

## Frequently Asked Questions for Families Navigating DISD School Choices

January 2022

- 1 What types of schools can I choose from?
- 2 What are magnet, transformation, and innovation schools at DISD?
- 3 What school am I zoned for?
- 4 Can I attend any DISD neighborhood school? How does my child get into schools we are not zoned for?
- 5 Where can I find data on school performance?
- 6 What additional resources are available to help me make an informed decision on school options?
- 7 What non-academic factors might I consider in choosing a school, and how do I get information on them?
- 8 Who is eligible for free Pre-K3/ Pre-K4? What DISD schools offer tuition-based Pre-K4?
- 9 When are the deadlines to apply for kindergarten, Pre-K4, etc.?
- 10 How does DISD handle transportation for students attending non-neighborhood schools?
- 11 When can my child start school?
- 12 Who is my DISD trustee and how can I contact them?
- 13 What does a DISD trustee do?

### 1. What types of schools can I choose from?

Dallas ISD has over 100 schools and programs to choose from. The following chart summarizes the types of programs currently available to students. Options vary by grade level, and DISD frequently begins a new, non-neighborhood school with a limited number of grades and expands availability each year until the school is established.

|                                  | Pre-K – 8 <sup>th</sup> | 9 <sup>th</sup> – 12 <sup>th</sup> | Other                             |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Career Institutes                |                         | X                                  |                                   |
| Dual Language                    | X                       | X                                  |                                   |
| Early Learning                   |                         |                                    | Pre-K3 – Pre-K4                   |
| Hybrid & Virtual                 |                         |                                    | 3 <sup>rd</sup> – 9 <sup>th</sup> |
| International Baccalaureate      | X                       | X                                  |                                   |
| Magnet Schools                   | X                       | X                                  |                                   |
| Montessori Schools               | X                       |                                    |                                   |
| Neighborhood Schools             | X                       | X                                  |                                   |
| Personalized Learning            | X                       | X                                  |                                   |
| P-TECH and Early College Program |                         | X                                  |                                   |
| Project-Based Learning           |                         | X                                  |                                   |
| Single-Gender                    | X                       | X                                  |                                   |
| STEM/STEAM                       | X                       | X                                  |                                   |
| Talented and Gifted (TAG)        | X                       | X                                  |                                   |
| Transformation Schools           | X                       | X                                  |                                   |
| Visual and Performing Arts       | X                       | X                                  |                                   |

DISD Source: "Welcome to Choose Dallas ISD."  
<https://www.dallasisd.org/choosedallasisd>.

# Frequently Asked Questions for Families Navigating DISD School Choices

January 2022

## 2. What are magnet, transformation, and other schools at DISD? What is the difference between them?

Dallas ISD has neighborhood schools and choice schools. Students are zoned to a neighborhood school (elementary, middle, and high school) based on their home address. Some neighborhood schools are called innovation schools if they have been redesigned around a model such as Montessori or STEM. Choice schools are schools that have a particular focus or educational approach and lack a geographic requirement for admission. Choice schools include campuses and “school with a school” programs. They include magnet and transformation programs.

Magnet schools are campuses (or programs within a campus) require students to meet academic qualifications for admission. Academic qualifications include STAAR test results for students entering grade 2 and above, and an evaluation and parent/teacher feedback for students entering grades Pre-K3 through 1. (DISD administers magnet tests to out-of-district and private school students who will not have STAAR results on record.)

Elementary magnet schools in DISD include the following, with magnet options expanding significantly at the middle and high school levels:

|                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <b>Montessori</b>                 | George Bannerman Dealey Vanguard Academy (pk-8)<br>Harry Stone Montessori Academy (pk-8)   |
| <b>Performing and Visual Arts</b> | K. B. Polk for the Academically Talented and Gifted and Fine Arts Vanguard (grades 4-5)<br>Jesus Moroles Expressive Arts Vanguard (grades 4-8)   |
| <b>STEM &amp; STEAM</b>           | J.P. Starks Math, Science, & Technology Vanguard (grades 4-8)  |
| <b>Talented &amp; Gifted</b>      | Mark Twain School for the Talented & Gifted (grades K-5)<br>School for the Talented & Gifted in Pleasant Grove (grades 4-8)<br>Sudie L. Williams Talented & Gifted Academy (grades 4-8)<br>Trinity Heights Talented & Gifted (grades 1-8)<br>William B. Travis Talented & Gifted Vanguard (grades 4-8) |

*DISD Source: “2022-2023 Magnet Available Seats by Grade Level”*  
<https://www.dallasisd.org/Page/79554>.

A comprehensive summary of magnet assessment requirements is available at <https://www.dallasisd.org/Page/56903>.

The number of available seats for 2022-2023 at each magnet school, by grade level, is available at <https://www.dallasisd.org/Page/79554>.

Transformation schools—similar to magnet schools—have no attendance boundaries and offer a specific emphasis or model of instruction, based on national best practices. Unlike magnet schools, transformation schools have open enrollment: they do not have academic requirements for admission. Instead, students are randomly selected for admission. Transformation schools are brand-new Dallas ISD schools.

## Frequently Asked Questions for Families Navigating DISD School Choices

January 2022

Elementary transformation schools in DISD include the following:

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|------------------------------|--|
| <b>All-Boys</b>              | Solar Preparatory School for Boys (grades pre-K-4-8)   |
| <b>All-Girls</b>             | Solar Preparatory School for Girls (grades pre-K-4-8)  |
| <b>Exploratory Arts</b>      | Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Arts Academy (grades pre-K-4-6)   |
| <b>Hybrid</b>                | Dallas Hybrid Preparatory (grades 4-6)   |
| <b>Montessori</b>            | Downtown Montessori at Ida B. Wells Academy (grades pre-K-3)<br>Eduardo Mata Montessori (grades pre-K-3-8)<br>Montessori Academy at Onesimo Hernandez (grades pre-K-3-8)<br>Prestonwood Montessori at E.D. Walker (grades pre-K-3-2) |
| <b>Personalized Learning</b> | Personalized Learning Preparatory at Sam Houston (grades pre-K-3-5)  |
| <b>STEM</b>                  | West Dallas STEM School Program at Pinkston High (grades pre-K-8)  |

*DISD Source: "Explore Dallas ISD's Transformation Schools"*

<https://www.dallasisd.org/Page/57261>.

Answers to frequently asked questions about transformation schools, including application timeline, are available at <https://www.dallasisd.org/Page/57276>.

Innovation schools are redesigned neighborhood schools that have enhanced their programming around a model such as Montessori, STEM, or personalized learning. They are open to students living within their attendance boundary, as well as transfer applications from students living beyond the boundary, in keeping with DISD policy for neighborhood schools.

Elementary innovation schools in DISD include the following:

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <b>International Baccalaureate</b> | Arthur Kramer Elementary (grades pre-K-5)<br>Geneva Heights Elementary (grades pre-K-5)<br>John F. Peeler Elementary (grades pre-K-5)<br>Preston Hollow Elementary (grades pre-K-5)<br>William Lipscomb Elementary (grades pre-K-5)   |
| <b>Leadership</b>                  | Herbert Marcus Leadership Academy (grades pre-K-5)<br>Julius Dorsey Leadership Academy (grades pre-K-5)<br>L.O. Donald Elementary Leadership Academy (grades pre-K-5)<br>Martin Weiss Elementary School of Leadership (grades pre-K-5)  |
| <b>Montessori</b>                  | Lorenzo De Zavala Elementary (grades pre-K-5)   |
| <b>Personalized Learning</b>       | Arturo Salazar Elementary (grades pre-K-5)<br>Chapel Hill Preparatory (grades pre-K-5)<br>Dan D. Rogers Elementary (grades pre-K-5)<br>Felix G. Botello Elementary (grades pre-K-5)<br>Henry B. Gonzalez Elementary (grades pre-K-5)<br>Ignacio Zaragoza Elementary (grades pre-K-5)<br>Jack Lowe, Sr. Elementary (grades pre-K-5)<br>Leila P. Cowart Elementary (grades pre-K-5) |

## Frequently Asked Questions for Families Navigating DISD School Choices

January 2022

|                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
|                                     | Lenore Kirk Hall Personalized Learning Academy at Oak Cliff (grades pre-K-5)<br>Personalized Learning Academy at Highland Meadows (grades pre-K-5)<br>Thelma Elizabeth Page Richardson Elementary (grades pre-K-5)   |
| <b>STEM/STEAM</b>                   | Bishop Arts STEAM Academy (grades pre-K-5)<br>Eddie Bernice Johnson Leadership Academy (grades pre-K-5)<br>Frederick Douglass Elementary (grades pre-K-5)<br>Kleberg Elementary (grades pre-K-5)<br>Maria Moreno Elementary (grades pre-K-5)<br>Marsalis Elementary (grades pre-K-5)<br>Paul L. Dunbar Learning Center (grades pre-K-5)<br>Ronald E. McNair Elementary (grades pre-K-5)                      |
| <b>Developing Innovation Models</b> | James S. Hogg New Tech Center (grades pre-K-5) – <i>new tech</i><br>James Bowie Elementary (grades pre-K-5) – <i>global service learning</i><br>Sylvia Mendez CREW Leadership Academy (grades pre-K-5) – <i>expeditionary learning</i><br>Birdie Alexander Elementary (grades pre-K-5) – <i>visual and performing arts</i><br>John Neely Bryan Elementary School (grades pre-K-5) – <i>novel engineering</i> |

*DISD Source: "Explore Dallas ISD's Innovation Schools"*  
<https://www.dallasisd.org/Page/57262>.

### 3. What school am I zoned for?

DISD has an interactive school locator at <https://dallasisd.schoolmint.net/school-finder/> (English only). The school locator enables families to identify the neighborhood schools their home is assigned to, see nearby schools on a map of their neighborhood, and identify choice schools that may interest them.

It is suggested that families call the school they believe they are zoned for prior to enrollment.

### 4. Can I attend any DISD neighborhood school? How does my child get into schools we are not zoned for?

For a child to attend a neighborhood school—not a transformation or magnet school—other than the one they are zoned for, the family must submit a transfer application. This can be done at any school, a ONE center, or online, but the district is moving toward digital applications (to be completed at a ONE Center or online). Once the application is complete, it will be submitted to the transfer school's principal for approval or denial.

School principals are responsible for determining transfer student acceptance, so some campuses may accept many transfer applicants, and other accept few. Families can seek to meet with the principal of the school they wish to transfer to in order to discuss their child's needs if they feel strongly about their child's placement.

## Frequently Asked Questions for Families Navigating DISD School Choices

January 2022

Families may apply to transfer to a school other than the one they are zoned for between January-March preceding a new school year. The district specifies that transfers are generally granted:

- (1) to allow students to attend the nearest DISD school with available space that offers a course or program their assigned school does not have (e.g., dual language programs),
- (2) to account for family/personal circumstances, or
- (3) to leave an academically unacceptable school and attend a higher-performing school with available space.

Once students are admitted as a transfer student to a new campus, they need not apply in future years for that same campus. However, transfer students can lose their access to their transfer school if they have inadequate attendance or academic performance, or if the school no longer has capacity to accept transfer students.

For information and online application materials, visit <https://www.dallasisd.org/Page/56408>. The webpage will display whether the application window is currently open or closed.

### 5. Where can I find data on school performance?

Campus profile. DISD publishes school profiles for each academic year that detail demographics, academic progress, testing outcomes, and the result of staff and family surveys on the school's culture and environment. Current profiles are available at <https://www.dallasisd.org/Page/26856>.

Campus TEA accountability ratings. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) produces campus accountability profiles (as well as detailed results) based on student achievement and progress. Current (2021) and historical summaries are available at [https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/perfreport/account/acct\\_srch.html](https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/perfreport/account/acct_srch.html).

Campus climate survey. Twice a year, DISD surveys school employees about campus conditions, including campus culture, support for educators, and cleanliness. Many campuses make these available on their webpages.

### 6. What additional resources are available to help me make an informed decision on school options?

ONE Centers. DISD offers five "one stop shops" to assist families in navigating school selection, application, and enrollment. See a list of all locations at <https://www.dallasisd.org/Page/56411>, call (972) 925-5560, or email [choosedallasisd@dallasisd.org](mailto:choosedallasisd@dallasisd.org) for assistance.

"Your Choices" website. DISD developed the Your Choices website so families can locate and compare schools side-by-side. For more information, visit <https://www.dallasisd.org/yourchoices>.

## Frequently Asked Questions for Families Navigating DISD School Choices

January 2022

School choice fair. DISD hosts a massive annual school choice fair that exposes families to the extent of options (Pre-K-12) that are available within the district, with the opportunity to speak with school staff and submit applications on site in some cases. The fair is held annually in November or December, and took place online in 2021. A second fair is being held on Jan. 13.

School tours. All DISD schools offer tours to community members. Some schools offer them at scheduled times, and others schedule them upon request. Contact the schools of interest to you for details. The Texas School Guide offers a useful list of things to look for when visiting a campus: <https://texasschoolguide.org/understanding-schools/> and questions to ask: <http://live.tsg.gfolkdev.net/content/uploads/2017/09/Questions-to-Ask-When-Visiting-a-School.pdf>.

Parent action guide. Children at Risk produced a guide to help Dallas-area parents navigate the school system in 2018. It includes explanations of different types of schools (neighborhood, magnet, charter, private), how to assess school quality and select a school, and a listing of community organizations providing resources and educational supports to families, at <https://texasschoolguide.org/content/uploads/2018/11/Dallas-Parent-Action-Guide-18-19.pdf>. In addition, families can examine the “grades” schools received based on Children at Risk’s criteria for quality schools at <https://texasschoolguide.org/>.

### **7. What non-academic factors might I consider in choosing a school, and how do I get information on them?**

Each family will prioritize different factors when choosing a school. For each of the following examples, the best ways to collect information are calling and visiting the campuses you are interested in. Here are a few important considerations:

School environment. School environment is how students, teachers, and other school employees feel about the campus and classroom. It impacts the school’s culture and how comfortable and supported students may feel in their learning environment. Dallas ISD surveys employees of each campus twice a year on school environment (see question #5). School environment also includes campus security, code of conduct, and discipline procedures.

Special programs available during the day. Some schools offer activities during the school day, such as campus gardens, focus on music and arts, STEM (Science Technology Engineering & Math), or participation in Girl and Boy Scout troops through the school. Families may also wish to learn about how recess and PE are integrated within the campus.

After school care and extracurricular activities. Schools provide different locations, policies, and pricing for after school care and programming, including supervised play and care as well as sports and clubs.

## Frequently Asked Questions for Families Navigating DISD School Choices

January 2022

### 8. Who is eligible for free Pre-K3/Pre-K4? What DISD schools offer tuition-based PK4?

Free preschool. Preschool is free for children who meet any of the following:

- Are eligible for free or reduced lunch (income under \$49,025 for a family of 4)
- Participate in SNAP, Head Start, or other federally funded programs
- Do not speak English
- Are homeless
- Are dependent on an active duty member of the U.S. armed forces
- Are or have been in foster care

Scholarship preschool. Preschool is also free for children who meet any of the following:

- African American
- Native English speaker who is unable to speak or understand English
- Meets expanded income threshold (income under \$79,500 for a family of 4)

Tuition preschool. Students who do not meet criteria for free or scholarship tuition may register in tuition-based Pre-K programs for \$5,250 per year (the price may change year to year). DISD recently opened its Pre-K programs to all students on a first-come, first-served basis.

A current list of schools offering Pre-K3 and Pre-K4 is available at <https://www.dallasisd.org/Page/74641>. Note that school start and end times may vary slightly by campus.

For more information on applying for preschool with DISD (including required paperwork and important dates), visit <https://www.dallasisd.org/prek>.

### 9. When are the deadlines to apply for kindergarten, PK4, etc.?

Preschool. Preschool slots typically open in April of each year and are filled on a first-come, first-served basis. Families may visit any of the five ONE Centers for assistance locating the nearest options and enrolling (see questions #6 and #8).

Kindergarten onward. When applying to your neighborhood school and not applying to a specialized program within the school (e.g., dual language)—which may have advance application dates — you can enroll your child at any time at the school office. The district is also moving toward online enrollment forms for many schools. Some schools offer information sessions in early summer to guide families through the process, and timing varies by school.

If you are applying to a specialized program or a magnet or transformation school, you must submit a paper or online application and any required documentation (see question #2) by January 31, 2022.

## Frequently Asked Questions for Families Navigating DISD School Choices

January 2022

### 10. How does DISD handle transportation for students attending non-neighborhood schools?

DISD offers transportation for students (grades Pre-K-12) attending transformation and magnet schools who live more than two miles from the campus. For these students, DISD offers pickup and drop-off from the student's home campus. In order to be eligible for transportation from a home campus (and to be notified of the transportation schedule before the school year begins), students must include a pick-up site on their application. DISD does not offer transportation for transfer students attending neighborhood schools that are not magnet or transformation schools.

### 11. When can my child start school?

#### Preschool

To attend DISD preschool, children must be 3 or 4 years old by September 1. (See question #8 to learn about free and tuition-based public preschool options.)

#### Kindergarten

Children must be 5 years old by September 1 to begin kindergarten.

### 12. Who is my DISD trustee and how can I contact them?

Each DISD trustee represents a defined geographical area. Most Oak Cliff residents are represented by Ben Mackey (District 7, North and Central Oak Cliff) or Joyce Foreman (District 6, Southwest Dallas). Maps of the area each trustee represents are available at <https://www.dallasisd.org/domain/456>, and contact information is available at <https://www.dallasisd.org/domain/447>.

### 13. What does a DISD trustee do?

DISD trustees are responsible for overseeing district operations and ensuring that the community's youth are well-served and local public education is successful. They are responsible for defining the district's vision and goals and tracking progress toward those goals, setting district policies, hiring a superintendent, approving the annual budget, and working with community members to communicate the district's plan, as well as to listen to constituents. Many school board members have websites/Facebook pages for sharing updates, host and attend community meetings on educational issues, convene task forces to address actionable topics, and talk with parents, the media, and community organizations about local public education. In Texas, school board members cannot be financially compensated for their role.