

NEW YORK CITY HIGH SCHOOL APPLICATION PROCESS

GUIDE FOR AGENCY STAFF SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE

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I. UNDERSTANDING THE NYC HIGH SCHOOL APPLICATION PROCESS

High school advisement is one of the most important jobs that we do for students in foster care. The high school a student attends can have a major impact on their graduation chances, their postsecondary readiness, and their social and emotional well-being during a critical stage of their adolescence. The data shows that students who get help from their Middle School Specialist through every step of the high school application process get into higher-performing schools, while students who don't get help are matched with high schools with below-average graduation rates – sometimes significantly below the city average.

The process the New York City Department of Education (DOE) uses to match 8th graders to public high schools is complicated. Students and their families are asked to come up with a ranked list of schools they want to apply to, and they are admitted according to a range of criteria that might not be obvious to someone who is filling out the application for the first time. This complex system of school choice and NYC's wide disparity in high school quality lead directly to an unequal and segregated high school landscape. Too often, students who don't have access to strategic high school advising list only a handful of struggling schools on their application. Students in foster care deserve equal access to a quality high school education, so it's vital that we support them during the high school application process.

The goal of this guide is to help you assist your students in preparing a well-tailored application that will maximize their chances of receiving a high school education that supports and challenges them. It is intended as a supplement to the online [MySchools](#) directory, and the outstanding information available via the [InsideSchools website](#).

In this guide, we provide a brief overview of the different admissions methods that high schools use, the different types of high schools, and what to look for when helping your student choose schools. We will clarify the meaning of the statistics and school quality measures found in the High School Directory in MySchools. We also provide information on transfer schools, charter schools, and high school advising for students with disabilities. At the end of this guide, you will find additional resources, including a [High School Checklist and Worksheet](#) that you can use to make sure you and your student are on track to submit a high school application that maximizes their chances of getting a school that supports their needs and aspirations.

High school applications are typically due in early December, but submitting a quality application takes time and should involve visiting potential schools. For that reason, it's important to start early!

Take some time each summer to identify all the rising 8th graders at your agency, including students who may be repeating 8th grade and students who are away at residential placements. Once you have a list of students, the next step is to reach out to the foster parent to introduce yourself, let them know that you will be helping them with the high school selection process, and schedule the first meeting with them and the student. Turn to page 14 for the full High School Checklist/Timeline.

FIVE KEY FACTORS THAT GUIDE SUCCESSFUL HIGH SCHOOL APPLICATIONS:

1. List 12 high schools if possible, in order of the student's true preferences.
NEW IN FALL 2024! Students can now list an unlimited number of high school programs, but 12 programs is still considered a "complete" application.
2. Always know the graduation rate and school safety stats for a school before listing it. Don't just look at last year's scores – consider historical trends as well.
3. Always look up your student's commute time to a school before listing it.
4. **Do not list low-performing high schools** or schools that aren't a match for your student.
5. Always check the admissions method for the school your student is applying to and make sure it does not exclude your student. Students who struggled in 7th grade should focus on high-quality schools that use Ed Opt or Unscreened admissions methods (or Zoned if there is a good zoned school nearby).

TIPS FROM MIDDLE SCHOOL SPECIALISTS, FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL SPECIALISTS

1. **Start Early!**

Some Middle School Specialists start speaking with their students about applying to high school in 6th grade. You don't need to get into the nuts and bolts at that stage, but it's helpful to get students thinking about it early. It's recommended that conversations start in earnest during the fall of 7th grade, since a student's 7th grade grades are the ones that count for screened schools. This also will give you time to build rapport with the student, as well as with school staff and families.

2. **Take a team approach.**

Don't work in isolation – involve the child's foster parent and case planner in the process, and if the child's goal is return to parent, involve the birth parent, too. Case planners can help reinforce messages to the family, invite you on home visits, and facilitate communication with the student and their parents. Their involvement is also critical so that you stay informed about the child's living situation and permanency plan. Birth parents can also play a supportive role, and it's essential they are involved if the child ends up going on trial discharge at any point during the application process.

3. **Involve the student whenever possible.**

Some students initially may show little interest, but keep trying. It's important to make decisions with them, not for them. Many of our students will move to a new foster home or get a new case planner during the application process, so it's imperative that we get to know the students and don't just rely on the adults around them. You can use the questionnaire at the back of this guide to help get the conversation started.

4. **Keep it positive.**

Don't use terms like "failing school." Instead talk about which schools are best equipped to provide support, help the student be successful, have the greatest chance of graduating, etc.

5. **Get to know the high schools so you can help youth make informed decisions.**

Try to visit some of the high schools with your students. If there are neighborhoods where the bulk of your students live, plan to go on virtual tours or admissions events hosted by schools in the area. Follow up with the student's Coach once they start high school to see how supportive their high school match is. Is this a school you want to consider for future students at your agency?

6. **Partner with guidance counselors, but don't rely on them.**

School counselors can be valuable sources of information about how students are doing in school and can help engage students in the application process. At the same time, they have huge caseloads and are incentivized to *finish* applications, not necessarily craft well-considered applications. Work with them, but never rely on them to do a youth's application.

7. **Give yourself time.**

Think about how many youth you have and be realistic about how long it will take you to do a good job. Make sure the youth understand how long it can take, too. You may need multiple conversations for the student to engage with you or come around to the idea of traveling for school. This can't happen if you need to rush your conversations.

8. **Work smart.**

Make sure you have a student's education records, including their final 7th grade report card and current IEP, before you begin researching schools. Allow adequate time to gather the records. Ideally, you will have met with the student's teachers and counselor in 7th grade and will be familiar with their academic strengths, needs, and work style. Tutors can also be a helpful source of information.

NYC HIGH SCHOOL ADMISSIONS METHODS

New York City schools use a variety of admissions methods to decide who goes to which high school. Every high school entry in the MySchools Directory lists the programs available in that high school and the admissions method used for each program (many high schools have multiple programs with different admissions methods). The table below can help you figure out what kinds of schools to direct your student towards, and what you and your student need to do to complete a successful application.

Note that outstanding high schools with Unscreened or Education Option (Ed Opt) admissions are often the best choices for students who struggled in 7th grade. Many Unscreened schools offer quality educational programs but don't screen for grades or test scores. High quality Ed Opt schools can also offer outstanding high school experiences to students who struggled in middle school.

| ADMISSION METHOD | WHO SHOULD APPLY | APPLICATION PROCESS TIP |
|---|--|---|
| Ed Opt Students are grouped as "High," "Middle," and "Low" based on their core course grades, and one-third of offers are made to students in each group. | Anyone This method is designed to admit students with a range of grades and academic abilities. | Ed Opt is the most common admissions method for NYC high school programs. |
| Zoned Heavy priority or guaranteed admission to students who live in the geographic area zoned to the school. | Students who live close to a great zoned high school (<i>This is unlikely for most of our students</i>). | If a student lives near a not-particularly-strong zoned school, they should put it at the bottom of their application or leave it off entirely. |
| Unscreened (Open) Random Lottery | Anyone | There are a lot more unscreened (and Ed Opt) programs in NYC now that Limited Unscreened has been discontinued! |
| Screened Top tier of academic programs—schools choose students according to their grades and test scores. Schools with screened admissions list their academic requirements in MySchools. | Students with good grades (typically 90 or above) | Students with poor academic records in 7th grade should not list screened programs on their applications! <i>Pay careful attention to the academic criteria listed in MySchools.</i> Some screened schools have additional admission requirements, like an essay or group interview. |
| Screened Language Programs reserved for students who speak the target language, are still learning English, and/or have been in the country for four years or less. | English Language Learners (ELLs) , especially students who are new to the country or students who are looking for transitional bilingual or dual language classes. | There are limited options for students who require bilingual classes at the high school level. To find International High Schools (schools designed for newly arrived immigrant students), filter for "School for New Arrivals" in the MySchools online directory . |
| Audition Strong arts curriculum and require an audition or portfolio to apply. Admission to these schools is competitive. | Students who have a strong interest in the visual or performing arts and are willing to prepare for an audition or submit a portfolio. | Find out the audition dates and portfolio deadlines as early as possible, and make sure your student signs up for them. <i>One audition school, LaGuardia, is a specialized high school and shouldn't be listed on the regular high school application – students apply to it separately.</i> |
| Test Specialized high schools admit students via a challenging test, the SHSAT , and they are among the hardest schools to get into. Learn more about the SHSAT (Specialized High School Admissions Test) online. | Students who are academically strong and are willing to prepare for the SHSAT. These schools don't take middle school grades into account, so in theory someone with a bad transcript has a shot at getting in. | Start preparing for the SHSAT at the beginning of the summer between 7th and 8th grade. Interested students should register for the SHSAT in MySchools . Specialized High Schools like Stuyvesant, Brooklyn Tech, and LaGuardia should never be listed on the regular high school application. <i>Students apply to these separately.</i> |

ADMISSIONS PRIORITIES

The factors that schools use to determine who gets in usually mirror the admissions method, but some high schools give priority based on zone, borough, or middle school attended. Each program in the MySchools directory lists the kind of priority they use.

Continuing Eighth Graders Priority: Continuing students in a school that serves grades 6-12 have a guaranteed match to the school if they list it on their application and do not match to a higher choice, regardless of the Admissions Method(s) and available seats. They are considered first for any open seats.

Feeder School Priority: Priority to applicants who attend identified middle schools.

Geographic Priority: Priority to applicants who live or attend middle school in the same borough as the high school.

Zoned Priority: Priority or, in some cases, a guaranteed match is given to applicants who live in the geographic zone ([see page 4](#)). To find out if a student has a zoned high school, enter the student's address into the DOE's ["Find a School"](#) online search function.

Diversity in Admissions: Priority is given to students from low-income families as part of an initiative to increase diversity in NYC schools, especially certain high-performing high schools in Manhattan. Because students in foster care are automatically eligible for free lunch, they should qualify for this priority. Check their profile in MySchools to make sure it's listed.

Note that the **"Limited Unscreened"** priority option (which gave preference to students attending open houses) no longer exists. ***Screened schools may still prioritize students who attend open houses.***

TYPES OF SCHOOLS

Aside from traditional comprehensive high schools, there are different types, or broad categories, of public high schools in NYC. While the city's 9 Specialized High Schools get most of the attention, the following types of high schools may also be of interest and a good fit for students in foster care.

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION (CTE) SCHOOLS

CTE schools combine traditional high school coursework with professional training in a trade. Unlike old-fashioned vocational schools, CTE schools aim for students to graduate college- and job-ready. Students may take a full load of college preparatory courses while earning professional certifications in a variety of fields, including science and engineering, health care, culinary, art and design, or more traditional trades like automotive repair or construction.

[Click here to learn more about CTE schools.](#)

CONSORTIUM (OR PBAT) SCHOOLS

Also known as "Performance Assessment Schools," Consortium schools follow the philosophy that small schools that concentrate on teaching a few subjects well are more effective than large schools that teach many subjects. Many classes are project-based and prioritize student discussion and collaboration. Consortium schools are exempt from administering most Regents exams, except for ELA. Instead, students create a portfolio of their work and complete oral presentations in each subject called performance-based assessment tasks, or PBATs.

Consortium schools may be a good option for students who prefer a non-traditional environment and/or who struggle with standardized tests. Some transfer schools are also consortium schools.

[Click here to learn more about PBAT schools.](#)

EARLY COLLEGE AND P-TECH SCHOOLS

Early College schools combine a high school curriculum with the opportunity to earn up to two years of college credit free of charge at a partner CUNY campus. Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools, or P-TECH schools, offer a six-year program (grades 9-14) where students can earn a career-specific Associate Degree in the field of science, math, technology or engineering. Each school is paired with an industry leader in the field to offer job shadowing, mentoring and internships to students.

[Click here to learn more about Early College and P-Tech schools.](#)

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

These schools are designed for newly arrived immigrant students who are developing proficiency in English. In addition to providing language supports, international schools help students acclimate to a new culture while recognizing the traditions and cultures of their home countries. In most international schools, classes are taught in English by ESL teachers. Students who are looking for bilingual instruction in their native language should also search for screened language programs in other high schools, not international schools.

[Click here to learn more about international schools.](#)

SPECIALIZED HIGH SCHOOLS

These nine schools are for students who excel academically or artistically. They are highly competitive and offer rigorous college preparatory instruction. Students are admitted based on the results of a standardized test the DOE administers in the fall of 8th grade, or, in the case of [LaGuardia High School](#), based on student academic records and an audition process.

[Click here to learn more about Specialized High Schools.](#)

TRANSFER SCHOOLS

Transfer schools are designed for students who are over-age for their grade or behind in credits. For more information, refer to the [Transfer School section](#) of this guide ([page 12](#)) or click [here](#).

CHOOSING AND RANKING SCHOOLS

Students can list an unlimited number of high school programs on their application, but 12 programs is still a good number to aim for. They will eventually list them in order of preference on their high school application. Most high schools offer multiple programs to which a student can apply, and students can apply to several different programs at the same school.

It's almost always a good idea to fill out the entire list: according to the DOE, students who listed 12 high schools received an offer of admissions at one of the schools on their list 97% of the time. **With that said, students should never include a school with poor outcomes or a school that they don't want to attend just to get an offer.** If a student only has a few target high schools, they should apply to multiple programs at those schools!

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 doesn't have the grades to get into should never be at the top of the list). Students will receive an offer from the highest-ranked school that admits them. **If a student lists their zoned school at the top of their application, or a school that has a lot of open spaces due to low demand, this is likely where they will end up receiving an offer.**

6 FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHILE HELPING A STUDENT PICK & RANK THE BEST SCHOOLS FOR THEM:

1. SCHOOL SAFETY AND ATTENDANCE DATA

Also in the “performance” section of the [online directory](#), you can find two key indicators of school safety and attendance. The first 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.**

Student attendance is less significant but still worth considering, as it speaks to the student’s peers and the culture of the school around regular attendance. Higher student attendance is better, and 85% and above is preferable.

2. GRADUATION AND COLLEGE ENROLLMENT RATES

Looking at how many students graduate from a school in four years and how many enroll in college and career programs afterwards can tell you a lot about a school. Generally speaking, the higher these two numbers are, the better the school, though it’s not a perfect measure!

New York City public schools have about a 90% four-year graduation rate overall. Therefore: if you see a 4-year graduation rate around 90% that means you are looking at a middle-of-the-road high school in terms of graduation outcomes. Anything above 90% is good. Above 95% is outstanding.

When it comes to college enrollment rates, we want to see at least 50% of students enrolling in a college or career program after graduation. Some schools have outstanding numbers on this front, which speaks to a very prepared student population and/or an outstanding guidance office. Either way, a high number is a good sign.

You’ll find this information in the “performance” section of the [online directory](#).

3. EXTRACURRICULAR AND ACADEMIC OPPORTUNITIES

If you want to dive deeper on a school, take a look at the extracurricular and academic opportunities that the school offers. If a school has a lot of AP classes, it can be a sign that a school is particularly academically rigorous. In other cases, you may find that the student you’re working with is particularly interested in a certain after school club or activity that will motivate them to attend school regularly. This information is available in the [MySchools online directory](#).

4. 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 could feel overwhelming to certain students. Small schools are at times able to offer more individual attention, but may lack certain resources (for instance, they might have to share a school psychologist or some of their physical facilities with another school). Discussing the size of a potential high school in relation to the student’s current school can be a good strategy for helping them visualize what their high school experience could be like.

5. LOCATION

This may seem obvious, but always look to see where a school is relative to where the student will be living during high school! Schools in the same borough as your student’s home can be farther than schools in another borough. For example, there are plenty of Brooklyn schools that are 1.5-hour commutes from a Brooklyn foster home, and sometimes a Manhattan school can be a better option.

It’s also important to consider the likelihood that a student might undergo a major transition or placement change before or during high school. Applying to a school in deep Queens is probably not a good idea for a student who is likely to return to their parent in the Bronx within the next year! In general, Manhattan schools or schools with good access to multiple subway lines are preferable for students with placement uncertainty in the future. Students who are definitely planning to move should consider a school close to where they will be living during high school.

If you know a student is about to go on trial discharge with their parent, reach out to the DOE's Enrollment team and ask them to use the student's parent's address for purposes of the high school application, rather than the foster home address. Remember, many high schools give admissions priority to students who live in the borough, so if a student is about to move to a new borough, you want to be sure they get priority for the schools near their new address.

6. VISITING SCHOOLS

Whenever possible, try to visit the schools a student wants to list on their application with the student, especially schools ranked higher on their application. Visiting a school is the best way to explore if it may be the right fit for a student. Contact schools directly or visit their webpage to find out if they have special events, open houses, virtual tours, or student-guided tours scheduled. You can also find a [calendar on MySchools](#) with school-based admissions events and a citywide calendar on the [DOE's high school admissions page](#).

WAITLISTS

Students will automatically be put on the waitlist for any schools listed higher on their application than the school they got into. For example, if the student got into their fourth-choice school, they will be put on the waitlist for the schools they ranked first, second, and third. You can also use MySchools to add students to waitlists in the spring and summer, after offers go out and the waitlists open.

Waitlists can be a very helpful tool for students who move homes or enter or exit care during 8th grade, after applications are due but before high school starts. If the student is now living far from the high school they matched with and the student can no longer do the commute, you can add them to waitlists at schools closer to their new address. Just make sure their address is properly updated in MySchools, so the student receives any new geographic priorities they are entitled to.

Students' official high school offer letters will include their position on any waitlists. A student's position on a waitlist can change from day to day, so make sure to log into MySchools regularly to monitor their position on the waitlist. If a student gets an offer off a waitlist, they only have one week to accept before the offer goes to the next student on the list. They will get an email notifying them of the offer at the email address used to set up the MySchools account; the school should also contact the student's parent or foster parent directly. However, if the child recently moved homes, the school may have incorrect contact information on file, so checking MySchools regularly will be critical for any of your students who are looking to get into a new school off the waitlist.

In our experience, students can and do get placements through the waitlists; however, some schools do not admit any students off the waitlist, so plan accordingly. The nine Specialized High Schools also don't use waitlists. You can learn more about waitlists from the [DOE's website](#).

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Aside from academic factors, special education or language needs, and their status as a student in foster care, some of the students we work with may have other needs or interests that should be considered during the high school application process.

WE HAVE IDENTIFIED THE FOLLOWING AS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT TO SOME STUDENTS IN CARE:

ATHLETICS

All schools offer some sports teams, and larger schools often have more options for students.

Look at the “activities” section of the [MySchools directory](#) to see which sports a school offers. You can also filter for different sports when searching for schools.

LGBTQIA STUDENTS

While there is no vetted list of schools that are particularly welcoming or inclusive toward LGBTQIA students, one potential sign that a school is safe for students of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities is the presence of a **GSA**, or **Gay-Straight Alliance** (also known as a *Gender and Sexuality Alliance*).

A GSA is a student-run organization that unites LGBTQ and allied students to build community and organize around issues impacting them in their schools and communities. Research shows that GSAs can have a positive impact on student health, wellness, and academic performance, and can help protect students from harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

To determine if a school has a GSA, look under the “activities” section of the [MySchools](#) directory or search for “GSA”.

PREGNANT AND PARENTING STUDENTS

The **DOE’s LYFE program** provides free, on-site childcare to the children of student parents who attend DOE schools. LYFE can accommodate children from six weeks old through age three.

LYFE program hours coincide with the regular school day. While student parents do not need to attend school in the same building as the LYFE program, they will need to attend a school nearby.

You can find a list of schools and campuses with LYFE programs at lyfenyc.org/locations.

SINGLE-SEX SCHOOLS

The DOE offers several single-sex middle and high schools, as do many charter school networks.

To find a complete list of DOE schools, filter for “female or male students only” on [MySchools](#).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

When working with a student on high school admissions, consult the [MySchools Directory](#). You should also familiarize yourself with the High School Scorecard developed by At The Table, which can help you generate a preliminary list of schools with strong graduation rates by borough. If your student wants to apply to a Specialized High School, bring them a copy of the [Specialized High School Handbook](#), which contains information on all the schools, tips on taking the SHSAT, and a couple of practice tests.

In the fall, the DOE usually holds high school fairs in each borough, where students can meet with DOE admissions specialists and representatives from high schools across the city. There is a city-wide fair for CTE high schools as well. These fairs offer students a great opportunity to learn about different schools and narrow down their high school selections. Make sure each student you’re working with attends at least one.

The DOE also runs webinars on the high school application process for parents each year. Parents should be encouraged to attend these webinars when their child is entering 7th or 8th grade. Find more information [online](#).

Finally, [Insideschools.org](#) is a great way to find out more about good schools and schools to avoid. Each school’s page includes an independent review, a summary of the school’s statistics, and a section for public comment. The site also identifies “Noteworthy” schools in every district and includes staff picks for schools that do a particularly good job serving certain populations of students, including ELLs and students with disabilities.

II. HIGH SCHOOL SELECTION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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

STUDENTS WHO WILL ATTEND DISTRICT 75 SCHOOLS:

Students who will attend District 75 schools don't need to participate in the regular high school admissions process. Instead, they will receive a placement in May or June from the **D75 Placement Office**.

In general, the transition to high 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 high school application is due!* If there is a chance the student will be moving to a District 1-32 school for high school, speak to the student's guidance counselor and make sure they complete a high 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 students with standard assessment on their IEP, the stand-alone District 75 high schools do not, as a general rule, offer an environment that is conducive for most students to earn a high school diploma. If you are working with an 8th grader with significant social-emotional, behavioral or mental health needs who cannot be successful in a less restrictive setting, consider exploring nonpublic schools for the student for high school. While not perfect, many nonpublic schools have a track record of graduating students with disabilities that far exceeds the results we see at the District 75 high schools for standardly assessed students. For more information on applying to nonpublic schools, refer to the [Special Education Section of the K-12 Educational Advocacy Manual](#).

STUDENTS WITH ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS:

Students with accessibility needs should check the MySchools directory or the DOE [Building Accessibility page](#) to determine whether a school meets their accessibility needs.

STUDENTS WITH IEPs OR 504 PLANS:

Students with IEPs or 504 plans can receive testing accommodations on any tests or auditions related to high school admissions, just like they would in school. Testing accommodations should be requested in advance from the school the student is applying to, or (in the case of the SHSAT) from the student's guidance counselor when signing up for the test.

All high 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 WITH SETSS OR RELATED SERVICES, OR STUDENTS IN INTEGRATED CO-TEACHING (ICT) CLASSES:

These students should expect that whatever high school they apply to offers, or will be able to offer, the program recommended on their IEP.

TIP: Once the student is admitted, it's a good idea to reach out to the IEP coordinator or school-based team 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 CLASSES IN MIDDLE SCHOOL:

Consider the student's ability to function in a larger setting, such as an ICT, with SETSS, a 1:1 para, or other supports. **Many high schools, especially the smaller ones, do not offer self-contained 15:1 classes, or may only offer 15:1 classes for ELA and math.**

It's best to reach out to schools and discuss your student's special education needs as soon as they are matched to the high school, rather than waiting until September, so the school can begin planning for their arrival. Schools may need to reconfigure the class schedule or modify their budget to hire an additional special education teacher, paraprofessional or other staff.

For some students used to a 12:1+1 program, the transition to high school is particularly difficult. Even if the school offers a 15:1 setting for some classes, the larger class size and lack of additional adult support may be hard to manage. Additionally, the student will likely be in general education classes for electives, and they will need to navigate the building on their own unless they qualify for a health or crisis para. For these students, you may need to consider other options, like District 75 inclusion, nonpublic schools, or specialized programs for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) or Intellectual Disabilities (ID).

Refer to the [Special Education Section of the K-12 Educational Advocacy Manual](#) for more information and next steps.

Students should still fill out the high school application, even if they currently need or may eventually need a temporary school placement such as a day treatment or residential program. Students in these placements do not automatically lose their high school offer – they can return to the high school offered to them until the end of their 9th grade year.

III. TRANSFER SCHOOLS

Transfer schools are DOE-run schools specially designed for students who have dropped out of high school or who are very behind in credits for their age. They tend to be small and offer extracurricular activities as well as tutoring, counseling, attendance interventions, and other supports. Many offer a “Learning to Work” program which provides students with academic support, college preparation, job and career development and paid internships.

Typically, students apply to transfer schools after they have completed at least one year of high school. However, some transfer schools have a hybrid admissions model and will accept overage students directly from 8th grade through the high school application process. The following transfer schools may accept applications from 8th grade students who are two years overage (15 years or older) at the time they complete their high school application.

TRANSFER SCHOOL LOCATIONS

BRONX

**Arturo A. Schomburg
Satellite Academy Bronx**

**New Directions
Secondary School**
(Grades 6-12)

BROOKLYN

**Aspirations Diploma Plus
High School**

Brooklyn Academy High School

Brooklyn Frontiers High School

**Brooklyn High School for
Leadership and Community Service**

**Liberation Diploma Plus
High School**

**Metropolitan Diploma Plus
High School**

Olympus Academy

Professional Pathways High School

MANHATTAN

**Emma Lazarus High School for
English Language Scholars**
(ELLs only)

Forsyth Satellite Academy

Harvey Milk High School

**High School for Excellence
and Innovation**

Independence High School

The James Baldwin School

**Liberty High School Academy
for Newcomers** (ELLs only)

**Lower East Side Preparatory
High School** (ELLs only)

IN ADDITION:

The **Judith S. Kaye High School**, a transfer school co-located with Co-op Tech in Manhattan, accepts applications from rising 9th grade students who are 16 and older, as well as overage 8th graders. Contact the school directly to apply; they do not participate in the high school admissions process.

For more information on transfer schools, including a vetted list of recommended schools by borough, refer to [Fair Futures Program Manual Appendix F8 Alternative High School Selection and Application Guide](#) and [Appendix F16 Alternative Middle and High School Options](#).

IV. 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 instruction and have high graduation rates, 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.

CHARTER SCHOOLS ADMISSIONS PROCESS:

Because charter schools are not standardized, each school has its own admission process. The deadline to apply to most charter schools is April 1st. Some charters may have a later deadline; for information about a specific charter school, contact the school directly.

Most charter schools conduct admissions through a lottery. Each school has its own application form, but many also use the [NYC Charter School Center's Common Application](#). All charter schools give enrollment preferences in the lottery to returning students, siblings, and students who live in the same school district as the school.

Charter schools may also give preferences to the following groups, depending on their charter:

- English language learners
- Students with disabilities
- Students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch
- Students in temporary housing, with child welfare involvement, or involved with the juvenile or criminal justice system

Specific Charter Schools to note include:

[Broome Street Academy](#) is a charter high school housed at the Door, a youth services agency in downtown Manhattan that offers many services and afterschool programs. The school gives admissions preference to students in temporary housing and students who have been in foster care or received preventive services. Its location at the Door makes it a good option for some LGBTQ+ students.

[New Visions for Public Schools](#) runs a network of district and charter high schools. New Visions schools are data-driven and have strong graduation rates, making them a solid option to explore for many students.

If you are interested in learning more about charter schools in your student's area, visit the [NYC Charter School Center's website](#).

V. 8TH GRADE HIGH SCHOOL APPLICATION CHECKLIST

STUDENT NAME: _____

| WHEN | WHAT | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
|---------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| JULY | Identify all rising 8th graders at your agency who will need to complete a high school application, including students who may be repeating 8th grade and students who are away at residential placements. Mail or e-mail the letter to parents/foster parents welcoming them to the high school application process. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Make sure all your 8th graders are in Care4 and add the goal " Help All 8th Graders with High School Selection Process " for the students on your list. TIP: You can e-mail Nadine the list and ask her to please add the goal for you! | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | | |
| JULY – AUGUST | Call the foster parents of every 8th grader on your list. The goal of the call is to introduce yourself (if you haven't already), let them know that you will be providing support around the HS selection process, and set up your first meeting with them and the student. See page 16 for guidance and some sample scripts if you don't know what to say. If you experience resistance or need support, set up a TA session with your relationship manager. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| AUGUST – SEPTEMBER | Start meeting with 8th graders (and their parents or foster parents, if they want to be involved). The purpose of these meetings is to learn about the student's academic and extracurricular interests, geographic preferences, and to explain the importance of getting into schools that are safe and where students can graduate. See tips on pages 7 and 8 on what factors to consider | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| SEPTEMBER – OCTOBER | Start reaching out to guidance counselors to let them know you will be assisting with the process. This can help with any communication issues that might come up in the future. Help students set up their online MySchools account. Check to make sure the information on their application is correct, especially the contact info and mailing address. TIP: Save the student's login information. You will need this to access their school offer letter and monitor their position on waitlists in the spring. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Register in MySchools for the Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT), if the student will be taking the exam. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| OCTOBER – NOVEMBER | Make a draft list of high schools for every 8th grader using the template on page 15 of this guide (or in Care4). Try not to include any high schools with a graduation rate below 90%, unless there is a strong reason why that school is a better fit for the student. Note any schools that require an interview, essay, etc. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Sign up for a TA session to review your draft lists and ask any questions about a particular student. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Attend virtual school events or in-person tours with students to learn more about different schools. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Make sure students interested in arts high schools record or sign up for an audition/complete their portfolio. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| NOV – DEC | Ensure student takes the SHSAT (if applying to Specialized High Schools). | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| DECEMBER | APPLICATIONS ARE DUE! Finish all high school lists and complete applications in MySchools . Ensure that there are NO schools with low graduation rates on that list, unless for a specific reason! | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Enter the final list of 12 schools that the student applied to into Care4. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | If you are helping students apply to arts high schools, make sure they complete their auditions and confirm receipt. Ensure students complete any additional requirements for screened high schools, if applicable. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| SPRING | Apply to Charter Schools (typically by April 1) for interested students. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | STUDENTS WILL RECEIVE A HIGH SCHOOL OFFER! Make sure to record what school they are going to into Care4, including the school's DBN, and then close out the goal. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Monitor students' positions on waitlists. Respond to any waitlist offers right away. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | If the student applied to Specialized High Schools, they may get two school offers, and must choose between the two. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

8TH GRADE HIGH SCHOOL RANKING WORKSHEET

STUDENT NAME: _____

| | SCHOOL NAME / PROGRAM NAME | ADMISSIONS METHOD | LENGTH OF COMMUTE (MINUTES) | SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE | % OF STUDENTS FEEL SAFE IN SCHOOL |
|-----|----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. | | | | % | % |
| 2. | | | | % | % |
| 3. | | | | % | % |
| 4. | | | | % | % |
| 5. | | | | % | % |
| 6. | | | | % | % |
| 7. | | | | % | % |
| 8. | | | | % | % |
| 9. | | | | % | % |
| 10. | | | | % | % |
| 11. | | | | % | % |
| 12. | | | | % | % |

VI. TIPS ON HOW TO MAKE THAT FIRST CALL TO THE FOSTER PARENT

The very first step in helping 8th graders get into quality high schools is **to make sure to call the foster parents to set up the first meeting with the student.**

The purpose is to introduce yourself, let them know that you will be providing support around the HS selection process, and set up your first meeting with them/the student. This first call should happen over the summer, and your first meeting should take place soon after.

MAKING THESE CALLS IS THE FIRST STEP AND DOING IT EARLY WILL HELP YOU STAY ON TRACK WITH THE HIGH SCHOOL SELECTION PROCESS! It is easy to get stuck on how best to introduce yourself, so we developed some sample language/scripts. We want you to feel comfortable having this first important conversation, so please reach out if you would like additional TA support - we can practice together! We also provided some tips below if you experience resistance.

SAMPLE LANGUAGE/SCRIPT

Feel free to tweak this to your style! The important thing is to be clear, concise, warm, and supportive.

I'm [YOUR NAME], the Middle School Specialist from [YOUR AGENCY'S NAME] I am part of the [FAIR FUTURES] program, which helps students succeed in school and achieve their goals. I am here to support you and [THE STUDENT'S NAME] with any educational or social-emotional needs [HE/SHE/THEY] have. So please feel free to reach out if you need any support, I'm here to listen and help!

I'm also calling to set up a meeting with you and your 8th grader soon so we can help [HIM/HER/THEY] get into a great high school! ... I know the DOE's High School selection process is pretty crazy/complicated, but I am here to help them get into a school where they can succeed.

Is there a good day/time for you and [STUDENT] to meet next week? ... I would love to hear about the students interests and geographic preferences, so we can find some great schools that match your needs.

[CONTINUED]

If the foster parent says that they want them to go into their local school and don't need help, here is some additional language:

I hear you. The [STUDENT NAME]'S commute time is definitely an important factor. I can help you find a school that is not too far away, where the student will also be safe and get the supports they need to graduate.

And sometimes it helps to pull out statistics:

The reason why we want to provide **1:1 support** to [STUDENT NAME] with this process is because we know that **50% of high school students in foster care are held back in 9th grade**, and **less than half go on to graduate**.

Without support in the admissions process, students in foster care often get stuck at the City's (worst/lowest-performing) high schools - and we believe that if we can connect our students to great high schools, we can give them a much better chance to graduate. I am here to help!

If the foster parent says that the middle school is helping with the application, you could say:

That's great! The more people helping, the better. School guidance counselors often have really large caseloads, like hundreds of students, so I can offer more personalized assistance to (the student) on top of what they are getting at school. I'll be sure to work with you and the school counselor so we're all on the same page.

VII. STUDENT INTEREST ASSESSMENT

This is one tool you can use with 8th graders to help assess their high school interests. This can help with narrowing down schools. After doing this exercise, you can help them find schools that meet their needs/interests that are also high performing and safe.

STUDENT NAME: _____

DATE: _____

HIGH SCHOOL SELECTION QUESTIONNAIRE

Please circle the answers that fit you best.

1. Which of the following subjects are you interested in? Choose as many as you'd like.

| | | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| Animal science | Architecture | Business | Communications |
| Computer Science | Technology | Cosmetology | Culinary Arts |
| Engineering | Environmental Science | Film/Video | Health Professional |
| Hospital Professions | Hospitality, Travel, & Tourism | Humanities & Interdisciplinary | |
| JROTC | Law & Government | Performing Arts | Visual Arts |
| Project-Based Learning | Science & Math | Teaching | Other: _____ |

2. What size school would you prefer?

| | | | |
|-------|--------|-------|--------------|
| Small | Medium | Large | I'm not sure |
|-------|--------|-------|--------------|

3. How do you learn best?

| | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| By doing activities (hands-on) | By listening to someone explain it |
| By reading about it | By discussing it with my classmates |

4. Which of the following sports are you interested in? Choose as many as you'd like.

| | | | |
|---------------|------------|---------------|--------------|
| Basketball | Bowling | Cross County | Fencing |
| Flag Football | Golf | Gymnastics | Handball |
| Indoor Track | Lacrosse | Outdoor Track | Rugby |
| Soccer | Softball | Swimming | Table Tennis |
| Tennis | Volleyball | Wrestling | Other: _____ |

5. List three things you like to do after school:

6. How long of a commute do you think you could handle?

15-minute commute 30-minute commute 45-minute or more

7. Where would you like to attend high school? Choose as many as you'd like.

| | | |
|--------|---------------|-----------|
| Bronx | Brooklyn | Manhattan |
| Queens | Staten Island | |

8. What are your goals for after high school?

Going to college Going to a vocational school Getting a job Joining the military

I'm not sure Other: _____

9. Would you like to take the Specialized High School Exam?

Yes No