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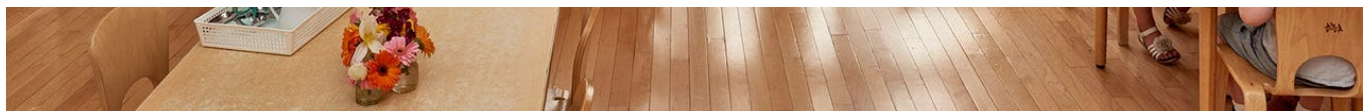
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The 12 most prestigious private preschools in New York City — and how to get in

Robin Madell Updated Sep 20, 2021, 8:31 AM





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.

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 added 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. Levey said that two years into the pandemic, more families need financial aid now, which can make it more competitive to receive.

"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, said 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? Or telling the school that your child is a dream and shares beautifully, and then on the school playdate your child grabs toys and smashes a toy over someone else's head. Better to say, 'We are working on sharing.'"

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: \$30,920 to \$54,120 a year

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

Notable facts: The school's 40 teachers represent 17 countries and speak 12 languages, and 25% of families receive tuition assistance.

The application process: West Side Montessori School is now accepting [online applications](#) for the 2023-2024 school year. Attending an open house is optional, and you can make an appointment [here](#) to attend the next open houses on October 19, December 1, or January 5.

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: \$23,440 to \$36,390 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.

"The fall 2022 tour schedule is now available, and both virtual and in-person tours are being scheduled now," Levey said. You can sign up for a tour [here](#). Once you've taken a tour, then you can request an application from the school. The deadline for the 2023-2024 school year is Friday December 9, 2022.

Website [here](#).

Online application [here](#).

Park Children's Day School

Park Children's Day School. Courtesy of Amy Nakano

Cost: \$16,500 to \$33,500 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.

The deadline for application submission is Thursday, December 15. After applying for the 2023-2024 school year, parents who are [fully vaccinated](#) will be invited to tour the school and visit with their child.

Website [here](#).

Online application [here](#).

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

Tuition: \$34,500 to \$40,700 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.

Levey shared that [after-school enrichment programs](#) offer one-hour classes, where children are escorted to and from classes by the nursery school team. A new director of admissions at the 92nd Street Y Nursery School was just named in August 2022: [Tara Ekelman](#), who was previously director of admissions and

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

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 tour registration and sign-up for the 2023-2024 school year has begun — you can sign up for a fall tour here. Tours are adults only, and after attending a tour, applications will be available.

"Proof of COVID-19 vaccination for those 12+ must be shown upon arrival, and masks are worn by those two and up," Levey said. Proof of vaccination can be emailed to vaccineverify@92NY.org. The school's application deadline for new applicants this year is December 2 and November 4 for siblings, legacies, and children of

92Y staff.

Website [here](#).

The Episcopal School in the City of New York

Cost: \$23,500 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. "Each class has two assistant teachers, with 24 teachers in total and some specialty teachers as well," Levey said.

The application process: "Tours for the parents only are one-on-one with the director of admissions, and each child's visit is a play session with the parents and director of admissions," Levey said. If you decide to apply, you should complete this [inquiry form](#). After your form is received, admissions distributes applications on a first come, first served basis. If you're offered an application, you'll

receive a link to submit it online. Children must be two years old by March 31 of the application year.

"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](#).

The Brick Church School

Cost: \$18,500 to \$34,800 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.

"Brick has an interim director, [Marie Fabian](#), as Amy Warden has left the school to head up admissions at The Stephen Gaynor School,"

Levey said.

The application process: Levey said 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 online](#).

Tours and interviewing are virtual for the 2023-2024 school year, 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 from families who are applying for their three-, four-, and five-year-olds; families with two-year-old applicants are not expected to submit a video.

Website [here](#).

Online application [here](#).

Downtown: First Presbyterian Church Nursery School

Cost: \$21,600 to \$35,900 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: Levey said applicants should be sure to review the school's [admissions video](#). Applications for 2023-2024 are now available [online](#), with a deadline of Tuesday, November 1. If you apply after the deadline, you'll still be considered on the school's wait list. Children must be two on or before August 31 of the year they enter.

"The applications received by the deadline will be placed in a lottery, and then parents will be notified if they can apply," Levey said. "Whether tours and or interviews will be virtual or in person is still up in the air." Open houses are online and adults only, with registration opening only after the school's lottery has passed.

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. FPCS will send out letters of notification on March 2, 2023.

The nursery school's director of enrollment and advancement is [Ashleigh Roscishewska](#), whom the school's website suggests

contacting directly with additional questions via email at aroschewska@fpcnyc.org, or by phone at (212) 691-3432.

Website [here](#).

Online application [here](#).

Beginnings

Cost: \$10,000 to \$37,320 a year

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

Notable facts: The current director, [LeeAnn Valvano](#), has been at the school for 18 years, but 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 school is inspired by the Reggio Emilia educational approach for 18 months to five years old.

The admissions process: Online applications are [now available](#) for the 2023-2024 school year — they're part 1 of the application process and are due on October 14 at 5 p.m. On October 17, a computer-

generated lottery will take place to continue in the application process. Part 2 of the application process is a "child information form," which the school will send to families that are selected in the lottery.

After submitting the child information form along with the application fee, the next step is to schedule a family visit, which will occur between November 2022 and February 2023.

You can attend a private adults-only (with proof of vaccination) in-person tour one-on-one or with both parents, which takes 30 minutes. 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. Children who attend in person should have a negative rapid test on the day of their family visit. 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: \$26,250 to \$42,350 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. "Moskowitz has just stepped down and the new head of school is [Carrie Kries](#), though Moskowitz will stay on this year doing exmissions," Levey said.

"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 application is available online for the 2023-2024 school year. "The one-hour school visit is for parents only and consists of a tour, a classroom observation, and a roundtable discussion with other applicant families and Washington Market enrollment staff," Levey said. "Prepare some questions in advance for the parent group

discussion that takes place after the classroom observation." Levey added that before school starts, the school makes home visits to see the children and their families.

Website [here](#).

Online application [here](#).

Brooklyn: Brooklyn Friends School

Cost: \$38,700 to \$40,200 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. You can sign up for an open house, which according to Levey will have live and virtual options.

Familiarize yourself with these [open house and application dates](#) for the 2023-2024 school year for BFS preschool Twos, Threes, and Fours. Note that November 18 is the primary application deadline for preschool applicants. The final application deadline is on January 12, 2023. If additional spots are available, the school will contact interested parents. Applications are submitted on [Ravenna](#).

Website [here](#).

Online application [here](#).

Brooklyn Heights Montessori School

Cost: \$30,500 to \$45,900 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 eighth grade. Elise Mattia is the director of admissions.

The admissions process: The admissions season has opened at BHMS, and according to Levey, virtual sessions will be offered for the 2023-2024 school year. 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 scheduled (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 (the school will send instructions to the parent or guardian). You can sign up for a virtual information session and tour [here](#).

Website [here](#).

Online application [here](#).

St. Ann's School

Cost: \$48,050 a year

Location: 26 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."

"There are 60 children in the preschool — a threes program and a fours program, both of which are 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., five days a week," Levey said.

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 2023-2024 application cycle will be fully remote this year, according to Levey. Admission is based on the personal interviews and results of tests done by the school. Diana Lomask is the director of admission — you can read her welcome letter and criteria for admission [here](#).

Website [here](#).

Online application [here](#).

This article was originally published on Insider December 19, 2020. It has been updated with new information.



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