

School Enrollment in Indianapolis: A Guide for Parents

Gone are the days of walking into your neighborhood school, filling out a few pieces of paper and receiving a packet of information to prepare you for your child's first day at a new school.

School enrollment in Indianapolis took a turn in 2017 with the arrival of Enroll Indy, a centralized system for school enrollment. Its mission is to match families with schools that fit the needs of their child, as well as provide equitable access to high-quality schools for all Indianapolis families.

Because Enroll Indy is a centralized enrollment system, it is advertised as “one-stop shopping” for finding the best school for your child. In reality, however, it is a complicated and confusing process that many parents struggle to understand (myself included, and I hold three degrees in education!).

Knowing my background in education, a few of my friends and neighbors (I live in Meridian Kessler) have asked for my help navigating the system. Based on my own personal experience, as well as the frequency of questions within my social network, I'm guessing there are many more parents out there who could use similar help. That is what lead me to create this informational guide.

This guide will walk you through each step of the process, beginning with understanding the school options available to you. You're probably familiar with the schools located near you, but perhaps you don't know what makes each of them unique. If you're anything like me, you've Googled, talked with friends and neighbors or crowd-sourced your questions on Facebook group pages. Unfortunately, you probably received conflicting answers or advice.

Every parent feels strongly that their child's school is the perfect school, and it is...for their child. One of the benefits of living in a city like Indianapolis is the vast array of educational options available to families. But, how do you go about finding the best fit for your child? That's where we'll begin.

Part 1: Understanding Your School Options

Most people have no idea what the difference is between a charter school, an innovation network school and a magnet school. Here's a breakdown of the school **TYPES** that are available in Indianapolis, along with a brief description of each:

1. **Charter school:** free, publicly-funded schools that operate independent of a school district, are authorized by, and held accountable to, either the Mayor's Office or the Indiana Charter School Board and are governed by their own school board. Charter schools follow most, if not all, of the policies and regulations set forth by the Indiana Department of Education, but they have a bit more autonomy in many aspects of how the school is run. Charter schools are public schools.
2. **IPS Choice school** (also referred to as a magnet school): free, publicly-funded schools that offer instruction in a specific area such as STEM (science, technology, engineering and math), IB (International Baccalaureate) or language immersion programs. These schools are part of the IPS district but often have some autonomy in various aspects of how the school is run.
3. **Innovation Network school:** free, public schools that are governed autonomously and are not part of the traditional IPS district. These schools have the freedom to make their own decisions but are held accountable by IPS for certain outcomes that vary from school to school. Some innovation network schools are also charter schools, meaning they are authorized by one of the city's charter authorizers.
4. **Neighborhood school:** free, public schools that are part of the traditional IPS district. Every child living within the district boundaries are guaranteed entrance to their neighborhood school for grades K-8. Each neighborhood school has its own boundaries which determine the students who are eligible to attend that school.
5. **Private school:** schools that are operated by private organizations or individuals and are often religious-based organizations. These schools do not take public funding and therefore charge tuition. Many, but not all, private schools take vouchers. Private schools are not part of Enroll Indy. Enrollment is done through the school.

6. **Virtual school:** schools that allow students to complete their work online from home. Some virtual schools are operated by traditional school districts while others operate independently.

Now that you know what types of schools are available to you, you will have to determine which ones your family is open to exploring further. Once that is decided, you can start narrowing down your options.

Part 2: Understanding Priorities

As you begin exploring school options more in depth, you will want to understand the different enrollment priorities for which you may be eligible. Enrollment priorities can increase the chance of getting your child into a particular school. Priorities are determined by the school or school district. Following is a list of **GEOGRAPHIC PRIORITIES**, along with a brief description of each:

1. **In District:** This means that applicants living within the IPS district boundaries will have preference over out-of-district applicants.
2. **In Zone:** This priority only applies to IPS Choice schools that have multiple campuses (example: Center for Inquiry schools) and means that applicants living within certain zones will have preference over those applicants who do not.
3. **Proximity:** This means that applicants who live within a certain proximity to the school will have preference over those applicants who do not.

Aside from geographic priorities, there are a few other **PRIORITIES** that you should be aware of. Not all of these apply to all schools.

1. Sibling Priority
2. Child of IPS Employee Priority
3. Children of Charter School Staff or Board Member Priority
4. Children of Butler University Staff Priority (ONLY applies to Butler Lab schools)
5. Affiliated Pre-K Program Priority (ONLY applies to charter schools)
6. IPS Loyal Applicant Priority (this one is important if you didn't get into your first choice school and want to transfer after spending a year at another IPS school)

Since sibling priority is a question that comes up quite frequently, I will address that more in depth. As of publication, sibling priority does still exist and applies to any applicant with a sibling (defined as living in the same household and/or sharing the same parent/guardian) who attends the school in a non-terminating grade. For example, a child with a sibling in 8th grade (the highest grade level offered at the school), would NOT receive sibling priority but a child with a sibling in 6th grade (not the highest grade level offered at the school) would receive sibling priority.

In addition to the different priorities, some schools have [eligibility criteria](#) that must be met in order to apply for that school. For instance, students must be tested and qualify as High Ability in both Math and English to be eligible to attend Sidener Gifted Academy. Both the Montessori and Spanish Immersion programs have eligibility criteria as well for students entering certain grade levels. These eligibility criteria are in place to ensure the success of students in a specific type of learning environment.

To determine which priorities apply to you, begin by locating your address on the IPS Proximity Zone map found [here](#). This will identify any school for which you live in the proximity zone and could apply with geographic priority.

If you live outside of the IPS district boundaries, you are still able to apply to schools within IPS. Just keep in mind that none of the geographic priorities will apply to out-of-district applicants.

Part 3: Finding the Right Fit

The beauty of school choice is that there are so many different models available for students. Speaking from firsthand experience as an educator and mother, I cannot stress enough the importance of researching your options and finding a school that is the right fit for YOUR child. Enroll Indy's [School Finder](#) is just one tool that you can use to gather information about schools and all the things each one offers. Take the time to research and visit the schools you think may be a good fit for your child. You may be surprised that what you originally thought was the best option actually isn't.

Once you have narrowed your options to a handful of schools, take the time to tour them. There is no better way to get a feel for the school and its teachers than by touring during a regular school day. Don't be afraid to enter classrooms and observe instruction. Your child will be spending the better part of each day for almost a decade inside the walls of a school. You need to feel comfortable there.

Most schools begin advertising tours in October and November, but a good school administrator will give tours to prospective parents at anytime throughout the year. Check the school's website or just give the school office a call to find out more information about upcoming tours.

Part 4: Knowing the Timeline

Keeping track of the dates that are part of the school enrollment process is half the battle. I've listed important dates below.

October 1	Kindergarten Birthday Cut-Off Date
October & November (ongoing)	School Tours & Open Houses
November 1 - January 31	Enroll Indy Round 1 Open
February 20	Round 1 Notifications Released
February 1 - April 30	Enroll Indy Round 2 Open
May 21	Round 2 Notifications Released

Remember, you can apply to schools anytime during the Round 1 or 2 enrollment windows.

Applying earlier in the enrollment window has no bearing on the match you will receive. All applications are considered together AFTER the window has closed.

*****Important Note Regarding Pre-K Enrollment*****

Beginning with the 2020-2021 school year (or the 2019-2020 enrollment rounds), you will apply for IPS Pre-K seats through Enroll Indy.

*****Important Note Regarding Kindergarten Enrollment*****

Beginning in the fall of 2020, children must turn 5 years old on or before October 1 to be eligible for kindergarten. This is a change to the legislation from prior years.

Part 5: Applying to Schools in Round 1

Once you have narrowed down your list of schools, you will need to create an account on the Enroll Indy [OneMatch](#) portal. Add your child/ren in as students so that you can apply to schools for them. If they're already in the system (this includes current IPS Pre-K students, as well as all K-12 students currently enrolled in an Enroll Indy participating school), you will be able to find their information to begin applying.

***If your student is in the system already, and you do NOT want to change schools, you do not need to do anything. They automatically keep their seat. Only add students who are new to the system (such as a sibling entering kindergarten) or those who want to switch schools.

Once all your students have been added to your account, you will need to provide basic information for each child for enrollment purposes (i.e. grade level, current school, etc.).

You are now ready to select schools. You are allowed to select up to 10 schools, **arranged in order of preference**. Only include schools you are willing to have your child attend. Just because you can select 10 schools doesn't mean you have to. Be sure to indicate if your child has a sibling that attends a particular school or if they are the child of a school employee. You will be prompted to do this for each school you select. Don't forget this step because this is how priorities are determined.

If you are applying for more than one child and you want them to attend the same school, be sure to turn on Family Match. Only turn on Family Match if keeping your children together at the same school is more important to you than being accepted into your first choice. For Family Match to work successfully, schools must be ranked in the EXACT same order for each child.

If you don't care if your children attend the same school or it's more important to you to get at least one of your children into your first choice school, turn Family Match off. If having your children at different schools for a year is doable for your family, you can always try to get your other child into your first choice school the next year and you would then have sibling priority working in your favor.

Once you have completed each of the steps outlined below, you are ready to submit your application. Applications may be edited at any time during the enrollment window.

OneMatch → Create Account → Add Students → Select Schools → Family Match

Part 6: Claiming a Seat

After the enrollment window closes, you will be notified by email and text message when your results are available. If your child received a match, you MUST go in to the Enroll Indy portal and claim or decline the seat within 30 days! If you do not receive a match or you choose to decline a seat, you can apply again to schools during Round 2 or during the late enrollment period.

Part 7: Applying to Schools in Round 2

If you do not receive a match or are unhappy with the match you receive in Round 1, you can reapply to schools during Round 2. If you received a match in Round 1, you should only reapply to schools that you want MORE than the one you were already matched with. This is because, if you receive a match after Round 2, you will lose your spot at the school you were matched with after Round 1.

For example, if you are matched with your 3rd choice school after Round 1, only reapply to your 1st and 2nd choice schools during Round 2. You will either be matched with one of those schools or you will not receive a match, in which case you will retain your spot at your 3rd choice school.

Keep in mind that if you do not receive a match or decline a seat during Round 2, there is a dead period during most of May. During this period, nobody can apply to any Enroll Indy school. You have to wait until the late enrollment period which begins in late May-early June (exact date is TBD, according to Enroll Indy's website).

Remaining seats for schools are made available during late enrollment on a first-come, first-served basis. These can be viewed on the [Enroll Indy website](#).

If you do not get a seat during any of the enrollment rounds, your child may attend their assigned IPS K-8 neighborhood school or you may look into private school or other district options. Students who do not receive a match may reapply the following year.

This is where the IPS Loyal Applicant priority may come into play. If your child spends a year at an IPS school that was NOT your first choice, and you choose to reapply to your first choice school the following year, you will be eligible for IPS Loyal Applicant priority. This will increase your child's chance of being matched with their first choice school in subsequent lottery years.

Part 8: Registering for School

Once you have claimed a seat, you still have work to do! Claiming a seat is NOT the same as registering with the school. Most schools will contact you once you have claimed a seat at their school (schools receive daily reports and notifications of enrollments). Many will send an email with a link to register via their school's Learning Management System (i.e. Powerschool, Harmony, Canvas, Blackboard, etc.). This is a crucial step! If you haven't filled out a bajillion forms and submitted your child's birth certificate, immunization records, etc., you probably missed the email and need to contact the school.

Most schools will follow up with you, if you've missed a step somewhere. Remember, they want to fill their seats just as badly as you want that seat!

Part 9: Enrolling in a School Mid-Year

If you've recently moved to Indianapolis or need to transfer schools in the middle of the year, you will need to check Enroll Indy's [Open Seat report](#) to see which schools have seats available at a particular grade level. These seats may be claimed through Enroll Indy's Family Resource Center or at the school. Additionally, students may enroll at their assigned IPS neighborhood school at any time.

I hope by reading this you have found some clarity in this process. Please feel free to reach out via email, if you have any questions.

Thank you,

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