What is a **'good school'** and how do you find one in Los Angeles?

The good news:
There are a lot of choices.

The bad news:
There are a lot of choices.

What you need is a **School Game Plan**.

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About this guide

LAist is an independent newsroom and NPR affiliate that provides Southern California with news and information on a variety of topics.

We've reported on education for years — and families tell us the process of choosing a school is bewildering, overwhelming and anxiety-driven.

In the Los Angeles Unified School District alone, there are more than 400 elementary schools, plus hundreds of specialized programs and dozens of charter schools.

LAist's **School Game Plan** is here to help. In this guide we'll cover:

- What education means to you and your family.
- School options, application processes and dates.
- What to consider as you're making your choice.
- Real parent experiences.

This workbook is focused on elementary and middle school choices in LAUSD, but a lot of the information is also relevant if you're looking for a high school or at another district.

Regardless of whether you decide to attend a school near your home or explore another option, we hope this information will help you feel more confident and eager to participate in your child's education.

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LAist

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School Game Plan works best with its online companion. Scan the QR code to access links, suggested resources and more support.

English
LAist.com/school

Español
LAist.com/escuela

Throughout the rest of this workbook you'll see other QR codes for additional resources.

Why can choosing a school feel so stressful?

It's not just choosing a school, it's choosing a school plus everything else, including economic anxiety. Children born today are less likely to outearn their parents than those born in 1940, according to Stanford researchers. That creates pressure to send children to the "right schools."

The "right school" will look different for every family. This workbook can't make that decision for you — but it can help equip you with information to navigate the available options.

Good to know: Parents' views of their own family's school experience are often positive — a national Gallup poll found nearly three-quarters say they are satisfied with their child's education.

Hear it from a parent: Take heart!

"If you care about your kids' education and you put time and energy into it, they're gonna get a great education," says Northeast L.A. mom Audrey Diehl. "Don't overly stress about getting into some perfect school ... There's probably a couple of different options that'll work great for you and your family."

What are your worries and hopes?

If you're reading this guide, you might be uncertain about what's next for your child's school journey. We'll offer several prompts along the way to help sort through your feelings. Feel free to write in this book!

Why does the school search process cause you stress?

Ask your child or ask them to write (or draw!) below: What do they want school to be like? What do they look forward to learning?

Imagine the future. Your child has just graduated high school. How will you know their educational journey has been a success?

What kind of public school experience is best for your family?

No one type of school is inherently better than another, and much of your family's experience will be shaped by your beliefs.

Think back to your experience as a student. What did you like about it? What do you wish was different?

What do you think school is for? Why?

Many factors outside of school will shape your child's life. Who or what else will help your child lead a fulfilling life? (i.e. family, friends, faith, hobbies). Be specific!

When should you start your search?

California's K-12 public school system is designed for children beginning at age 5.

But every child in California who turns 4 years old by Sept. 1 of the school year can enroll for free in a grade called **transitional kindergarten**, or TK. It's part of the state's effort to expand universal preschool.

TK is one preschool option among many for young children: daycare, nursery school, family home providers and childcare centers. Every family has different needs, and those needs will shape your choices.

If you want to learn more about public preschool options, we have a guide for you. →

What you should know about transitional kindergarten

As a free option, transitional kindergarten can save parents a lot of money. Parents also must weigh how sending their kids into a school-based environment compares to a preschool they might already know and like, as well as other needs like all-day care, and how much play their child does.

TK students, like other elementary school students, follow a schedule: morning bell, recess, lunch, second recess and dismissal. They're also learning how to listen to instructions or stand in a line. Some are learning to go to the cafeteria for lunch.

Hear it from a parent: Your experiences may vary

Lyse Messmer saw variation between two Northeast L.A. schools her son attended. While she liked his first TK program, she felt it relied more on screen time and worksheets than she liked; Messmer transferred him to another program with more outdoor play.

She said the overall TK experience has been beneficial for her child, and a welcome financial relief. "I think the benefits of him getting used to a bigger classroom and a bigger elementary school and navigating all that stuff for him has been really positive," she said.

When should you apply?

If you want to attend your assigned local school, the process is straightforward, but to enroll in a specialized program at that same school or send your child elsewhere, it's more complicated.

The application process for the largest pool of schools is called "Choices." This includes magnet schools, dual-language programs, and some charter schools among other options. The application can be done online or on paper.

There are two windows to apply — on-time and late.

- The **on-time application** usually opens about 10 months ahead of the first day of school.
- The **late application** consists of the spaces left after families who applied on-time accept their offers. In most cases, submissions are accepted through the following school year.

Here's the general Choices timeline in LAUSD:

- **September/October:** Multiple schools gather to share information at in-person and virtual "Choices fairs."
- **October:** On-time Choices application opens.
- **Early November:** Deadline to apply.
- **December:** Late Choices application opens.
- **February:** Schools announced for on-time applications.
- **Early March:** Deadline to accept or decline school offers for on-time applicants. School assignments for late applications follow the processing of on-time applications. Students may be offered a spot through the start of the spring semester.
- **August:** The school year begins.

Good to know: Public education has a lot of jargon, and as you'll soon learn, LAUSD has several terms specific to the district.

Neighborhood schools

Every child who lives within the district boundaries has a default school. The district's official term is **resident school**, but you may also hear people call the school close to their home a **neighborhood school** or **local school**.

Families may enroll in their neighborhood school because it's convenient, walkable and they want to be more connected to the community around their home.

Plus, your school choice journey becomes a short one if your neighborhood school fits the bill.

How to enroll:

- Collect the required documents (for example, proof of residence and immunization) and enroll online or in person at the school.

Hear it from a parent: Neighborhood schools build community.

Huriya Jabbar's son started kindergarten at their neighborhood elementary school in Echo Park, an arts magnet program that's walking distance from their home.

She says there's something special about attending a school where many of the students live nearby.

"There's a way to have this kind of reinforcing community where you're running into people at the grocery store, and it's easier to attend the birthday parties," Jabbar says. "[You can] build and sustain that community over time."

Neighborhood schools

Every neighborhood in Los Angeles has a resident school. This activity will help you think about how well you know yours and hopefully spark some new questions.

What's the name of your child's resident school?

If you're unsure, find your resident school here. →

What do you know about it? How do you know that?

What other questions do you have about your resident school?

We'll talk about how to get fact-based information about schools on page 29.

Magnet programs

Magnet programs focus on a theme, such as science, math, language, advanced studies or art. LAUSD created its first magnet programs in 1977 to de-segregate schools after a court order. The goal was to attract students from different racial backgrounds to specific campuses.

In the decades since then, many magnets have grown in popularity among a broad range of families.

Magnet programs may encompass the whole campus (a magnet school) or be limited to a department within a larger school (a magnet center). In the latter, magnet students attend separate classes and have separate teachers.

Families may enroll in a magnet program because their child has a specific interest or they're interested in a program that attracts students from different backgrounds and geographic areas.

Who can apply:

- Any student who lives within LAUSD boundaries can apply, including those with disabilities and English language learners.
- There is no test required for admittance, except in some cases for gifted magnet programs.

How to apply:

- Applications for magnet programs are typically due in early November and there is a late enrollment option a month later.
- Apply online or in person at the school.

Magnet programs

When there is more demand than seats available, families are admitted based on a **points system** that takes into consideration:

- **Matriculation**: If a student advances from the last grade at their current magnet program to a middle or high school, they get **12 points**.
- **Waitlist:** If the student was put on a waitlist in the previous year, they earn **4 points** for each year on the waitlist, up to **12 points**. A student cannot receive matriculation and waitlist points in the same year.
- **PHBAO:** If their resident school is predominantly Hispanic, Black, Asian and "other non-Anglo" (aka PHBAO) students get **4 points**.
- **Overcrowding:** If their resident school is overcrowded, students get **4 points**.
- **Siblings:** If a sibling already attends a desired program, students get **3 points**.

You can contact your child's resident school to find out if it's considered PHBAO or overcrowded.

Here's an example. Imagine you have a child entering second grade. They didn't get into any of the magnet schools you applied to the year before. That's **4 points** from the waitlist. Also, their current school is predominantly Hispanic. That's another **4 points**. And their two older siblings attend the magnet you want to go to. That's another **3 points**, for **11 points total**.

That means a child with 13 points will be offered a spot in the program before your family, but you'll be ahead of a student with 7 points. Seats are assigned randomly when children have the same number of points.

Magnet programs

Keep in mind:

- Even if your resident school has a magnet program, you have to apply for it.
- Magnet schools are not required to provide transitional kindergarten, but there might be an on-campus TK option available. Enrolling your child won't guarantee them a spot in the kindergarten magnet program, but can give you insight into the school. You can find out what's available by checking with the school.
- Families may apply for up to three programs a year. If a student is not selected for any of their three choices, they are placed on a waitlist for their first choice school. (And they get 4 points toward next year's admissions cycle if they never get off the waitlist.)
- Families applying to gifted magnet programs must show the "ability" or "strong potential" to work two years above grade level, be assessed by the district and meet additional criteria.
- Late applications do not accrue points.

Magnet programs

Hear it from a parent: Understand your limits.

When it came time to look for a middle school, Jolivette Mecenas and her partner wanted a school that offered their son advanced math classes and a music program. Mecenas visited open houses and took school tours in the fall before they applied to Choices.

"That's, I think, the best way we learned the information that led to our decision," she says. Her son also tagged along on the tours. The aquariums full of marine animals in one teacher's classroom at Portola Middle School caught his eye.

"It was a big plus if we met really excited teachers who were just really into what they were teaching," she says.

The trade-off was adding a 20-mile commute to and from the Tarzana campus. The family has driven, carpooled and used LAUSD buses at different points.

"Think about if your kid can wake up that early and deal with coming home a bit later," Mecenas says. "Do they have a lot of extracurriculars? Do they play sports? Because it really eats up that time."

Multilingual multicultural programs

These programs are often called **dual-language programs**. Some families may also know these programs by the term **immersion.**

In these programs, students learn in both English and a second target language. These programs may include students who are native speakers of the second target language learning English.

Families may enroll in a dual-language program because they want their child to learn an additional language or because they want to strengthen a language spoken among family.

LAUSD's more than 200 dual-language programs include: Arabic, Armenian, French, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin and Spanish.

How to apply:

- Applications for dual-language programs are typically due in early November, and there is a late enrollment option a month later.
- Apply online or in person at the school.
- If the number of applicants exceeds the space at the school, the spots are prioritized based on whether a student has siblings in the program already and where they live.

Keep in mind:

- Starting in second grade, new students have to take a test to assess whether they can keep up with the target language skills of peers already in the school's program.
- A school may not offer a dual-language class in every grade. For example, newer programs may build capacity grade-by-grade.

Multilingual multicultural programs

Hear it from a parent: The right program is worth the wait.

Soozy Rios Bellenot's oldest child attended their neighborhood school in Boyle Heights before applying to attend a French-English dual language school in Highland Park in the middle of first grade.

Rios Bellenot, who lived in France for several years and is fluent in the language, previously passed over a Westside dual-language program that would have required a lengthy commute.

Her children applied for and accepted a spot in the Highland Park program through Choices (they've since moved to the school's neighborhood).

Navigating a changing school administration and finding enough qualified teachers are a few of the challenges the program has faced since it started.

"But what's been interesting is seeing all of the folks who love this program and believe in this program, even as it has its bumps," Rios Bellenot says.

Remember your vision of your child's successful education? (From page 5.) How would learning in another language align with that, if at all?

Gifted and talented

The district provides some form of gifted and talented education programs — known as GATE — at every school from TK through 12th grade. **Accelerated** and **honors** are other terms used to describe these programs, which may include small groups of students gathering for more complex discussions or separate classes focused on advanced coursework.

Families may enroll in GATE because their child is bored in their current class or they are seeking a more challenging academic experience.

There are several additional options for higher-level academic programs beyond those offered at a neighborhood school.

Schools for Advanced Studies

LAUSD awards schools with exemplary GATE programs the Schools for Advanced Studies label. Schools must reapply for this designation every five years, demonstrating student academic outcomes, family engagement and staff skill level. There are also two single-gender SAS schools: The Girls and Boys Academic Leadership Academies.

Gifted magnet programs

Magnet programs and magnet schools offer accelerated study for students. Unlike SAS schools, magnet programs' gifted designations are continuous and don't require school officials to re-apply with the district.

Gifted and talented

How to apply: Applications for both SAS and magnet programs are typically due in early November, and there is a late enrollment option a month later. Apply online or in person at the school.

- To be eligible, students must meet one of the district's criteria, which include test scores, creative ability, critical thinking and leadership skills. (The identification process can vary by school; learn more in the online School Game Plan.)
- The district also has several highly gifted magnet programs that require a specific test administered by an LAUSD psychologist.
- Gifted magnet programs prioritize applicants based on the points system described on page 13 of this workbook.
- SAS schools randomly select eligible students based on the available number of spots, giving priority to siblings of existing students.

Keep in mind:

- The school may notify you if your child is identified as gifted. Families, educators, community members, peers or the students themselves can also request an assessment.
- If your resident school is an SAS school, you do not need to submit an application, but your child must be considered eligible by the school.
- Magnet programs and SAS programs both serve students seeking more advanced learning experiences, but the goals of each program are different. Magnet programs seek to integrate schools while SAS schools are meant to serve as a model for GATE programs district-wide.

Charter schools

Charter schools are tuition-free, publicly funded schools often run by nonprofit organizations.

Charters are exempt from many of the state laws that govern traditional public schools. Leaders of a charter school have more freedom to try new methods of teaching, select learning materials, and more easily hire (or fire) teachers, who at most charter schools are not unionized.

Families may enroll in a charter school because they are attracted to the school's approach to teaching or resources, or are looking for an alternative to their local public school.

Are charter schools "better" than traditional public schools?

It's hard to create an "apples-to-apples" comparison between traditional public schools and charter schools because there are so many variables — from where students live to their socioeconomic background and how the schools are run.

In California, Stanford University researchers found students at some charter schools score higher on standardized tests, some score worse and others do about the same as their peers at nearby traditional public schools. Researchers say that because charter schools operate with so much flexibility, the success of one student or group of students at one school does not mean the result will be universal.

In short: Whether your child thrives in a charter school will be shaped by their unique attributes, your family's goals and a multitude of factors specific to that school.

Charter schools

How do charters affect public funding at local schools?

California funds schools based on average daily attendance. School districts lose out on the state funding that follows each student who enrolls in an independent charter school run by an outside organization.

Though adding up how much money districts lose when students enroll in charters is complicated, this funding loss has led to public debate around how charter schools affect the education of students who remain in traditional public schools.

What have you heard about charter schools?

Do you believe this is true? Why or why not?

Is there a charter school near you that you are curious to learn more about?

Charter schools

You'll encounter two types of charter schools in LAUSD.

Type 1: Affiliated charter schools. These are run by LAUSD but have some of the same freedoms as independent charters — more on those below. You may hear affiliated charters referred to as **dependent** charter schools in other districts.

How to apply:

- Choices applications for affiliated charter school programs are typically due in early November and there is a late enrollment option a month later.
- Apply online or in person at the school.
- When there are more applications than seats available, the school will conduct a lottery and must publish the date on its website. Certain groups of students (i.e. siblings of continuing students) will have priority.
- Students who are not selected join a waiting list for all of the affiliated charter schools they applied to.

Type 2: Independent charter schools. These are run by nonprofit organizations with unelected boards. Independent charter schools need permission from an authorizer before they can open. In most cases, the authorizer is the elected board of the local school district.

How to apply:

- Independent charter schools have a separate application process that is unique to each school; start with the website.

Other district options

There are three other Choices programs that apply to a handful of schools. You can learn more about them from LAUSD.

- **International Newcomer Academies:** A program for non-U.S. born students who are learning English and have been enrolled in U.S. schools for three years or less.
- **Permits with Transportation:** Like magnets, the goal of this program is to integrate schools. It allows students in grades 6-12 in specific areas to attend Revere Middle School in Los Angeles, Portola Middle School in Tarzana or Taft High School in Woodland Hills.
- **Early/Middle Colleges:** Three schools with a specific focus on earning college credit or advanced education.

Intra-district options

If you are interested in an LAUSD school that is not part of the Choices application, but also not your resident school, there is a separate process. For more on intra-district permits, check out our online guide.

Out of district

There are 80 public school districts in L.A. County, and you can apply to a school in a district outside of where you live.

Families may choose this option because they want their child to attend a school closer to their work, a school with a specialized program or for another reason.

It's a two-step process to leave your home district:

- Apply online for an outgoing inter-district permit for the following school year, usually between February and April.
- Apply for an incoming inter-district permit from the desired school district.

Each school district determines the criteria for transfers into and out of their schools.

Our region also has hundreds of private schools. About 11% of students in L.A. County go to one of these schools, which include traditional private schools, religious schools, Montessori schools and others. These schools charge tuition, though some families may offset the cost with financial aid or scholarships. Each has its own application process.

Now that we've covered all the kinds of schools, let's talk about what things to think about in making a choice.

What information should you consider in your decision?

What does your child like to do?

While all schools expose students to a variety of subjects and activities, some may focus on incorporating a specific theme or style of teaching.

Hear it from a parent: Listen to your kids' interests.

As a kindergartner, Debbie Steinert's eldest son started showing interest in advanced scientific concepts. Steinert applied for the Balboa Elementary Gifted Magnet Program in Northridge. "I was looking more for him to be surrounded by other nerds so he wasn't ostracized," she says. "If my son's mouth opens, science comes out still. So having other people that maybe recognized his interests and shared his interests would be good for him."

What do your kids enjoy? What subjects and activities have they shown interest in?

Are there any subjects or skills they find more challenging? How would you like their school to support them in these areas?

What information should you consider in your decision?

Does your child have unique needs?

If you know or suspect your child has a disability, they may need additional support at school — including an **individualized education program**, or IEP.

Despite some legal protections, a lot of parents say they have to advocate for services to help their children learn, and many families struggle to get help.

"It can be very discouraging, but there are wins," says L.A. parent Lisa Mosko Barros, the mom of two neurodiverse kids, and an advocate and founder of the nonprofit SpEducational. "We don't have the option of not trying."

Here are some questions to consider asking a prospective school:

- What resources are available for families of children with disabilities?
- How do you meet the needs of students with disabilities?
- What's the turnover rate for special education teachers? Special ed aides?
- How do you identify children who struggle to read and what kinds of tools are available to help?

Good to know: Many laws protect the rights of students with disabilities. Learn more. →

What information should you consider in your decision?

How will your child get to school?

It's best to inquire directly with the school your family is interested in to confirm what transportation may be available. If they're already enrolled, you can use the Parent Portal app.

California doesn't require schools to offer transportation, though the federal government does require it for the following groups:

- Students with disabilities whose IEP includes transportation.
- Unhoused students.

LAUSD also prioritizes busing for:

- Magnet programs and other Choices schools.
- Areas with hazardous walks to school (i.e. gang activity or dangerous streets).
- Families concerned about immigration enforcement actions.

Other students may also be eligible, including those:

- With an IEP that does not include transportation.
- Who live more than one mile (elementary school) or more than two miles (middle/high school) from their school.
- Who live near an established school bus route.

Good to know: Most families have to opt-in to transportation every year.

How do you imagine your child getting to school?

What information should you consider in your decision?

How competitive is enrollment?

The interest in some schools far exceeds the capacity.

Ask staff directly about capacity, the number of applications in previous years and number of openings for the upcoming year.

Remember, for magnet programs, if you don't get in the first year, you accumulate points that can boost subsequent applications.

Who cares for your child before and after school?

LAUSD partners with several organizations to offer free before- and after-school programs, but there are not enough spaces for every child in the district, and it can be confusing to figure out what program your school offers and how many spaces are available.

These programs may also be referred to as Beyond the Bell, Expanded Learning Programs (ELP) or the Expanded Learning Opportunities Program (ELO-P).

Good to know:

- Families must complete a separate application for before- and after-school programs.
- LAUSD has a "school explorer" site; search for your school, then scroll beneath "School Experiences" to find "Beyond the Bell" to see what programs are available. →

What information should you consider in your decision?

The role of test scores

For better or worse, we evaluate schools largely by students' standardized test scores.

"A lot of what [test scores] tell you is how well off economically are students in this school, rather than how much is the school contributing to their gains and growth," says Linda Darling-Hammond, founding president of the Learning Policy Institute.

For example, one study in Mississippi found a school's overall scores can mask outcomes for low-performing groups of students.

No one metric defines a great school, and there are many factors beyond test scores to consider, such as:

- High-quality, experienced teachers and administrators.
- Engaged parents and families — and avenues for them to participate at the school.
- Clean and safe facilities.
- Access to play and extracurricular activities including arts, sports and other clubs.

Good to know: We have a list of places to start your research journey. →

What else do you care about?

LAist has heard from dozens of families about what they think makes a "good school."

What parents tell us they care about: The principal, diversity, safety, and resources.

What kids tell us they care about: Lunch, technology, fun and recess.

What both tell us they care about: Teachers and outdoor space.

What do you care about? Write out some of the things that are important to you. We'll get back to them in the next section.

Go on a school tour

By far the most frequent piece of advice we've heard is to take an in-person school tour.

"The very best thing that people can do is go to the school and try to watch the way that educators interact with students, the way that students interact with each other, and the way that families are included — or not — in the life of a school," says Jack Schneider, an education researcher and parent. "Once you do that, you really get a sense of what kind of place kids are going to school."

Some schools post information about tours online, but you may have to call for details.

Good to know: Some schools may offer a virtual tour through live webinars or videos on their website. While this doesn't have all the benefits of an in-person tour, it can still help you get to know the school. And be on the lookout each fall for LAUSD's in-person and virtual "Choices Fairs" where families can talk to educators from different schools in each region.

The school tour

Once you're on a tour, here are some questions to ask:

- Can I talk to staff and students?
- Do staff send their own children to the school?
- What's the staff turnover rate?
- What professional development is available for staff?
- How big are classes?
- What extracurricular activities are available?
- Is there before- or after-school care?
- What is the school's approach to social and emotional learning?
- How does the school handle discipline and bullying?
- How much time do students spend on screens? i.e. working on computers or tablets?
- Are there any recent or planned improvements to campus?
- What opportunities are there for parents to get involved? Is there a parent-teacher organization (PTO)?
- Can the school help connect families to other community resources, such as meals, mental health or housing support?

Consider asking grade-specific questions as well. For example, if you're looking at a transitional kindergarten program, ask:

- What kind of outdoor time do children get and what do those spaces offer?
- How do you incorporate play into the curriculum?
- Are there bathrooms in the classroom? (If not: Where are the closest bathrooms and how do the children get there?)

Remember: That list of things that are important to you from page 30? Ask about them! (And be mindful that other tour participants get the chance to ask questions.)

The school tour

Here are some things to observe:

- Are students engaged in the lessons?
- Is there green space? Trees and shade?
- How are staff interacting with students and each other?
- What information is posted in the front office and hallways? Are there opportunities for parental involvement?

Hear it from a parent: The website isn't everything

When Stephanie Horwitz and her family were looking for a dual-language Spanish program for their daughter near their home in South L.A., they fell in love with one school's vibrant website.

Then they toured the campus in person.

"Maybe because our expectations were so high, we were disappointed," Horwitz says. "In person, it didn't really give off the same amount of warmth and joy that I think we had expected from the website."

Another negative was the 20-minute commute. Then they visited another school with a bare-bones website that also offered a dual-language program and was about five minutes away.

"It's not a fancy school by any means. It's just a regular school building, but the kids were clearly happy there," Horwitz says. "They would give the principal hugs throughout the tour, just unprompted."

The school tour

Next time you go on a school tour, take notes. Here's an example of how you can organize them:

School name:

What do you notice about the school's condition?

- Buildings:
- Classrooms:
- Bathrooms:
- Grounds:

What do you notice about the students and teachers?

What did you like?

What did you dislike?

What opportunities are there to get involved with the school?

What would your child's commute to this school be like?

How can you meet other parents?

There are parent Facebook groups and there are also a variety of school, local government and parent-run organizations who can connect you to families willing to share their experiences.

At the school level, look for:

- **Parent-teacher organizations,** or booster clubs.
- **School site councils:** A group of parents, community members, staff, and students that advises leadership.

At the city level, look for:

- **Local neighborhood councils:** These groups are typically small and have a direct line of communication with city government. Many have a representative focused on education.
- **Parents out and about in your community:** Several people told us they got useful information by striking up a conversation with parents at parks, preschools and libraries.

When will you hear back about your family's choice?

As we noted earlier, LAUSD starts notifying families about the outcome of their Choices applications in February, and families have until early March to accept or decline the school placement offered. Otherwise, the student's enrollment will default to their resident school.

Acceptance: If you accept the district's offer, the next step is to contact the school to enroll. Students who do not enroll and subsequently attend class within the first week of school are dropped from the program.

Waiting list: When there are more applicants than available space, your child will be placed on a waitlist. If you applied for multiple schools and are not selected for any of them, your child is placed on the waitlist for their first choice school.

Schools start to offer available spaces to students on the waiting list on a rolling basis and continue through the beginning of the fall semester. Spots may also open up the first two weeks of the spring semester.

You can contact the school directly to learn more about your child's status on the waitlist.

Students still on the waitlist in the fall when the next application period opens should reapply.

How do you get involved in a child's education no matter the school?

Education experts and parents we interviewed also encouraged families to think about what they can contribute to their larger school community in addition to what they hope their child will get out of their individual educational experience.

"Instead of obsessing over finding the one best school and angling to get our kids into that school ... we can begin to recognize that **public schools are designed to bring us together**," says Schneider, the education researcher. "They're designed to be spaces where young people from different walks of life sit alongside each other as they learn."

One place to start is at your school's parent-teacher organization, called a PTO or PTA, or a booster club.

While fundraising is often a primary focus for school-based groups, they can be more inclusive, says Lori Rosales, a former PTA president in Atwater Village.

"People can give money, they can give supplies or they can give time," Rosales says. "That is going to ensure that everybody can participate in some way."

Whether or not a school has one of these groups, there may be other ways to get involved. One option is volunteering.

How do you get involved in a child's education no matter the school?

You've already taken a big first step in engaging with your child's education by picking up, reading and filling out this workbook! Here are a few more questions to start thinking about. It's also OK to come back to this page later if you're feeling overwhelmed.

What role did your parents play in your education? How did that affect you?

How do you want to be involved in your child's education?

What changes do you want to see in schools?

You can contribute to systemic changes.
One place to start is the school board. Learn more about your board member and what they do. →

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Feedback?

What else does this guide need? Has it helped you? Do you have other things to share? **Reach out to us online:**

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