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The 12 most prestigious preschools in New York City and how to get in, according to parents and consultants

Robin Madell Updated 10 hours ago



The Washington Market School is located in Lower Manhattan. Courtesy of Julian Wright

The private preschool landscape in New York City is arguably the most competitive in the nation.

Education consultants Wendy Levey and Cindy Chanin selected the 12 most prestigious in the city.

Picks include West Side Montessori School, First Presbyterian Church School, and St. Ann's School.

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New York City has arguably one of the most competitive landscapes for private preschools in the nation.

Manhattan-based educational consultant Wendy Levey told Insider that a lot of this has to do with what comes after preschool: "In order to get into private school kindergarten in NYC, children must have preschool experience so that they have social skills, pre-reading and math skills, and have the ability to share, be independent, and to be active learners," she said.

Levey said that certain preschools in NYC are tougher to get into than others not just because of the large number of applications they get but because of their class sizes, or how many students they allow in each year. Some programs additionally have a legacy policy, much like for colleges, where students can get a leg up if a sibling or relative went to the school previously. If a school is affiliated with a church or synagogue and takes from its own constituency first or your family needs financial aid are also factors that can work for or against an applicant.

"Getting into any preschool can be arduous when numbers are high and spaces are few," Levey said. Why parents fight for a spot knowing the odds often comes down to reputation — maybe

celebrities or well-known business leaders bring their kids there, or, possibly more importantly, the preschool's notorious for landing its graduates spots at the most prestigious private schools in the city.

Cindy Chanin, the LA-based founder of [Rainbow EDU Consulting & Tutoring](#) and a former Ivy admissions rep who's heavily involved with several of New York City's most sought-after private schools, advised that the best way to make your kid stand out in a sea of applicants is to enthusiastically communicate to your first-choice admissions reps that their school is your "true love" and demonstrate gratitude, such as by sending a [thank-you note](#) for considering your child's application.

[Karen Aronian](#), a parent and former NYC public school teacher who works with select families to elevate their admissions presentations, agreed with this approach. Aronian's tips include charming your school of choice by sending them "love letters" of why and how their school is *the* school for your child or family, as well as determining what you can offer the school "professionally, monetarily, in service."

"These schools differ in their approaches — parents and children who align with each school's mission, methodologies, and pedagogies are the right fit," Aronian said.

"The objective is to highlight a child's precocious abilities, originality, strengths with literacies, problem-solving and logic, creativity, talents, and social and emotional skills," Aronian added. "Preschools are cultivating a diverse community of students and families that will inform, stretch, and foster a rich learning environment."

Admittance into a top preschool requires not just a stellar picture of your child, but of you as the parent, too.

"Your presentation is essentially PR," Aronian said. "Parents should consider how they may enrich and contribute to a school's community through their volunteerism, professional, and personalized skill set."

Levey added that kids need to avoid appearing trained or coached.

"Schools really want nice families, diverse families, and families that buy into whatever the philosophy of the school is without wanting to change it," Levey said. "Families who will respect the culture of their school, bring and pick up their children on time, come to parent-teacher conferences, and participate in school activities."

Levey's final piece of advice? "Never tell an admissions director that your child is 'gifted' at age two because they know the alphabet," she said. "Learning the alphabet at two is rote learning. Ask that same child to start at the letter 'M' — is the child still a genius?"

Levey and Chanin selected 12 preschools in Manhattan and Brooklyn that, in their experience, are the most prestigious programs around. Here's what they offer, how much they cost a year, and what the application process is like.

Upper West Side: West Side Montessori School



West Side Montessori School. Courtesy of Amy Stoney

Cost: \$32,000 to \$54,660 a year

Location: 309 W 92nd St, New York, NY, 10025

Notable facts: The school's 38 teachers represent 15 countries and speak 13 languages, and 25% of families receive tuition assistance.

The application process: The admissions process involves classroom observations, which are being conducted via [Zoom](#), and a parent interview.

Aronian shared that for her child, WSMS was the best method and the best fit for pre-K. In terms of the application itself, she said that having recommendations was key.

"Previously, they had attended a Montessori preschool outside of NYC," Aronian said. "It was indeed helpful that their preschool teachers and administrators' recommendations spoke to my child's growth and development both within and outside of the school's program."

Ilana Goldman, a political and nonprofit consultant who's had two children attend WSMS over the last 10 years, believes the best advice to get in is simply conveying authenticity.

"West Side Montessori School is a wonderful community filled with diverse families — but what we all seem to have in common is living in a very authentic way and encouraging our kids to find their own best path," Goldman said. "West Side seems to have a knack for selecting families that are equally committed to that kind of community as academics."

Website [here](#).

Online application [here](#).

The Saul and Carol Zabar Nursery School at the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan

Cost: \$23,150 to \$35,850 a year

Location: 334 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, NY, 10023

Notable facts: The school — which offers [financial assistance](#) to families who qualify — is described on its website as a "progressive preschool that embraces families from all backgrounds and cultivates a connection to Jewish values and tradition," and says that it treats families as "partners in the work that we do."

The admissions process: Admissions advises that being flexible with your [program preferences](#) — between the options of the two-day morning class, three-day morning class, five-day morning class, five-day extended class, and five-day class — makes it more likely that the school will be able to accommodate your family.

"Tours are virtual and are being scheduled now," Levey said.

Website [here](#).

Online application [here](#).

Park Children's Day School



Park Children's Day School. Courtesy of Amy Nakano

Cost: \$16,000 to \$32,000 a year

Location: 4 West 76th Street, New York, NY, 10023

Notable facts: Park Children's Day School is located on Central Park and has been in a historic 1911 school building since 2014. (The school originally opened its doors in a separate location in 1963.) The current location features original art deco touches, high ceilings, a huge gymnasium, and an outdoor experience via the park to add to the school's nature and science program.

"Park Children's Day School has a long history from when it began as Park Avenue Christian Day School, so families trust the school," Levey said. "It is a traditional school and parents get that."

"What has been unusual for our school this year is that we have

joined the mayor's initiative for Outdoor Learning as the safest way to have children in school at present," said Betsy Newell, the director of Park Children's Day School. "The street in front of school has been closed and a complete classroom (tents, rugs, furniture, book shelves, easels, etc.) is set up each morning rain or shine." Newell added that over 50% of teachers have been with the school for 20 to 45 years.

The school [posts its newsletter online](#), which can give you a window into its culture and recent activities.

The admissions process: Park Children's Day School has reformatted its [admissions process](#) due to the pandemic, and suggests that interested parents call the school to speak to the admissions office. After receiving your application, the admissions office calls applicants to schedule a one-on-one online parent meeting. Levey confirmed that open houses are currently virtual.

Website [here](#).

Online application [here](#).

Upper East Side: The 92nd Street Y (92Y) Nursery School

Tuition: \$32,400 to \$39,500 a year

Location: 1395 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY, 10128

Notable facts: The school is housed on the sixth floor of 92Y with nine classrooms, an extensive library, two outdoor terraces, and a rooftop playground.

The application process: According to Chanin, 92nd Street Y Nursery school is very hard to get into, which accounts for so many families turning themselves inside out to get a foot in the door. "Per one of my clients, certain families resort to lobbying support from a higher-up at JP Morgan who is one of many big benefactors of the school," Chanin said.

[Alina Adams](#), an educational consultant and the author of "[Getting into NYC Kindergarten](#)," said that knowing someone with pull at 92Y is a big plus. "If this person can vouch for you and your child, it will give you a leg up," Adams said. "Some people join the Y and seek out relationships with people in power there before they even have kids."

Levey confirmed that tours are currently virtual, and sign-up for them has begun. "Proof of COVID-19 vaccination for those 12+ must be shown upon arrival, and masks are worn by those two and up," Levey said. The school's application deadline this year is [November 5](#).

Website [here](#).

Online application [here](#).

The Episcopal School in the City of New York

Cost: \$23,000 a year for all groups

Location: 35 East 69th Street, New York, NY, 10021

Notable facts: According to the school's website, the Episcopal School is independent and nonsectarian, neither governed nor subsidized by any church. But it does have a weekly Children's Chapel where children and parents meet for songs and stories from

the Bible and world folktales that "express and support the values of the School and its community." All children come half days, morning or afternoon.

The application process: The school's admissions for the 2021-2022 school year will be conducted virtually. There will be two virtual sessions held for families that apply, with the first one in the fall — instead of a traditional tour, it will be a virtual one-on-one meeting with the admissions team. In December, January, or February, a follow-up online meeting is held to answer remaining questions. The admissions team also holds a one-on-one Zoom meeting to meet the child and answer questions.

"When interviewing live or virtually, parents should be interesting and interested," Levey said.

"Dress as though you are on an interview," she added. Don't look at your watch or your phone and ask "important questions" like, "How do you get a reserved child involved in the group?" or, "How do you teach values here?" she suggested.

Website [here](#).

Online application [here](#).

The Brick Church School

Cost: \$14,000 to \$33,300 a year

Location: 62 East 92nd Street, New York, NY, 10128

Notable facts: The Brick Church School was founded in 1940. The school is located in Carnegie Hill, an appealing location for young families with Central Park close by.

The application process: The school's website states that preference is given to children of active Brick Church members who joined at least one year prior to application to the school and siblings, but all are encouraged to apply. Tours are virtual, and you can take an eight-minute virtual tour of the school [here](#) — if you apply, the admissions team holds Zoom meetings with applicant families to share more details and answer questions, and a short video of your child is required.

Website here.

Online application here.

Downtown: First Presbyterian Church Nursery School

Cost: \$20,600 to \$33,900 a year

Location: 12 West 12th Street, New York, NY, 10011

Notable facts: First Presbyterian Church School has been active since 1952, and was founded on the Reggio Emilia educational philosophy, a child-centered approach that focuses on self-directed experiential learning. The school provides a full menu of [COVID-19 resources](#) for its families on its website, from sing-along rooms to read alouds and movement studios.

The admissions process: There will be small group tours for First Presbyterian Church School (FPCS), and Levey emphasized that applicants should be sure to review the school's [admissions video](#).

You can also see the kids and teachers in action (particularly pre-COVID-19) on the school's [Facebook page](#). Be prepared to submit a digital family portrait video as part of the online admissions process. All applications must be submitted by October 15. FPCS will send out letters of notification no later than noon on March 10, 2022.

Website here.

Online application here.

Beginnings

Cost: \$7,000 to \$35,885 a year

Location: 130 East 16th Street, New York, NY, 10003

Notable facts: Beginnings started in 1983 as a playgroup of five

toddlers held in the founding director's East Village apartment. It moved to its present location the next year. The top floor houses a massive [Materials Center](#) of natural and found objects donated by NYC residents and businesses for classroom project use.

The admissions process: You can attend an adults-only (with proof of vaccination) in-person tour one-on-one or with both parents. A second option is a virtual tour followed by a call with an admissions staff member to ask questions and learn more.

There's also a virtual option for the second part of the application process, which is traditionally a playground visit to have school staff meet with the parent and child. Levey said that this year, children will be interviewed at [Stuyvesant Park](#) for 20 to 30 minutes, or if you prefer not to meet in person, you can substitute a two-minute or less candid video of your child playing with a favorite toy or engaging in an activity. The application process concludes with an optional phone or email conversation with a current parent.

Website [here](#).

Online application [here](#).

The Washington Market School





The Washington Market School. Courtesy of Julian Wright

Cost: \$25,000 to \$35,850 a year

Location: 55 Hudson Street, New York, NY, 10013 and 134 Duane Street, New York, NY, 10013

Notable facts: The Washington Market School (WMS) was featured in "Nursery University," a documentary by Mark Simon made in 2008 in the midst of a baby boom.

Levey added that the school was founded by the current director, Ronnie Moskowitz, with a few neighborhood families.

"Ronnie said it was the 'old-hippie network' not the 'old-boy network' when she started the school in an article written by Victoria Goldman in 2003 called 'The Baby Ivies.'" Levey said. "In 2013, in an article by Amanda Gurren called 'Admission to Private Preschool Isn't Such a Stroll for NYC Parents,' she said Tribeca has transformed and it's more of an old-boys population."

The admissions process: The Washington Market School doesn't interview children. "We believe that putting students through formal interviews and assessments is not informative at this age," the school's website states.

The school prioritizes having parents "experience the school through the eyes of their children," and tours are virtual with a small-group discussion. The two-step process involves not only a school tour but also a chance for in-classroom observation. Prepare some questions in advance for the parent group discussion that takes place after the classroom observation.

Website [here](#).

Online application [here](#).

Brooklyn: Brooklyn Friends School

Cost: \$27,400 to \$42,400 a year

Location: 375 Pearl Street, Brooklyn, NY, 11201

Notable facts: At Brooklyn Friends School (BFS), an independent Quaker school, [39%](#) of students at the school identify as students of color, and there are two full teachers in each classroom. BFS is preschool through 12th grade.

The admissions process: The popular preschool program for three- and four-year-olds includes [legacy admissions](#). Threes children must be three years old, and Fours children must be four years old by September 1 in the year they start school. All admissions events will be held virtually this year. You can sign up for an open house [here](#).

Familiarize yourself with these for BFS preschool Threes and Fours. Note that January 7, 2022, is when required supplemental application materials are due for preschool applicants.

Website [here](#).

Online application [here](#).

Brooklyn Heights Montessori School

Cost: \$14,600 to \$43,300 a year

Location: 185 Court Street, Brooklyn, NY, 11201

Notable facts: When Brooklyn Heights Montessori School (BHMS) was first founded in 1965 with 20 children, it was only for ages three through five. Today, BHMS goes from preschool through 8th grade.

The admissions process: If you're hoping to have your child attend BHMS long term, be aware that the website states that the Twos Program and Preschool Threes are the largest entry points for the school. And once you have an admissions appointment (these are currently virtual), do your best not to cancel it — according to the school's site, "during the busy admissions season rescheduling may be difficult and is not guaranteed." Applications are made through the [Ravenna portal](#), and the parent or guardian must submit short video clips.

Website here.

Online application here.

St. Ann's School

Cost: \$48,900

Location: Willow Place, Brooklyn Heights, NY, 11201

Notable facts: A 2017 [Page Six](#) article headline stated that St. Ann's School "is where kids are groomed to be members of the bohemian elite" and described it as "a self-professed 'amusement park.'" According to the article, the school "is so sought after that it wasn't even willing to squeeze Matt Damon's kids into packed classes this school year."

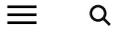
To get an idea about St. Ann's unique preschool culture — where "children shrink and follow a cat to a moonlit party on the roof; they head off on the R.V. Calypso to explore bioluminescence; they build the Great Wall; they accompany Abu the elephant from Baghdad to Aachen bearing glittery soap for their classmates" — read [this letter](#) from Cathy Fuerst, head of the preschool.

The admissions process: St. Ann's application process for the 2022-2023 application cycle "will still involve significant health and safety protocols, and there will be at least some virtual component for every age," according to the website. Admission is based on the personal interviews and results of tests done by the school.

Website here.

Online application here.

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