

Puzzle Pieces Learning Academy PCS Enrollment Policy

I. ENROLLMENT

A. GENERAL POLICY

Enrollment in a public charter school is subject to Board Policy and Superintendent's Rule 5150, Resident and Nonresident Student Eligibility.

Puzzle Pieces Learning Academy Public Charter School is a public school that:

- Is nonsectarian in all its programs, policies, and operations.
- Is a school to which parents choose to send their children.
- Is open to all eligible students on a space-available basis. If the number of student applicants exceeds the predetermined student capacity of PPLA PCS, a lottery shall be used to fill available seats Pre-K seats are determined by an award number from MSDE.
- The Charter School is tuition-free for all students who are eligible to attend any other Baltimore County Public School (BCPS) tuition-free in **Grades Kindergarten (K) through 5th**. Enrollment in the Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) program is tuition-based and determined by an income-driven scale, **unless the student is referred to PPLA PCS from Baltimore County Public Schools, or any other stipulations outlined in this document apply.**
- Is subject to federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination.
- Is in compliance with all applicable health and safety laws.

B. LOTTERY POLICY

- Eligibility for enrollment must be consistent with the school's approved grade levels.
- PPLA PCS shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, creed, sex, ethnicity, economic disadvantage, sexual orientation, mental or physical disability, age, ancestry, athletic performance,¹ or special need. However, PPLA PCS has a weighted lottery system with specific specifications based on demographics. The demographics include:

Under Maryland law (Md. Educ. Art. § 9-102.2),

(a) A public charter school may give greater weight to a student's lottery status for certain students, including:

- (1) Students eligible for Free or Reduced Price Meals;
- (2) Students with disabilities;
- (3) Students with limited English proficiency;
- (4) Homeless students, as defined under the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act;

PPLA PCS will hold preference to 2-4.

- PPLA PCS will provide an electronic version of the student application for review and posting by June 30th on the website and closes January 15 of each year.
- PPLA PCS shall give public notice, of at least one month, of all application deadlines. PPLA PCS will set the application and lottery window each year. Public notice can include, but is not limited to, posting to website notices, announcements in school or community association newsletters, postings on community bulletin boards, radio or television announcements, and notices in local newspapers.
- In cases where there are fewer spaces than eligible applicants, the charter school shall hold an enrollment lottery for all such applicants.
- PPLA PCS may exempt from the lottery students who meet specific criteria and students currently enrolled in the charter school.

Specifically, the following categories of applicants may be exempted from the lottery:

- a. Siblings of students currently admitted to or attending PPLA PCS (see also Maryland Law § 9-102.2(a)(5));
 - b. Children of a charter school's founders (so long as the total number of students allowed under this exemption constitutes only a small percentage of the school's total enrollment); and
 - c. Children of PPLA PCS employees (so long as the total number of students allowed under this exemption constitutes only a small percentage of the school's total enrollment and the employees of BCPS school system.
- All lotteries shall be open to the public, with assistance from SchoolMint, and with notice given to all applicants at least one week prior to the lottery.
 - PPLA PCS will keep record of all names of applicants, names of accepted students, and an ordered weighted waitlist after the lottery is conducted.
 - Students currently and/or referred to PPLA PCS from Baltimore County Public Schools to participate in Pre-K 4 programming

Enrollment for Pre-K and K-5th Grade During Non-Lottery Periods

In Maryland, public charter schools, like PPLA PCS, are permitted by state law to use a lottery system for admissions when the number of applicants exceeds available spaces. This is established under the Maryland Public Charter School Program, found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Education Article, §9-101 et seq.

Pre-K Enrollment

If you're looking to enroll your child in **Pre-K** outside of the main lottery window, you can join our **"Pre-Enrollment Interest Pool"** at any time by submitting an application to PPLA PCS. Please note that joining this pool doesn't guarantee acceptance; it places your child in a pool from which selections may be made. When a Pre-K seat becomes available, we'll conduct a **mini-lottery process** to fill the opening.

What is a Mini-Lottery Process?

A **mini-lottery process** is a smaller version of our main lottery. We use it to fill any Pre-K seats that open up after the main lottery, typically due to withdrawals, no-shows, or mid-year vacancies. This process is only held when there are open seats and draws from the pool of interested families who have joined the Pre-Enrollment Interest Pool. The same rules and weightings (such as those for siblings, or income or educationally disadvantaged applicants, as permitted by Maryland law, specifically **Education Article §9-102.2**) apply as they do in the main lottery.

K-5th Grade Enrollment

For **Kindergarten through 5th grade**, the lottery period for the upcoming academic year typically **ends on January 15th** and **opens up in late summer of July each year**. For families seeking enrollment during periods outside of this designated lottery window, you may submit an application to PPLA PCS. Once we receive your completed application, we'll keep it on file for future consideration and review applications in the order they are received. Should a space become available, enrollment will be offered to applicants based on their submission date, subject to any applicable priority criteria permitted by Maryland law.

The enrollment lottery is conducted at the end of Open Enrollment.

C. WEIGHTED LOTTERY PROVISIONS (IF IMPLEMENTED BY PPLA PCS AND APPROVED)

PPLA PCS may utilize a weighted lottery system to prioritize the enrollment of educationally disadvantaged students, in alignment with Maryland Charter School law, federal regulations, and the guidelines established by the Maryland Alliance of Public Charter Schools for MMP CSP grant applicants. Any implementation of a weighted lottery by PPLA PCS is subject to prior review by its authorizer, Baltimore County Public Schools.

Purpose and Application of a Weighted Lottery:

A weighted lottery serves to enhance admission opportunities for all, or a specific subset of, educationally disadvantaged students. This means that educationally disadvantaged students may receive multiple chances in the lottery, while other applicants receive one opportunity. A weighted lottery will not be used to create a school that exclusively serves a particular student

demographic or to guarantee a specific number of seats for any subset of students, with the exception of geographic preferences as outlined below.

PPLA PCS, may be a recipient of proposed CSP funds, is responsible for adhering to CSP statutes and non-regulatory guidance applicable to CSP-funded schools.

Definition of Educationally Disadvantaged Students:

For the purpose of a weighted lottery, "educationally disadvantaged students" encompass individuals who are economically disadvantaged (e.g., eligible for Free or Reduced Price Meals), English learners, students with disabilities, students experiencing homelessness, and neglected or delinquent students.

Allowable Categories for Weighting under Maryland Law

Should PPLA PCS implement a weighted lottery, it may assign greater weight to a student's lottery status if the student meets any of the following criteria:

- **Economically Disadvantaged:** A **20% weighted consideration** will be applied for students who are economically disadvantaged (e.g., eligible for Free or Reduced Price Meals). For students applying to grades K-5, economic disadvantage will be determined based on Baltimore County income metrics. For Pre-K students, economic and educational disadvantaged will be determined based on PPLA PCS metrics aligned with MSDE.
- **Geographic Proximity:** A **10 % weighted consideration** will be applied for students residing geographically close and median income to the school at 4416 Wilkens Ave, Baltimore MD 21229. This geographic preference applies to grades PreK through 5th, **who reside within the community of the school's location and median income** will also receive this weighted consideration. For students applying for K through 5th it will be the median income for Baltimore County residents. For Pre-k 3 and 4 it will be the median income of Baltimore City residents, and will give preference to Baltimore County families for the Pre-K 4 program during the lottery process.
- **Students with Disabilities:** A student identified as having a disability.
- **Limited English Proficiency:** A student demonstrating limited English proficiency.
- **Homelessness:** A student experiencing homelessness, as defined under the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

Enrollment for Pre-K through 5th Grade

- **Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K):** Pre-K enrollment will continue to follow established eligibility

criteria, utilizing Baltimore City income metrics for determining economic disadvantage. Preference is given to students or residents of Baltimore County for the Pre-K 4 program during the lottery process. **Educationally and Economically** disadvantaged students K-5 will be determined based on MD ed. law, geographic location to the school and median income for Baltimore City residents for Pre-K 3 and 4. Preference is given to Baltimore County residents for Pre-k 4 program and median income.

- **Kindergarten (K) through 5th Grade:** Enrollment in grades K through 5th via the charter education pathway is exclusively available to **Baltimore County residents** based on the lottery selection process. **Baltimore City residents will not be eligible to matriculate through the charter education pathway for grades K through 5th. Educationally and Economically** disadvantaged students K-5 will be determined based on MD ed. law, geographic location to the school and median income for Baltimore County.

Economically and Educationally Disadvantaged Students

Economically and educationally disadvantaged students are those who face barriers to academic success due to financial hardship, limited English proficiency, disabilities, or other circumstances that impede access to equitable educational opportunities.

This population includes, but is not limited to:

1. Economically Disadvantaged Students:

- Students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals (FARMS) under the National School Lunch Program based on family income and household size.
- Students from households receiving assistance through programs such as SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid.
- Students experiencing homelessness or housing instability.
- Students in foster care or who are wards of the state.

2. Educationally Disadvantaged Students:

- All students described above are “economically disadvantaged.”
- Students who are English Learners (ELs), or whose primary language is not English and who are developing English proficiency.
- Students with disabilities, including those with an active Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan.
- Students who are migratory, experiencing frequent school transitions due to seasonal employment.
- Students with interrupted formal education due to circumstances such as immigration, displacement, or trauma.

This definition is aligned with federal guidance under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Charter Schools Program (CSP), and may be used to inform equitable outreach,

enrollment, and weighted lottery practices.

Please refer to previous language stated on metrics and criteria for

clarity. **Geographic Preference**

PPLA PCS proposes a geographic attendance area with a median income that is equal to or less than the median income of Baltimore County. If approved, PPLA PCS may provide guaranteed placement through a lottery to students who live within the specified geographic attendance area for up to **10%** of the available space. The exact percentage must be proposed by PPLA PCS. See previous information for clarification.

What are the requirements for a “ Weighted Lottery?”

Requirements for Implementing a Weighted Lottery:

- Before a weighted lottery can be conducted, PPLA PCS's Lottery and Enrollment Policy, detailing the weighted lottery, must include and address the following for review and approval:
 - The specific categories and sets/subsets of students to receive weights in the lottery.
 - The amount of weight to be applied to each category/set/subset (e.g., two or more chances to win the lottery).
 - The rationale/justification for the amount of weight to be applied.
 - Any proposed limit on the percentage of available seats to be filled using a specific weight. For example, an authorizer might limit a weight for a specific subgroup to a certain percentage of seats (e.g., 20% of available seats for limited English proficiency students, as per a scenario). This is distinct from, but must align with, the overall federal requirement that weights not be used to create schools exclusively serving a particular subset of students. Geographic preferences are limited by state law to up to 35% of available space.
 - A description of the mechanism(s) and/or processes that will be utilized to carry out the weighted lottery, including how BCPS will oversee the process.
- If PPLA PCS is an MMP CSP grant recipient, this policy must be included with the Eligibility Form and Grant Application for review and approval. Before funds are released, a signed charter contract including the approved lottery policy is required. Any subsequent amendments require authorizer and MAPCS approval.

Outreach and Non-Exclusivity:

- Utilizing a weighted lottery does not relieve PPLA PCS from its responsibility to ensure a broad strategy of outreach, recruitment, and retention for all students, including educationally disadvantaged students.

- If there are fewer weighted students applying than the number of seats potentially influenced by a weight in a multi-stage lottery (like the geographic preference scenario), the remaining seats in that stage are available to all lottery entrants. A weighted student may be selected for such a group of seats or remain on the waitlist with all lottery entrants.

Enrollment Priorities at Puzzle Pieces Learning Academy PCS: Pre-K 3 and 4 (adopted by MSDE)

At PPLA PCS prioritizes enrollment in our prekindergarten program to ensure we serve the children who can benefit most. Here's how we determine enrollment priority:

Prekindergarten Slot Expansion

When expanding our prekindergarten slots, we give priority to 3- and 4-year-olds who fall into one of the following categories:

- Tier I children.
- Children with disabilities, regardless of family income.
- Children from homes where English is not the primary language.

Increasing Enrollment

Our goal is to continually increase the proportion of Tier I children enrolled in our full-day prekindergarten program:

- **3-Year-Olds:** The percentage of enrolled Tier I children who are 3 years old will grow each year until all eligible 3-year-old Tier I children are in a full-day prekindergarten program.
- **4-Year-Olds:** Similarly, the percentage of enrolled Tier I children who are 4 years old will increase annually, aiming for all eligible 4-year-old Tier I children to be in a full-day prekindergarten program.

Understanding Family Share Contributions

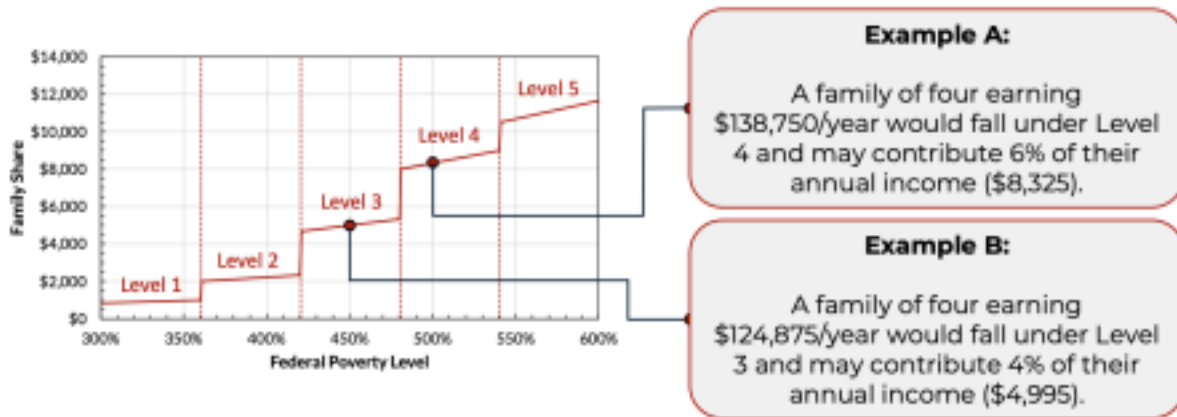
At Puzzle Pieces Learning Academy PCS, family share contributions are determined by a tiered system:

- Tier I families: Families in this category do not have a family share contribution.
- Tier III families: These families are responsible for paying the full cost-of-care.
- Tier II families: For Tier II families, the specific amounts for the State Share, Local Share, and Family Share are determined by a Sliding Scale. This presentation will focus on explaining this sliding scale in detail, as it defines the co-payment amount for Tier II

families.

Family Contribution for Tier II Households

The family contribution gradually increases with increased income, with sharp cost increases at the boundaries between sliding scale levels.



*Using the FY2022 Federal Poverty Guideline for a family of four of \$27,750.

Domicile and Enrollment Eligibility

Domicile and Enrollment Eligibility for Pre-Kindergarten Students

Enrollment in PPLA PCS is contingent upon a student's eligibility to attend a public school in Baltimore County, Maryland, as determined by domicile in accordance with Maryland law.

For all students, including those enrolled in the Pre-Kindergarten program, continuous enrollment and matriculation through the Charter School are expressly contingent upon the student maintaining bona fide domicile within Baltimore County, Maryland.

It is understood and agreed that:

a. **Domicile Requirement:** A student must reside with a parent or legal guardian who is domiciled in Baltimore County, Maryland, to be eligible for enrollment and continued attendance at the Charter School. "Domicile" shall be determined in accordance with the provisions of the Education Article, Annotated Code of Maryland, specifically **Md. Code Ann., Educ. § 7-101**, and any applicable regulations of the Maryland State Board of Education (e.g., **COMAR 13A.08.01.02**).

b. **Ineligibility for Out-of-County Pre-Kindergarten Students to Matriculate:** Notwithstanding any initial enrollment in the Charter School's Pre-Kindergarten program, students who do not establish and maintain bona fide domicile within Baltimore County, Maryland, **are not eligible to matriculate to Kindergarten or subsequent grades within the Charter School.** Such students' enrollment shall cease at the conclusion of their Pre-Kindergarten year, or upon discovery of non-domicile during their enrollment.

c. **Verification of Domicile:** The Charter School shall implement procedures for verifying

student domicile, in collaboration with the County Board, consistent with BCPS policies and Maryland law. The Charter School shall require documentation of domicile upon initial enrollment and may require re-verification of domicile at any time deemed necessary, including but not limited to, prior to a student's matriculation from Pre-Kindergarten to Kindergarten.

d. **Consequences of Non-Domicile:** If a student is found not to be domiciled in Baltimore County, Maryland, they shall be removed from the Charter School's enrollment consistent with BCPS policies regarding non-resident students. The Charter School shall promptly notify the parent(s) or legal guardian(s) of such a determination and the effective date of disenrollment.

e. **No Exception for Pre-Kindergarten:** Enrollment in the Pre-Kindergarten program, whether funded by the State, County, or other sources, does not create an exception to the domicile requirement for continued enrollment or matriculation into subsequent grades.