

## NEW YORK CITY NURSERY SCHOOLS

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BY LIZ PERELSTEIN AND ANGELA PENG

School Choice International

The day after Labor Day. For New Yorkers with pre-school aged children, it is a day that has been dreaded for the entire summer. It is the start of an arduous and 9 month long process of getting their children into their chosen NYC nursery school. Most applications are available between the Tuesday until the Thursday after Labor Day. But there are schools, and their scarcity deems these the most desirable, that run out of applications within a day, some even by noon on the day after Labor Day. Some parents spend the dreaded day hitting redial on their phones, receiving busy signals on the other end for hours. Getting through may get them an application, but in some cases getting through to a person only means getting a chance at an application that is distributed by lottery. It is quite a competitive sport to win a spot for your child in a good nursery in New York.

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### PRIVATE SCHOOLS

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For children between 18 months and four years of age by the following September, there are quite a number of toddler and nursery school programs available. In addition to schools that offer only nursery programs, there are also those that start with nursery programs and go up to grades six, eight, nine, or twelve. These ongoing schools maintain nursery divisions primarily as a service to their community, so most spots are taken by the children or siblings of students and alumni, primarily designed by the schools to support the family within the school, and to feed the older grades during less competitive times.

But for anxious parents, enrolling a child in a nursery within an ongoing school may mean one less time to go through the dreaded private school application process. Few parents are able to step away from the experience sufficiently to recognize that virtually all children do get placed in the end; that which nursery school your child attends doesn't really matter in his or her ultimate educational destination; and, perhaps most importantly, that each opportunity to move a child to a new school results in a better match between child and school, as children reveal their strengths and weaknesses, academic and otherwise, with age.

Among the nursery schools in New York, educational philosophies are notably different from one to another. There are Montessori schools, progressive and traditional schools, and some schools actually combine various approaches. As young children do not express preferences, it is important for parents to figure out which educational philosophy reflects their own value system as parents, and, to the extent that it is possible, which would be the best match for the child they know.

### **Montessori Schools**

In the early 1900's, Maria Montessori created a strict approach for teaching young children. Montessori schools are based on her approach, which focuses on reality instead of imaginative play. The learning focuses on practical life tasks, sensory tasks, and early language and math skills. In a Montessori classroom, children most likely will work by themselves or in small groups using specialized materials developed for their program. Not many Montessori schools in New York City follow the strict approach created by Maria Montessori. Most schools take an integrated approach, encouraging students to socialize and giving plenty of support during the separation process.

### **Progressive Schools**

Nursery schools of this type believe that children learn through discovery and teamwork. Children work with all kinds of materials such as sand, water, puzzles, blocks and etc to learn pre-math, pre-reading and other skills. Socialization and free play is highly encouraged. Children are not expected to learn any particular skills in a prescribed time. Rather, it is believed that when they are ready, they will develop the skill.

### **Traditional Schools**

In traditional nursery schools, children work on specific skills such as counting, phonics, and letter and number recognition. The curriculum has specific goals and it is usually teacher-led curriculum. Most programs prepare children with reading and math readiness skills. Many schools have curricula based upon a combination of different educational philosophies. They may offer structured lessons designed to teach specific skills as well as encourage children to learn through play.

### **Feeder Schools**

Some parents believe that certain nursery schools automatically “feed” children into specific desirable private schools. While this may have been more true several years ago when admission was less competitive and when schools had a more local approach to selecting their applicants, it’s no longer the same nowadays. Now, most schools take

qualified applicants from all over the city, and prefer representation from a variety of nursery schools in their entry level classes. While admittedly, some nursery program directors do have stronger and long standing relationships with particular independent schools, admission could never be promised based upon these relationships, and neither nursery nor ongoing schools could compromise their reputations as the concept would imply.

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## **PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

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With the exception of nursery schools intended for children with special needs, all nursery schools for children under four are private in New York City. Public schools for mainstream children begin at age 4. However, as not all public schools have pre-K programs, so parents who want to enroll their 4 year olds in public schools must consider schools outside their neighborhood and go through an application process. The process for public Pre-K (4 year old) applications starts the previous March. Children must be four by December 31st. Families receive acceptance from Office of Student Enrollment by May and the second round deadline is in July. While places are available for all children whose parents submit in a timely manner, first choice may not be available.

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## **PRIVATE NURSERY SCHOOL LOCATIONS**

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Upper West, Upper East and Morningside Heights have many excellent nursery schools to choose from. There are also many good nursery schools in Lower Manhattan and East 20s and 30s. There are a few schools that have multiple locations throughout the city. Outside of Manhattan, Riverdale, Brooklyn Heights and Park Slope all have excellent schools; facilities as well as outdoor space tends to be more luxurious once you leave Manhattan.

For more information regarding the specific schools in your neighborhood or to get the school directory, please visit the Parents League's website [www.parentsleague.org](http://www.parentsleague.org).

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## **APPLICATION PROCESS**

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The key to getting into a nursery is having a realistic list of schools to apply to. In today's intensely competitive environment, usually eight to ten schools is the norm. The best lists include a few top tier (or highly competitive) schools, a few schools that are reasonable goals, and a few that will definitely accept your applications. Although this

sounds more like the process of applying to college than to nursery school, New Yorkers begin everything early. In light of the tremendous number of applications each school receives every year, the long waiting lists and, basically, the panic that fuels the continuation of this cycle, parents can protect themselves by applying to a sufficient number and range of schools.

#### WHAT MATTERS:

Schools are looking for families who share their values and can contribute in many ways to the school's community. They are looking for parents who know their children, enjoy spending quality time with their children, and help shape their lives in positive ways.

Parents must take an active role in the application process, attend school tours and open houses, and behave respectfully during their visits to the schools.

#### APPLICATION TIMETABLE:

It is ideal to start the search for a nursery in September, on the day after Labor Day, the day that everyone else begins the nursery school application process. This is exactly one year before the actual enrollment date. Registering before that time is impossible.

The acceptances are usually mailed between the last week in February and the first week in March. Parents must reply by the middle of March. Dates vary slightly each year and specific dates are listed each year on the ISAAGNY website (<http://www.isaagny.org/>). The New York City nursery schools that are members of the Independent Schools Association of Greater New York require parents to sign enrollment contracts. Once a parent has signed a contract, they have committed to that school. No other NYC school will consider their child and they will not be released from the contract.

#### FOR LATECOMERS:

For the many families who learn that they will be moving to NYC after the nursery school process has begun, encountering native New York families already well along in the application process can be extremely stressful. However, once the first round of applicants is notified and have accepted places, latecomers to the process ultimately are able to find nursery school places for the following September. Although newcomers to NYC may have to wait, and face quite a bit of uncertainty as children of their acquaintances get accepted in nursery schools, places do emerge during the course of the spring and summer when New Yorkers are transferred out of the city, buy homes in the suburbs, or give up their coveted

spots for various reasons. Families who are patient will find that options become available well beyond the regular nursery school admissions timetable.

School Choice International ([www.SchoolChoiceIntl.com](http://www.SchoolChoiceIntl.com)) is happy to help any families who have difficulty with nursery school admissions either during, or after the standard timetable.

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