# How the Junior Kindergarten/Kindergarten January 2020 Lottery Works: A Detailed Guide for Families
**Student Registration Center**

We hope that the following questions and answers will help families better understand how school assignments are made during the Junior Kindergarten/Kindergarten (JK/K) Lottery, and how the waitlists are created through this process.

This guide uses a Questions & Answers format to provide details of the following topics:

1. Controlled Choice & Socioeconomic (SES) Balancing
2. Lottery Numbers & Bonus Points
3. Understanding Waitlists
4. Reducing Your Risk of a Mandatory Assignment
5. General Advice on Making Your Choices

## Section 1: Controlled Choice & SES Balancing

### Why do we have Controlled Choice in Cambridge?

Cambridge Public Schools has been implementing the Controlled Choice Plan for over 30 years, and its primary purpose is to integrate and diversify all of our schools and programs. We do not integrate based on race or ethnicity, but on the basis of socioeconomic status (SES), as measured by the percentage of students who do and do not qualify for the federal Free or Reduced Price Meals Program. The goal of Controlled Choice Plan is to help us achieve a diverse student body that reflects the diversity of the city in all of our schools.

### How does SES factor into the registration process?

When registering for school, you are asked to complete a Controlled Choice Form. Your answers will help us determine in which assignment category your child's registration form belongs: Free/Reduced Lunch (F/R) or Paid Lunch. Each school will have a set percentage of seats available in each of these two categories.

The Controlled Choice form offers three options:

- Yes - I am eligible for free or reduced price meal benefits
- No - I am not eligible for free or reduced price meals benefits
- I decline to disclose this information

If the Controlled Choice form is left blank, or the family selects "I decline," the application will be categorized as a "Paid Lunch" application.

This system is completely voluntary and we rely on families to state honestly whether you believe that you do or do not qualify for this program. The Controlled Choice Form isn't used for any other purpose than for making school assignments. By voluntarily disclosing whether or not families qualify for this program, you can help our system remain equitable.

**IMPORTANT:** Families must provide documentation of their income in order to apply for the Free & Reduced Price Meals benefit. In September, you will receive a letter from the Food & Nutrition Services Department inviting you to apply for this benefit. Your registration status has no connection to receiving this benefit. You MUST apply in September in order to receive this benefit.

## How is SES Balance Defined and Applied to the Lottery?

SES balance is defined based on the 3-year average of the percentage of JK/K that do and do not qualify for Free or Reduced Price meals. This calculation is made on October 1 of each year, and is used to define a demographic range that is close to that average.

In other words, it is like taking a snapshot of what the SES balance of the JK/K cohort looks like after school begins, and then averaging the last three years of this data. This average SES composition for our JK/K is applied to the Lottery pool in January.
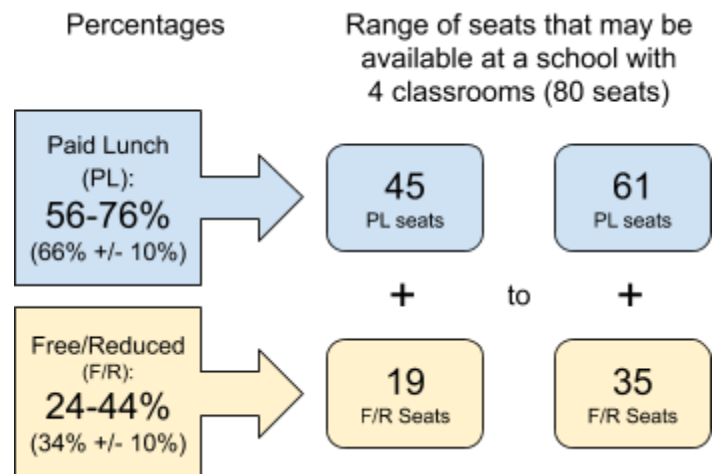
**For the 2020 JK/K Lottery, the target SES percentages will be 66% Paid Lunch and 34% Free/Reduced Lunch.**

To allow for more flexibility and help more families receive one of their school choices, the Controlled Choice Plan allows assignments to be made, as long as the percentage of students in each category is within 10% of the average.

This year, this means we can assign up to 76% of seats to families in the Paid Lunch category at any particular school, but we cannot exceed this amount. Or, we could assign up to 44% of seats to students in the F/R Lunch category.

What this means is that in a school with 4 JK/K classrooms, there are 80 seats total. The SES breakdown of those seats could range from:

- 44 Paid Lunch & 37 F/R Lunch seats
  to
- 61 Paid Lunch & 19 F/R Lunch seats

Percentages

Range of seats that may be available at a school with 4 classrooms (80 seats)

Paid Lunch (PL):
56-76%
(66% +/- 10%)

45 PL seats

61 PL seats

+ to +

Free/Reduced (F/R):
24-44%
(34% +/- 10%)

19 F/R Seats

35 F/R Seats

The exact percentage and number of students in each category will depend on the applications received for the school. In making school assignments, a computer program will match students to seats that are divided into Paid and Free/Reduced categories based on the district average,  +/- 10%, as explained in the next section.

# Section 2: Lottery Numbers and Bonus Points

## What makes Cambridge's Assignment Process a "Lottery?"

After all the applications are received in January, the SRC compiles all the data and sends it off to an outside Lottery consultant who uses a computerized system to assign random numbers to all applications. This is very similar to any other lottery system, where the higher your number, the better. What makes this more complex is that the system also adds additional "bonus points" based on program priorities, as explained below.

## What are Bonus Points?

The lottery gives bonus points for each School Choice where one of the following factors applies:

- **Sibling bonus points** are added if the child's brother or sister is enrolled in Grades JK-4. This rule is intended to keep siblings together in the same elementary school.

- **Proximity bonus points** are added for the two schools that are closest to the family's home. This rule is intended to increase the number of families who can be assigned to a school within walking distance from home. Families are not required to select one or both of their proximity schools - this is optional. **Please note that having proximity bonus points does not guarantee that your child will be assigned to your proximity schools even when you select one as your first choice.**

- **Program language bonus points** are added based on a test of the child's fluency in the language of a two-way immersion school or program. Specifically, language bonus points only apply if you select Amigos School, the Chinese Immersion Program at Martin Luther King, Jr. School, or the Ola Portuguese Immersion Program at King Open School. This rule is intended to ensure that two-way immersion schools have a high enough percentage of students who speak the program language; **however, having program language bonus points does not guarantee that your child will be assigned to an Immersion Program even if you select one as your first choice.**

These factors are each weighted differently. The highest possible bonus points that you can receive for a particular school choice is is 3 million:

- Sibling + Proximity = 3 Million
- Sibling + Program Language = 3 Million

This is followed by:

- Siblings only = 2 Million
- Proximity only = 1 Million
- Program Language only = 1 Million

## Do applications receive the same bonus points for all choices?

Bonus Points, if applicable, are added to the random number to create the Applied Random Number, which will be different for each of your choices.

For example, let's say that you choose Schools A, B, and C. In the example below, your Lottery number is 548 and you have an older child at School A. Your child speaks the program language of School B. The bonus points will be applied to the total point score differently for School A and School B. You will not receive bonus points at School C.

| Choice Number | SCHOOL CHOICES | Random Number | Type of Bonus | Bonus Points | Applied Random Number (total score for each choice) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | School A | 548 | Sibling | 2,000,000 | 2,000,548 |
| 2 | School B | 548 | Program Language | 1,000,000 | 1,000,548 |
| 3 | School C | 548 | NONE | N/A | 548 |

## Where does Parent/Guardian Choice come in?

The goal of Controlled Choice is to achieve socio-economic balance, while also maximizing the number of students who are assigned to one of their choices. To do this, students are assigned to a school by looking first at the Applied Random Number for each application's first choice.

The Lottery will take the application with the highest Applied Random Number and see if there are seats available at their first choice school. Unless they chose Tobin Montessori (which may have zero open seats), this student will almost certainly get into their choice of school.

The Lottery then moves down the list of applications from highest to lowest Applied Random Number until there are no seats remaining. Keep in mind that for a seat to be available, it must match the student's assignment category (Free/Reduced or Paid).

Some schools will fill up entirely with families who selected the school as their first choice. When this happens, no one who listed the school as their second choice will able to be assigned.

When all first choices have been considered, the computer will move on to match as many of the remaining applicants as possible to their second choice school. Finally, the process is repeated for third choices.

# Section 3: Mandatory Assignments & Waitlists

## What if my student doesn't get into any of our school choices?

All students will be assigned to a school, but not all will be assigned to one of their school choices. Each year, approximately 15-18% of our JK/K Lottery applicants will not receive one of their three choices of schools for a complex variety of reasons. Students in this situation will be mandatorily assigned to a fourth school where there is space available in their SES assignment category. In addition, they will be placed onto the waitlists of their three schools of choice.

It is very important to us that families understand the Lottery rules and have access to historical results from the Lottery, so that they will be fully informed of likely outcomes based on their school choices.

> The SRC will review all applications to identify those that are at higher risk of mandatory assignment. We will call these families to ask them to weigh their possible feelings if their child is not assigned to one of their choices. Some families are comfortable with the risk, and others decide to change their choices.

To ensure families are fully informed, the Student Registration Center will review all applications to identify those that are at higher risk of resulting in a mandatory assignment. SRC staff will call these families to ask them to weigh their possible feelings if their child is not assigned to one of their choices. Some families are comfortable with the risk, and others decide to change their choices.

With all the preparation and hope that families invest in the registration process, when a family's child is not assigned to one of their choices they may feel anxiety, frustration or sadness. The SRC staff will provide as much information to you as possible about your options and the likelihood of receiving an offer off the waitlist. Often, seats will become available between the release of the JK/K Lottery results and the start of school in September. Additional seats may become available between September and December school vacation.

If a seat becomes available and you are next on the waitlist, the SRC will contact you to discuss whether you would like to transfer schools, and we will work with you throughout the process.

## How are Waitlists Ordered?

Students who do not get into any of their choices are automatically placed on the waitlist for each of the schools they chose. Students who get into their third choice of school are placed on the waitlist for their first and second choices. Those who get into their second choice are placed on the waitlist for their first choice school.

The order of the waitlist is derived from the Applied Random Number assigned during the Lottery, but applications are reordered into groups so that mandatory assignments will have a better chance of getting into one of their choices. There is additional reordering, as well, as follows:

> **Top of the Waitlist: First Choices**
> Applications that selected the school first are re-organized into three sub-group and then rank ordered by Applied Random Number within each sub-group, as follows:

- Unassigned students who listed School A as their first choice, but did not get into any of their choices are first in line on the waitlist.

- Applicants who listed School A as their first choice but were assigned to their third choice are listed next.

- Applicants who listed School A as their first choice but were assigned to their second choice are the last set of applications in this group.

**Middle of the Waitlist: Second Choices**

Those who selected the school as their second choice are added to the waitlist behind all of the first choice applicants. These second choice applicants are re-arranged into two subgroups and rank ordered by Applied Random Number as follows:
- Unassigned students who listed School A as choice 2 and did not receive any of their choices.
- Students who listed School A as choice 2 but were assigned to their third choice.

**End of the Waitlist: Third Choices**

Applicants who selected School A as choice 3 and received none of their school choices will be the last group of students added to the waitlist for School A.

If you are on more than one waitlist, your waitlist position will be different for each school, based on the order you listed it on the application.

➡ **IMPORTANT:** Families *must* list three choices on their registration form. Any family who lists only 1 or 2 choices, and who becomes unassigned, will be placed at the end of the waitlist regardless of applied random number. It is *imperative* to list three choices. Per Controlled Choice Policy, you must sign a release if you elect not to choose three schools on the registration form.

You MUST make

**3**

School Choices

# EXAMPLE OF A WAITLIST

Let's imagine a waitlist with six students who chose School A as their first choice, four who chose it second, and two who chose it third. There is also one student who only listed 2 schools on their registration form. The order of the waitlist can be seen below:

| First, Second, or Third Choice? | Which school choice were they assigned to? | Applied Random Number from the Lottery | Waitlist Position | Name |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **First Choice** | Did not get into any of their choices | 500 | 1 | Grace |
| | | 12 | 2 | Francois |
| | Got into their 3rd choice | 1,000,242 | 3 | Mariah |
| | | 301 | 4 | John |
| | Got into their 2nd choice | 2,000,001 | 5 | Kian |
| | | 548 | 6 | Jane |
| **Second Choice** | Did not get into any of their choices | 24 | 7 | Bettina |
| | | 6 | 8 | Nia |
| | Got into their 3rd choice | 1,000,36 | 9 | Oliver |
| | | 15 | 10 | Curtis |
| **Third Choice** | Did not get into any of their choices | 3 | 11 | Lenora |
| | | 1 | 12 | Andres |
| **Did not list 3 choices** | None of their choices | 204 | 13 | Henry |

➡ **Remember:** School assignments must follow the Controlled Choice Plan; therefore, in some cases a seat will remain open after the Lottery, but a waitlist will be started because students on the waitlist are a different assignment category than the open seat. In the case of Immersion Programs, assignments off the waitlists also follow rules regarding the percentage of students who do and do not speak the Program Language.

Waitlists are complex. We hope to help families understand how waitlists are organized for a school. Please don't hesitate to ask us any and all questions that you may have. Please feel free to call or e-mail Kathy Sampson with any waitlist and school assignment related questions at 617-349-6067 or ksampson@cpsd.us.

# Section 4: Reducing the Risk of a Mandatory Assignment

### Is there any way to estimate my chances for getting into a school?

Each year, the Student Registration Center develops data tables that offer projections of the number of seats potentially available in each school. These tables provide estimates that might help you to understand where the most seats are available, and which schools have historically been most popular within your assignment category.

These numbers are just an estimate -- there is no guarantee that the outcome of this year's Lottery will follow historical trends; however, it is important to understand that some combinations of Lottery choices are more likely to result in mandatory assignments than others.

| Table 1: Estimated Seat Availability: January 2020 Kindergarten Lottery | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | A | B | C | D | E | F |
| School | JK/K Capacity | Current JK's (Rising K) | Estimated Seats available for new applicants | Prior Year Siblings | Prior Year Applicants with Proximity Bonus Points | Estimated Seats for Students With No Bonus Points |
| | | | | | | |
| Baldwin | 100 | 26 | 74 | 15 | 27 | 32 |
| Cambridgeport | 80 | 34 | 46 | 27 | 25 | 0 |
| FMA | 100 | 44 | 56 | 5 | 13 | 38 |
| Graham & Parks | 60 | 30 | 30 | 19 | 32 | 0 |
| Haggerty | 80 | 28 | 52 | 17 | 13 | 22 |
| Kenn/Longfellow | 80 | 11 | 69 | 2 | 6 | 61 |
| King NiHao | 60 | 15 | 45 | 5 | 12 | 28 |
| King Open | 80 | 31 | 49 | 8 | 15 | 26 |
| Morse | 80 | 32 | 48 | 13 | 31 | 4 |
| Peabody | 80 | 30 | 50 | 11 | 36 | 3 |
| Tobin MJK4 | 40 | 40 | 0 | 3 | N/A | 0 |
| Tobin MK5 | 40 | 40 | 0 | 3 | N/A | 0 |

| | A | B | C | D | E | F |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Table 2: Estimated Seat Availability: Dual Immersion Programs** | | | | | | |
| School | JK/K Capacity | Current JK's (Rising K) | Estimated Seats available for new applicants | Prior Year Siblings | Prior Year Applicants w/ Language Bonus Points | Estimated Available Seats for Students With No Bonus Points |
| Amigos | 80 | 30 | 50 | 26 | 30 | 0 |
| Chinese Immersion | 40 | 20 | 20 | 12 | 26 | 0 |
| OLA | 40 | 11 | 29 | 3 | 6 | 20 |

## How do I interpret these charts?

- **Column A:** This column refers to the total number of seats available for Junior Kindergarteners and Kindergarteners at each school. Schools have 2 - 5 classrooms, each of which can have up to 20 Junior Kindergarteners or Kindergarteners.
- **Column B:** This estimate is based on the number of Junior Kindergartners currently enrolled, plus the average number of students who typically repeat Kindergarten for a second year.
- **Column C:** Estimated total remaining seats available for new students entering through the lottery.
- **Column D:** The number of siblings can vary from year to year, so this estimate is based on last year's lottery.
- **Column E:** The number of applicants with proximity or language bonus points will vary from year to year, so this estimate is based on the number of applicants to the school who had bonus points last year.
- **Column F:** This is our best guess for the number of seats that we think will likely be open for applicants who do not have any bonus points in the Lottery. The estimate reflects the net number of seats available when Columns B, D,E , are subtracted from Column A.

As stated in this explanation, the actual results of any year's lottery can vary widely. These charts represent a mix of actual current data and historical data from last year. **Although there are a few schools with zero available seats estimated at the time of the JK/K Lottery for students without bonus points, a small number of seats do open up for students on those waitlists.**

## Do some schools have longer waitlists than others?

Yes - some schools have very short waitlists or none at all, while those that typically fill up with families, as shown on the chart above, typically have longer waitlists. A description of last year's Lottery picks is available on the SRC website (Table 3 in the 2018 Lottery Data.)

Following is the length of the waitlist that was created in last year's Lottery (held in January 2019) at the schools we are projecting to have zero seats available for families without Bonus Points.

| School | Did any students with bonus points who chose the school #1 not get in? | Total Length of Waitlist |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Amigos | Yes - 13 students | 50 |
| Cambridgeport | Yes - 2 students | 38 |
| G&P | Yes - 10 students | 46 |
| MLK Chinese Immersion | Yes - 10 students | 21 |
| Tobin M4 | Yes - 3 students | 92 |
| Tobin M5 | Yes - 3 students | 25 |

## What should be my take-away from this historical data?

⇨ **Please understand that selecting a school where we estimate that there will be zero seats available for your family will increase the risk of your child receiving a mandatory assignment.**

We encourage you to list your true first choice on your registration form; however, if all of your choices are among those with long waitlists following last year's lottery, and you do not have bonus points at any of these schools, your application could be at high risk of resulting in a mandatory assignment. Mandatorily assigned students will receive priority on the waitlist, but if you have no bonus points and your Lottery number is low, your student may never get into the program.

## Should Anyone List Tobin Montessori as a Choice?

This is exceedingly risky, because the age of entry for Tobin Montessori is 3 Years Old. **In general, there are zero seats available for our junior kindergarten and kindergarten applicants to Tobin Montessori.**

As a result, junior kindergarten and kindergarten applicants who select Tobin as a choice are placed onto its M4 (Montessori four-year old) and M5 (Montessori five-year olds) waitlists. Typically, the M4 waitlist will have over 70 students on it, and an average of 5 seats may open up for students on the waitlist; the M5 waitlist usually has over 20 students on it, and an average of 5 seats may open up for students on the waitlist.

**The vast majority of families who select Tobin as one of their choices will be *unassigned* to any of their school choices through the JK/K Lottery.**

Selecting Tobin as a first choice when there are zero seats available means that your child will be shut out of an opportunity to be assigned to that choice. This could impact the possibility of being assigned to your

second or third choices, as many schools are filled at that point. If you have a compelling need for your student to attend the Tobin Montessori, we strongly encourage you to select schools for choices 2 and/or 3 where you have bonus points, or schools that historically have more seats available following the lottery.

# Section 5: General Advice On Making Your Choices

### How should I think about my First Choice?

Your first choice school is most important, and you are most likely to get into your first choice. This is because the Lottery system will prioritize making as many first choice assignments before even considering second or third choices. Some schools become filled based only on first choice applications.

All CPS schools are good schools, and we encourage you to get to know several of them before making your choices.

> Your First Choice is Most Important.

If you are hoping to increase your chance of getting assigned to your first choice, you might want to apply to a school where your child will receive Bonus Points. However, this is optional. Your first choice should be the school that you feel would be the best fit for your family.

### What about my Second and Third Choices?

You may want to think about what combination of choices will be most likely to result in a Mandatory Assignment. For example, if all of your choices contain one of the following risk factors, you may want to switch one of them to a safer choice:

- Schools with zero projected seats for families without Bonus Points (these schools are likely to have long waitlists): Amigos School, Cambridgeport, Graham & Parks, MLK Chinese Immersion
- Choosing none of your Proximity Schools
- Choosing Tobin Montessori

There are so many hidden gems in Cambridge Public Schools—it's important to keep an open mind as you get to know what each school is like. We encourage families to learn about a variety of schools, especially if your preferred schools are among higher-risk choices listed above.

Every family will have your own priorities and preferences – there is no "right" way to participate in the Lottery. If you have any questions, the Student Registration Center is here to help.