



## **City School District of Albany**

*A Q&A about the current status and proposed direction  
for Prekindergarten programming in the City School District of Albany*

### **1. How many Prekindergarten students does the district serve?**

There are currently 591 Prekindergarten seats for the 2009-10 school year. This is a marked increase from the 2002-03 school year, when 350 students attended Prekindergarten.

### **2. Will there be enough seats for all families that request Prekindergarten for the 2010-11 school year?**

Yes.

### **3. Is Prekindergarten a mandated program?**

No.

### **4. Why does the district choose to offer Prekindergarten if it is not mandated?**

The district believes in and values the critical role that early childhood programs play in the academic, social and emotional development of all children. Research shows that establishing a solid foundation for young children is vital in shaping the critical first years of the school experience. The district's Prekindergarten programs are matched to New York State learning standards and help children build the skills, confidence and relationships they need to begin a lifetime of learning.

Prekindergarten is an important component in the district's efforts to raise achievement for all students in Albany. The community has supported this philosophy as the district has grown into a Capital Region leader in Prekindergarten programming this decade.

### **5. Are all Prekindergarten programs housed in school buildings?**

No. All 12 district elementary schools offer Prekindergarten, with 27 total classrooms serving up to 450 children. There also are 10 classrooms in community-based organizations (CBOs) serving up to 141 children. The district has oversight for all programs, whether they are housed in our schools or at CBOs.

### **6. What is the class size for the district's Prekindergarten classes?**

The district caps Prekindergarten classes at 18 students. Some of the CBOs have lower classroom caps (*see the chart below*).

### **7. What is the age requirement for a Prekindergarten student?**

Children must be **4 years of age by December 1** of a given year in order to register for Prekindergarten. For example, a current Prekindergarten student must have turned 4 before December 1, 2009.

**8. What is the breakdown of available Prekindergarten seats per site?**

School-based programs		Community-based organizations	
Elementary school	Number of seats/classrooms	Location	Number of seats/classrooms
Giffen	72 seats (four classrooms)	Head Start (three locations)	72 seats (five total classrooms)
Arbor Hill	54 seats (three classrooms)	Boys and Girls Club	32 seats (two classrooms)
TOAST, ASH, New Scotland, Eagle Point, North Albany Academy, Delaware Community School (DCS/Dual Language), Pine Hills	36 seats in each school (two classrooms)	Arbor Park Child Care Center	16 seats (one classroom)
Montessori Magnet School	36 seats (four PK-K classrooms, with nine PK and nine K students in each)	Children's Corner Day Care Center	12 seats (one classroom)
Schuyler Achievement Academy	18 seats (one classroom)	Nursery School at The College of Saint Rose	Nine seats (one classroom)
Sheridan Preparatory Academy	18 seats (one classroom)		

**9. Are there any plans for expansion for the 2010-2011 school year?**

Yes. Schuyler Achievement Academy and Sheridan Preparatory Academy each will add one classroom, giving both schools 36 Prekindergarten seats in two classrooms.

**10. What is the cost of Prekindergarten programming?**

The district's Prekindergarten programs cost \$3,943,607. Grant funding totals \$2,221,107. The district's general fund covers \$1,722,500.

**12. Are all Prekindergarten programs free?**

No. There is a fee for students attending Children's Corner Day Care Center, The College of St. Rose and Arbor Park Child Care. All other programs are free.

**13. Is transportation mandated or provided by the district?**

Transportation is not mandated by regulation for any program. Currently, only magnet school Prekindergarten students are transported to school.

**14. How are Prekindergarten students currently enrolled in non-magnet schools or CBOs?**

The district has enrolled all non-magnet Prekindergarten students at Central Registration in Lincoln Park beginning on a specified date in the spring. Families have registered their children on a first-come, first-served basis.

If the family’s neighborhood school already has reached capacity when a parent attempts to register a child for Prekindergarten, the parent is given the option of all other sites that have openings. The child also is “wait-listed” for a seat in the neighborhood school in the event that a seat becomes available.

If a parent requests a program other than the neighborhood school, parents are registered in the neighborhood school and put on a waiting list for the non-neighborhood school of choice. If a seat is available in the non-neighborhood school at the beginning of the school year, parents are given the opportunity to enroll in the requested school. This is generally a rare request; seat availability is rarer.

For the Dual Language Program at Delaware Community School (one classroom, 18 total seats), there must be a 50/50 balance of native English-speaking and native Spanish-speaking children in the program – nine English speakers and nine Spanish speakers. New native Spanish entrants are tested to ensure this balance in the two-way immersion program.

**15. How are Prekindergarten students currently enrolled in magnet schools?**

Prekindergarten seats in the district’s three magnet elementary schools traditionally have been filled through the annual magnet lottery, which is conducted in the late winter or early spring. Parents indicate on the application their first, second and third choices. Students with an older sibling already enrolled in a magnet school are given preference in that school, as are students who live in each magnet school’s neighborhood zone (magnet schools have a half-mile zone, compared to the 1.5-mile zone for the district’s nine neighborhood elementary schools).

Families of students selected in the magnet lottery receive admissions letters specifying a period of time (up to three weeks) to confirm acceptance of the seat by bringing the admissions letter, along with required documentation, to Central Registration. Children whose names are not pulled in the lottery are wait-listed for anticipated vacancies in any magnet program and come to Central Registration to enroll in a non-magnet school or CBO for the Prekindergarten year.

**16. Why is the district changing these processes?**

In an April 2009 audit of the district’s Prekindergarten program, the State Education Department cited the district for non-compliance in the area of random selection. Random selection is defined as opportunity and access for all families to enroll in Prekindergarten programs in a fair and equitable manner. First-come, first-served enrollment does not meet this standard.

The State Education Department subsequently informed the district that it must implement a random-selection (lottery) process for Prekindergarten. The State Education Department informed the district that it must conduct one lottery for all Prekindergarten seats, thus removing Prekindergarten from the general magnet lottery.

Failure to implement the required action will result in the disapproval of the district's Prekindergarten application and proposed budget for the 2010-11 school year.

**17. Will families have different options for Prekindergarten enrollment because of this change?**

This is one of the goals of parent meetings being conducted in December regarding the planned changes in Prekindergarten enrollment. Should the district continue to offer sibling and neighborhood preference for Prekindergarten enrollment? Should families be able to choose a non-magnet school other than their neighborhood school?

Feedback on these questions will be welcome and will help inform the district's recommendation to the Board of Education, which is expected to make a final decision on details of the Prekindergarten lottery no later than its February 4 meeting.

**18. Who will conduct the lottery?**

Joseph White Associates will conduct the lottery for K-6 seats in all three magnet schools and a **separate lottery** for all Prekindergarten seats. Joseph White has conducted the district's magnet lottery since its inception.

**19. How will parents enter the Prekindergarten lottery?**

Families will have from March 1 until March 31 at 3 p.m. to complete an application for the Prekindergarten lottery. All students with fully completed applications by the deadline will be entered into the lottery. The magnet lottery (K-6) and the Prekindergarten lottery will be held on the same day, **Friday, April 16**, at a school location to be determined. Directions for hand-delivering or mailing applications will be forthcoming in a wide variety of communications from the district.

**20. How will parents be notified of Prekindergarten placement?**

Parents are welcome to but need not attend the Prekindergarten lottery. Families will receive a letter in the mail with notification that the child has been selected for a seat in a specific classroom for the 2010-11 school year. Instructions will be provided to families as to how and when to bring their necessary paperwork to Central Registration to confirm acceptance into the school or program within a short window of time (TBD). In alignment with K-6 magnet notification, that timeframe will be approximately three weeks.

**Note:** Families who do not register in the specified time period will lose their Prekindergarten seat to the next child on the list. Every effort will be made to contact the family in order to respect the deadline for acceptance. If a family misses a deadline and comes to Central Registration after the acceptance period has elapsed, the parent will be offered all available seats in all programs, either at the neighborhood school or at another site with availability.

**21. What happens for families that miss the March 31 lottery deadline?**

After the acceptance period is complete for students selected in the Prekindergarten lottery, families will be welcome to come to Central Registration to enroll their children in Prekindergarten for the coming school year. There is a rolling admission process that continues throughout the school year.

**22. What is the district's protocol for Kindergarten enrollment?**

If a child attends a magnet school for Prekindergarten, the family has the option of keeping the child in that school Kindergarten and all subsequent elementary years served by that school.

If the child attends the Dual Language Program for Prekindergarten, the family also has the option of keeping the child in that program through fifth grade (the final year for all students attending Delaware Community School).

If the child attends the neighborhood school for Prekindergarten, the family has the option of keeping that child in that school for Kindergarten, applying for a Kindergarten seat in one of the magnet schools or applying for open enrollment to another neighborhood school depending on seat availability.

If the child attends Prekindergarten in a community-based program or any non-district school or program, the family can apply to the magnet lottery for Kindergarten, register at Central Registration in the spring for a seat in the child's neighborhood school or apply for open enrollment in another neighborhood school depending on seat availability.

**23. Will the district's protocol for Kindergarten enrollment change with the Prekindergarten lottery?**

As with questions regarding possible changes to the choice options for Prekindergarten, this also is a question on which the district is keenly interested in receiving parent feedback. For example, should students attending Prekindergarten in a non-magnet school other than their neighborhood school be able to choose that school for the remainder of the elementary years?

Input received during the parent meetings in December will inform the district's recommendation to the Board of Education, which is expected to make a final decision on the Prekindergarten enrollment process by its February 4 meeting.

**24. What is open enrollment?**

Open enrollment is a school-choice option through which parents can enroll their children in a school other than their neighborhood school. It applies to non-magnet schools only.

The district determines the schools and grade levels where there may be anticipated seat openings for the following school year. A date is established by which families must complete and file an application for an available seat in a selected school.

For more information about open enrollment, contact Central Registration at (518) 462-7207.