

Glossary of Terms for New York City Public and Independent Schools

(Reference List: *P* = Public; *I* = Independent; *SN* = Special Needs; *R* = Religious; *A* = All)

Age/Birthday Cut-off (A): Minimum age at which a child is eligible to enter school. The generally used cut-off age, nationwide, for a child entering **Kindergarten** is 5 years old. The cut-off date for turning 5 years old can differ between states and among types of schools.

- For **public schools** in New York City, the child must turn 5 by December 31st of the entering **Kindergarten** school year.
- For **independent schools** in New York City, the child must turn 5 by September 1st of the entering **Kindergarten** school year, though some use an earlier cut-off date.
- **Parochial schools** and some international schools tend to use the public school cut-off guidelines, with some flexibility.
- The School at Columbia follows the age eligibility guidelines as the New York City **public schools**.

Afterschool Program (A): Activities such as sports, art, and music that are provided, usually through the school, to children after school, generally between 3:00 - 6:30 p.m. These supervised programs:

- range in fees and hours
- take place either in school or offsite
- often offer bus transportation for offsite activities, if needed.



Bilingual Education (P): Approach to educating students whose home language is not English.

- Students are taught academic subjects in their home language and also take **English as a Second Language (ESL)** classes.
- Not all schools offer bilingual classes.
- **Public schools** are required to form such classes when there are 15 or more students with the same home language in two contiguous grades.

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Catchment Zone (P): A geographic area in which a neighborhood school, usually an **elementary school**, is assigned for all students who live within that area as determined by the student's home address.

- Each **district** sets the Catchment Zone's boundaries.
- To find out your "Zone" or "Catchment", call 311 and give them your address or go to the New York City public school zone finder at <http://maps.nycboe.net/index.asp>.

Charter School (P): Autonomous public schools that operate based on five-year performance contracts or "charters."

- The schools operate independently of the local district office, often developing their own curricula.
- The students must meet academic performance goals and state standards as evidence in standardized tests.
- Though funded by tax dollars, Charter Schools do not receive money for facilities; accordingly many Charter Schools share space with traditional **public schools**.
- Most Charter Schools in Manhattan are located in Central Harlem and they provide traditional environments with uniforms required to be worn by students and an extended school day.
- Charter Schools are required to admit New York City students citywide by **lottery**, with preference given to students who live in the district of the school.

Collaborative Team Teaching (CTT) (P, SN): Teaching method used in classes where students with **special needs** and general education students learn alongside each other. Two teachers, one trained in **special education**, work as a team in the classroom.

Committee on Special Education (CSE)(P, SN): The CSE assists public and private school students suspected of needing **special education** services by referring them for evaluations.

Compulsory School Attendance Age (A): Children in New York City between the ages of six and 17 are required to attend an educational or instructional program in a school or at home.

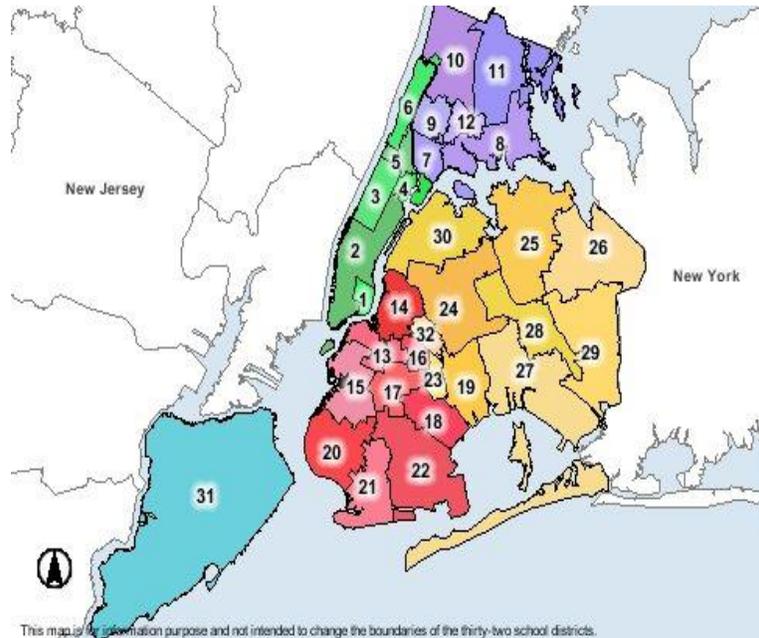
Department of Education (DOE)(P): Branch of city government that determines policy for and oversees the vast New York City **public school** system. The DOE is responsible for the education of 1.1 million students in 1,500 schools. Most of the interaction for parents of **elementary school** students is at the school or **district** level.

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Distance Learning (*I*): The process by which technology is used for education so that the student does not have to be in the physical place where the teaching is taking place. Access to the course materials and instructor is gained through technology such as the Internet, interactive videoconferencing and satellite.

District (*P*): One of 32 groupings of New York City public schools. Manhattan contains Districts 1-6. Columbia University's Morningside campus is contained in Districts 3 and 5; Columbia University's Medical Center campus is located in District 6.



District 75 (*P*): A citywide special education designation that serves 20,000 severely disabled students and operates special programs and schools across the city.

Dual language (*P, I*): Programs in which students learn in two languages.

- Dual language immersion programs have classes in which half the students speak English as their home language and half speak another common home language.
- Classes are taught in each language on alternative days or weeks, and the children are expected to become fluent in both.
- Not all schools offer dual language immersion programs.
- Currently, the languages offered in New York City public and charter schools are Spanish, French, Chinese, Haitian-Creole, Hebrew, Korean, and Russian.
- These programs shouldn't be confused with bilingual or English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, designed to teach English to non-English speakers.

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Early Childhood Programs or Schools (Nursery Schools or Pre-Kindergarten Programs) (I): Education in a private center or school of young children between the toddler and **compulsory school** stages (ages 2/3-5/6).

- The focus is on learning through creative play, sensory experience, and social interaction.
- They offer a variety of early childhood learning philosophies, and often combine several schools of thought:
 - **Developmental:** The most common type of preschool philosophy in the United States, it emphasizes the physical, cognitive, emotional and social areas of a preschooler's development.
 - The classroom is set up with a hands-on approach and a mixture of both self-directed and teacher-directed activities.
 - Developmental classrooms are interactive environments with an informal tone.
 - **Montessori:** Developed by Dr. Maria Montessori, it emphasizes the individual child's initiative and independence.
 - Special materials called "manipulatives" are used in the classroom to foster sensory awareness.
 - Children in mixed-age classrooms progress through an orderly series of structured activities at their own pace, taking an active role in their education and learning from each other.
 - **Progressive:** Progressive preschools are sometimes known as the "Bank Street Approach", named after the Bank Street College of Education. Child-centered play and social interaction are emphasized, and creative exploration is encouraged. Experiential learning is the focus of a progressive environment, with the teacher as facilitator and the children's interests as the basis for the curriculum.
 - **Reggio-Emilia:** Named for the region in Italy where it was started, it combines characteristics of developmental and Montessori programs with an emphasis on creativity and artistic expression and a conscious use of color and light in the classroom.
 - Children's play and projects are documented in photographs and records of their own words.
 - Teachers and parents use these to follow each student's progress and help children to consider and revisit their work as meaningful.

Early Intervention (A): Free evaluation and services available for very young children birth to age three who have developmental or physical problems such as cognitive, physical, communication, social/emotional and or adaptive delays.

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Elementary School (A): A school that generally serves students from **Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten** or Grade 1 through Grade 5.

English as a Second Language (ESL) (P): Program in which students – for one to three periods a day – learn to speak, read and write English from a trained teacher, who might or might not speak the child’s home language.

- Students are taught completely in English.
- The student’s grade level and proficiency in English determine how many ESL periods a student receives each day.
- The student “English Language Learner” (ELL) attends regular courses taught in English the rest of the day.

Financial Aid (I, R): Financial assistance from a tuition-based school that is not a loan and will not have to be paid back.

- Schools base their decision on information the family provides about income and expenses.
- Financial aid can cover some portion of the tuition, or in rare cases, nearly all.
- Schools often have their own financial aid forms and deadlines, so you should inquire at each school.

General Education (P): Inclusive educational services presented with standard teaching methods and without additional supports. The structure of such a school or program is such that all children learn together without entrance testing or supplemental services as with **Gifted and Talented** or **Special Education** programs.

Gifted and Talented (G&T)(P): School or program available in some schools for students determined to be “exceptional” by free tests administered by the **DOE**.

- Students are selected to enter **Kindergarten** through Grade 2 G&T classes based on the results of two tests, the Otis-Lennon School Ability Test (OLSAT) and the Bracken School Readiness Assessment (BSRA).
- The OLSAT, which includes both verbal and non-verbal items, is administered by a trained teacher.
- The BSRA tests a child's knowledge of colors, letters, numbers/counting, sizes, comparisons, and shapes.
- Some gifted programs are open to students who live outside the program’s school **zone** or **district**.
- G&T programs often teach material that is accelerated above the student’s grade level.
- Hunter College Elementary School, a free G&T public school run by Hunter College separate from the **DOE**, limits admission to Manhattan students entering **Kindergarten** only and requires the fee-based Stanford-Binet test.

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High School (A): A school that generally serves students in Grade 9 through Grade 12.

- **Screened/Selective:** A public **high school** admissions method under which students who apply are ranked by a school based on students' academic record, standardized test scores, and attendance. There might be other items that schools use to screen applicants such as an interview, essay or test. Some **middle schools** might also have screened or selective admission methods.

Home Schooling (P): Parents have the right to educate their children at home even after the age of six (the start of compulsory education in New York State).

- Parents must comply with state regulations which include giving timely notice of the parents' intention to education the child at home.
- Parents must file an instructional plan known as an "Individualized Home Instruction Plan" or (IHIP) and must regularly submit assessment reports.

Inclusion or Mainstreaming (P): The practice of placing students with disabilities or **special needs** in classrooms where they are integrated with other students.

Individualized Education Plan (IEP) (A): A document that describes the student's **special needs** for students in need of **special education** services.

- The IEP determines the services, modifications, and aids to be provided to the child.
- The IEP also includes the student's present level of educational performance and a list of measurable annual learning and achievement goals for the student.

Independent School (I): a private school run by a board of directors and funded by tuition charges, gift donations, or endowments.

- The independent school might have a religious affiliation, but is not governed by a religious organization as is a **parochial school**.
- In New York City, many of the Independent Schools are members of a non-profit organization called the Independent Schools Admissions Association of Greater New York (ISAAGNY). ISAAGNY sets guidelines for its **early childhood** and **ongoing schools** on application and admission in order to clarify the process of applying to Independent Schools.

Independent School Admissions Decisions, Deadlines, Process and Testing (I):

- **Admissions Decision:** The response received after submitting an independent school application for your child can fall into the categories of accept, waitlist, or deny.

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- **Accept:** The school has admitted your child for the coming year and is awaiting your timely decision to confirm enrollment.
 - **Waitlist:** A space might become available and the school will consider your child for such a space.
 - **Deny:** The school has not offered your child a place, nor is your child on the waitlist.
- **Admissions Deadlines:** The timeline for application and notification of a school's decision, as determined in the New York City area by ISAAGNY deadlines.
 - **Application:** Applications are generally available for you to fill out in the fall of the year preceding enrollment. It is essential that the applicant adhere to the application deadline at each school when they apply.
 - **Notification from School:** ISAAGNY schools follow the same dates for notification.
 - **Early Notification:** In order to promote a sense of community, independent schools have the option to offer siblings and legacies applying for 2, 3 and 4 year old programs or for Kindergarten or Grade 1 an earlier notification of their decision. Parents should ask each school to clarify how it defines a legacy.
 - **Response:** ISAAGNY schools follow the same parent reply deadlines. Parents must adhere to the deadline or risk losing the space to a family on the waitlist.
 - **Admission Interviews and Meetings:** Appointments set for families to meet with school personnel as part of the admission process.
 - **Child Playgroup:** The playgroup is often used instead of an interview for younger applicants. The size of the group varies from school to school, as will the policy for separating you from your child at the school visit. Call the admissions office to find out what will be expected of you and of your child at this time.
 - **Child Visit:** Children might be asked to meet one on one with an admissions officer, teacher, or school administrator. This process varies from school to school. If you have questions about this process speak with the admissions office to find out what will be expected of the applicant at this time.
 - **Parent Interview (Parent Meeting):** Schools might require a parent interview or meeting as a part of the admissions process. You should check with each school you apply to about this step. If you are a two-parent family, be sure to ask if they require or simply prefer that both parents attend this meeting.

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- **ERB Testing:** In order to protect children from multiple administration of similar tests and to provide consistency in test reporting, ISAAGNY has contracted with a testing agency, the Educational Records Bureau (ERB), a not-for-profit organization. Most schools will require testing from ERB for admission. Younger students will take the Early Childhood Admissions Assessment (ECEE), while students applying for Middle School and High School will take the Independent Schools Entrance Exam (ISEE). For more information on ERB's testing services, visit <http://www.erbtest.org/>. There is a fee for this test.

International Baccalaureate (IB) (*I,P*) : An internationally recognized primary and secondary educational curriculum offered in almost 8,000 public and private schools in 138 countries for students aged 3-19. The IB program of study, culminating in the achievement of the IB diploma, offers an interdisciplinary approach to learning with a focus on critical thinking, global inquiry, and integrated themes and subject areas.



Kindergarten (*A*): Name for the traditional entry grade for elementary school students, though mandatory education in New York City does not begin until 1st grade. To be eligible for Kindergarten, a child must turn five by 12/31 of the year of entry for public school, and usually by 9/1 for independent school.

Lottery: Method to ensure random selection of students for school admission. Charter schools are required to pick students by lottery; some other schools choose to use it.

Middle School (*A*): A school that generally serves students in Grades 6 through 8.

Ongoing School (*I*): An educational institution that offers more than preschool programs, although it might offer such programs in addition to its other grades.

- Most ongoing schools start in Kindergarten and continue at least through grade 5.
- Other typical ending points are 8th and 12th grades.

Parent Coordinator (*P*): Full-time employee, required at every public school, to handle parent outreach, encourage development of parent organizations, address parent concerns, and make the school parent-friendly. Parent coordinators work on-site and are hired by the principal.

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Parent-Teacher Conferences (A): Brief meetings between parents or family members and the child's teacher scheduled for the fall and spring at which parents learn of their child's progress in school. Sometimes children are asked to attend the meetings as well.

Parochial School (R): A private religious school run by a church or parish and administered by the local Catholic Archdiocese. A parochial school requires tuition, but the fees are more nominal than those of a private **independent school**.

Private School: Tuition-based school administered independently of a governmental agency, thus retaining the right to select their students and charge fees. Private schools encompass both **independent** and **parochial** schools.

Progressive Schools (A): A term originally applied to schools that followed the philosophy of the Progressive movement in early 20th America.

- A term now used to describe schools that stress "child-centered" (rather than "teacher-centered" or "**traditional**") learning.
- Progressive educators believe that children learn best through experience and hands-on projects, and that lessons should be based on a child's own interests.
- Progressive educators also believe that it is more important to learn to gather and interpret information than to memorize facts.
- A progressive classroom often has tables and chairs, or rugs and bean-bag chairs, rather than desks in rows.
- Children work individually or in small groups, rather than listen primarily to lessons offered by the teacher at the front of the room.

Public School (P): Free Pre-K through Grade 12 education funded by tax revenue and administered by a governmental agency.

- The New York City Department of Education (**DOE**) administers all public schools within the 5 boroughs, except Hunter College Elementary and High School, which is administered by Hunter College, a public institution of higher learning in the City University of New York system.

Primary Tuition Scholarship (PTS) (I, R): Columbia benefit for full-time salaried Officers of Administration, Instruction, the Libraries, or Research, or members of the United Doctors Association.

- The PTS pays between 10% and 35% of your child's tuition in Grades K–8 at a New York City **private school**, depending on eligible family income.
- Families can receive both **Financial Aid** and the PTS benefit to assist them in affording a tuition-based education.
- Please contact the Columbia Human Resources Benefits office for more information and to determine eligibility.

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Selective/Specialized Schools(*P*): At the high school level, there are "selective schools" that use tests or other screening methods to choose their student body. Students may be chosen for their achievement level or specific talent. Selective schools and programs are often referred to as "screened" programs by the Department of Education.

The city's nine specialized high schools, established under New York State Law (2590 — Section G), are highly selective. Any 8th or 9th grade student living in the five boroughs may apply.

The eight high schools for which students must take an exam are:

- Stuyvesant High School (in Manhattan)
- Bronx High School of Science
- Brooklyn Technical High School
- Staten Island Tech
- Brooklyn Latin

There are also small specialized high schools located on CUNY campuses:

- High School of American Studies at Lehman College (in the Bronx)
- The High School of Mathematics, Science, and Engineering at City College (in Manhattan)
- The Queens High School for the Sciences (at York College)

These schools have one admissions test, given in October or November. Students who move to the city after the test is given may take it the following year in late August.

The specialized arts high school, Fiorello LaGuardia High School of Music and Art and Performing Arts, in Manhattan, requires an audition (in dance, voice, instrumental music, drama, technical theater or a portfolio in studio art) in November and December. Students who move to the city after the auditions are held may audition in the following year, usually in late August.

Some schools (those known as being "selective") have their own admissions criteria which might include an interview, essay or exam. Screened programs within some neighborhood high schools look at students' past achievement and attendance.

(Definition excerpted and modified from www.insideschools.org)

Special Education (*A*): A set of services determined by qualification through free evaluation and **IEP**. The services which children with disabilities have a right to receive in order to meet their individual needs can include:

- specially designed instruction,
- occupational or speech therapy,
- supplemental aids and supports.

Special Needs (*A*): Children who have developmental or physical problems such as cognitive, physical, communication, social/emotional and or adaptive delays, and might require special services or accommodations.

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Traditional Schools (teacher-centered) (A): Emphasis is on students' mastery of a body of knowledge and basic skills.

- Some traditional schools maintain strict behavior and/or dress codes.
- In traditional schools, teachers do most of the talking in rooms where desks are placed in rows, in contrast to student-centered or **progressive schools**.

Universal Pre-K (UPK) (P, I): Optional Pre-Kindergarten programs located in public schools, community centers, or daycare facilities.

- Half-day or full-day programs at **public schools** are free.
- UPK at community and daycare centers are partially subsidized (about two hours).
- UPK is eligible for students turning four by 12/31 of the school year of entry.

Unzoned (P): Schools that serve students from a whole **district** or even all boroughs.

- Unzoned schools accept children by special application or **lottery**.
- Unzoned schools are also referred to as “option”, “choice”, or “magnet” schools.