language learners (ELL)
- Students with disabilities
- Students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch
- Other groups, such as students in temporary housing, court-involved students or students in foster care.

Single-sex charter schools are also allowed.



## IV. MIDDLE SCHOOL APPLICATION CHECKLIST

**STUDENT NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

WHEN	WHAT	COMPLETED
Summer before 5th grade	Identify all rising 5th graders on your caseload, any students who may be repeating 5th grade, and any other students who will apply to middle school.	
	Let parents and foster parents know you will be assisting them with the middle school application process. Schedule meetings with families.	
August-September of 5th grade	Meet with students and families to develop a preliminary list of up to 12 middle school programs.	
	Start by determining whether the student has a zoned middle school and if that school is a good fit.	
September-October of 5th grade	Attend Middle School Open Houses and Fairs	
	Visit schools to see the atmosphere and environment before completing applications.	
October of 5th grade	Students' personalized applications are available online through MySchools.	
	Check to make sure all the information is accurate, especially the parent name and contact information, and the students mailing address.	
November of 5th grade	Finalize a list of schools and programs with the student.	
	Help the family complete the application, or work with the student and guidance counselor to complete it.	
Early December of 5th grade <i>(usually Dec. 1st)</i>	Middle school applications are due. Check with the school guidance counselor to ensure the student's application is completed.	
March of 5th grade	School matches will be available online. Families will also receive offer letters in the mail.	
	Apply to charter schools, if desired. Charter schools typically have an application deadline of April 1st.	
Spring of 5th grade	Monitor your position on the waitlist of any schools you're interested in.	
	If needed, appeal your middle school match. Appeals may be especially necessary for students who moved homes during the application process.	

## MIDDLE SCHOOL RANKING WORKSHEET

**STUDENT NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

	SCHOOL NAME / PROGRAM NAME	ADMISSIONS METHOD	% PASSING CORE CLASSES	% OF STUDENTS FEEL SAFE IN SCHOOL
1.			%	%
2.			%	%
3.			%	%
4.			%	%
5.			%	%
6.			%	%
7.			%	%
8.			%	%
9.			%	%
10.			%	%
11.			%	%
12.			%	%