

Cambridge Preschool Program Ongoing Enrollment Policy

(April 2025)

Introduction:

The Cambridge Preschool Program (CPP) is a mixed-delivery universal preschool system designed to ensure that all families that reside in the city of Cambridge have access to free, high-quality preschool programming for four-year-olds. (A limited number of three-year-olds are also served.) Through this program, families select from among a variety of preschool options during an application period each fall, and are subsequently matched with a preschool program, based on families' rankings, using a matching algorithm system.

Purpose of this Policy:

Although the vast majority of CPP children are matched with, and subsequently enroll in, preschool programs through the annual CPP application period that occurs each fall, some eligible families may apply for a CPP seat after the application period has closed and/or once the school year has begun. These families may include, for example, families that move to Cambridge after the match has occurred; families that become CPP-eligible mid-year; or eligible families who become aware of CPP after the match has occurred. This policy is designed to provide guidance for placing these families in a CPP preschool program outside of the annual match periods.

Summary of CPP Annual Application and Match Periods: Families applying for a CPP seat for the subsequent school year can apply in the following match periods:

- Fall – This is the primary CPP Application period. The CPP match is completed in the late fall / early winter, after the application period closes. The vast majority of CPP seats are allocated during this match.
- Spring – A second, smaller match occurs for families who missed the fall application deadline. Families that apply during this match have access to any CPP seats that remain available after the fall match.
- Summer – Affiliate match occurs. This match only includes families affiliated with Harvard and MIT/Biogen programs.

Defining Ongoing Enrollment Eligibility:

Most families that apply for CPP enrollment outside of the standard application periods above are either:

- 1) seeking a CPP seat for the school year that is in-progress;
- 2) or they are applying during the summer for the upcoming school year.

For either of these scenarios, families may apply for a CPP seat if:

- They recently established residence in Cambridge (after the CPP match has been completed).¹
- A change in their financial circumstances has made them eligible for CPP “priority”² status.
- Their child is not enrolled in preschool, or is attending a non-CPP preschool, and the parents have decided to enroll in CPP.

CPP will not consider an ongoing enrollment application for a non-priority family whose child is already enrolled in a CPP preschool as a “private pay” family unless the family recently established residence in Cambridge. CPP will not consider ongoing applications for the school year in progress after May 1st of each year, except in rare situations with families with “priority” status.

Procedure:

Identifying Available Seats: At three points during each school year the CPP enrollment team will survey all CPP providers to identify any unfilled preschool seats that the provider would like to make available to newly enrolling CPP families. This will occur once in November and again in February for the school year in progress, and once in June for the upcoming school year. Providers will be given 10 business days to complete the survey. CPP partners that have multiple sites will identify available seats per site, rather than

¹ Families that are planning to move to Cambridge cannot submit CPP applications until they have established residence in Cambridge.

² Children are eligible for “priority” status if their family is eligible for free/reduced lunch (for CPS); their family’s income is at or below 65% of area median income; they are experiencing homelessness or are in foster care.

across their network. In addition to the tri-annual survey, CPS and DHSP programs will update seat availability at least monthly during meetings with the CPP enrollment team.

Providers that make seats available for ongoing CPP enrollees should note that:

- CPP is unable to pay for unfilled seats.
- CPP providers may try to fill those seats with private-pay families as long as they notify the CPP Enrollment team as soon as a seat has been filled.
- CPP providers should avoid discussing CPP seat availability directly with families and should instead direct interested families to complete a CPP application and/or contact OEC with questions.
- Available CPP seats may also be filled by families who applied and were approved for a CPP program transfer.³

Additionally, providers that choose to submit ongoing enrollment seats must attest that the program is prepared to enroll new CPP children (qualified staff are in place, for example) and must agree to:

- Offer interested families the opportunity to tour the school and to meet with program staff to learn about the program and have their questions answered.
- Develop a transition plan for the child and family that will ensure that children and families are warmly welcomed into the program.
- Notify CPP enrollment staff if they fill any of the available seats with non-CPP children so that the OEC can adjust their records accordingly.

Family Application: Eligible families may apply for a CPP seat through ongoing enrollment by completing the online CPP application or contacting the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) for support.

Assigning Seats to Ongoing Enrollees: When a family has completed the application, CPP enrollment staff will contact the family within ten business days⁴ to review available options⁵. Families will be informed of all CPP programs that have open seats remaining,

³ Please refer to the CPP Program Transfer Policy for details.

⁴ There are times during the year when OEC pauses the processing of ongoing enrollment applications, such as periods during which the annual CPP match is underway.

⁵ When multiple families are seeking seats simultaneously, CPP will prioritize placement of families who meet the CPP “priority” criteria. If multiple priority families are applying simultaneously, these families will be

and families will have up to ten business days to select and rank three programs that they feel will best meet their needs.⁶ Within five business days of the family's completing their ranking, CPP enrollment staff will contact the programs that were selected, starting with the family's first choice, to confirm the availability of the seat. Once seat availability has been confirmed, families will have 10 days to accept the seat. Once the family has accepted a seat, the CPP enrollment staff will work with the family and the selected program to facilitate the enrollment process.

prioritized based on the date that they submitted their enrollment application, with those who applied earlier receiving priority.

⁶ As is the case with the general lottery process, three-year-olds who do not have priority status will only be offered seats at DHSP and CPS, if seats for three-year-olds are available within those programs.