

Time for Kindergarten! Now what?

Your guide to starting your child in Portland Public Schools from the Arleta PTA.

By Denise Castañon

You've got a child who's going into kindergarten next year! If it's your first child or first time enrolling into Portland Public Schools (PPS), you may be confused as to what your next step is. Here's some helpful information to get you started.

Your Neighborhood School

If you are all set on selecting your neighborhood school for your child, things are pretty simple going forward. Attend your neighborhood school's Connect to Kindergarten information session and enroll your child in the spring. (Please do this in the spring! While your child is guaranteed a spot at your neighborhood school, it's so much better if administrators and teachers have an accurate enrollment count well before the start of the new school year!) You can find out which school is your neighborhood school [here](#).

Other Options

If you want to explore other schools for your child, certain PPS schools use a lottery system for enrollment. These schools offer dual language immersion programs or a special focus on certain subjects like the arts or science.

For the 2019-2020 school year the lottery will take place February 8 to March 8, 2019. Attend a Connect to Kindergarten session at all the schools you are considering lottery into. (In fact many lottery schools require you attend one of the sessions to be eligible for the lottery.)

You can find ALL PPS neighborhood, language immersion, and focus option schools' Connect to Kindergarten dates: [here](#)

If your neighborhood school is **Arleta**, congratulations! This K-8 school has dedicated teachers and staff, and a strong, engaged parent community. Join our **Facebook page Arleta School and Families United** for updates on all the fabulous things happening at Arleta from musical theater productions to the garden club to LEGO League to the basketball teams for girls and boys — all extracurriculars started and run by parents. **Arleta's Connect to Kindergarten sessions are:** **Wednesday, February 13**, 6 pm-7:30 pm and **Wednesday, April 10**, 6 pm-7:30 pm. Child care will be provided both nights. PTA parents will also offer **school tours** on every Friday morning at 8:20 am, starting on **March 8 through April 26**. (No tour during spring break, March 29) And please feel free to come to the Arleta Family Picnic on May 23. Playground meet and greets for incoming kinders and their families will also be scheduled for August.

And for more information about kindergarten readiness, information about before and after care, and more go [here](#).

Things to Keep in Mind About the Lottery

Don't count on winning the lottery. Many families apply and only a limited number of slots are available. You can see how many spaces are available at each school [here](#) (scroll to the last page). Even if you choose to participate in the lottery, plan on attending one of the Connect to Kindergarten events at your neighborhood school as well.

Also make sure your #1 choice school is your top priority, if you get in or on a wait list it will most likely be to your first choice. Finally, get familiar with SchoolMint, the online lottery enrollment form, well before the deadline. Once the lottery is open, sign up and create an account [here](#).

How to Decide on a School

Looking at school rankings online only tells one side of a school's story. While no one school is perfect, many neighborhood schools are often perceived as not being "good enough" by incoming parents. But digging deeper can provide a better understanding of a particular school's strengths and weaknesses. Visit the school's Facebook page or website. Ask your neighbors who have children attending the school to share their experiences. And to really get the best sense of a school, visit it in person. Attend a PTA meeting or go on a school tour.

One More Option: Public Charter Schools

Public charter schools are another education option for families within PPS. The enrollment for public charter schools varies by school. Contact any charter schools you are interested in to find out more about their enrollment process:

- **Arthur Academy K-5**
7507 SE Yamhill St., (503) 257-3936
- **Emerson School K-5**
105 NW Park Ave., (503) 525-6124
- **KairosPDX**
3635 N Williams, (503) 567-9820
- **LeMonde French Immersion K-8**
1010 SW 3rd Ave., (503) 208-3198
- **Opal School K-5**
4015 SW Canyon Rd., (503) 471-9902
- **Portland Village School K-8**
7654 N Delaware Ave., (503) 445-0056
- **Trillium School K-12**
5420 N Interstate Ave., (503) 285-3833

Stories from Arleta Families

Addie Benfield was a teacher in West Linn when her daughter was entering kindergarten in 2013. As a teacher she knew how important those first years of school are for kids. “What I was wanted for her was to have a dynamic early childhood experience,” she says. “I was looking for her to have opportunities to create, explore, move her body, practice social skills — not sitting for hours doing canned curriculum.”

Addie had to decide between bringing her to the school where she taught in West Linn or Arleta. Wanting her daughter to have friends in the neighborhood, she chose Arleta. “It turned out to be a great fit for my daughter as well as for meeting my expectations,” Addie says. “The connections that she has made at Arleta have rooted us deeper in our neighborhood.” And in terms of the quality of kindergarten instruction Addie was impressed. “My daughter was painting, singing, writing, building, calculating, reading, discovering, playing, learning, growing. Her classroom buzzed with energy and ran smoothly.”

Addie’s daughter is now in 4th grade and is having fun competing on the Oregon Battle of the Books teams. Her younger daughter will start at Arleta in the fall. “In her mind, she is already there,” says Addie “It’s where we head on weekends to use the playground, where we walk each day to bring sister to/from school, where her best neighbor friend is enjoying kindy this year.”

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When Allison Vazquez’s oldest child started school in 2012, her family decided to look beyond their neighborhood school. “I knew funding in PPS was low, we had friends who attended a charter school, and I was worried about my first kid sitting at a desk all day,” she says.

Allison enrolled her child at Southwest Charter (now called Cottonwood) because of the place-based education philosophy that puts an emphasis on protecting nature and civic involvement. But when it was time for her daughter to start kindergarten, the family considered taking another look at their neighborhood school, Arleta.

“We had visited a couple times and had talked to parents of Arleta students from the neighborhood. We made a pros/cons list. The pros included less car travel, making friends in the neighborhood, walking to school, people we talked to loved the school,” says Allison. “Cons, we would miss the place-based education model.”

Allison ultimately decided to enroll her kids at Arleta, and her family has been happy with the transition from a charter to their neighborhood school. Her kids are now in 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade. And Allison has gotten very involved with Arleta. “I joined the PTA the first year we started at Arleta,” she says. “The second year I was fundraising coordinator, and third and fourth year vice president. I think that was the first time Arleta PTA had a fundraising focus.”

“We love the community, teachers, and my kids have learned a lot and excel,” says Allison. “It hasn't been perfect, but my kids are doing well and enjoy going to school — most of the time.”

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Before Chelsea Doré's oldest son started kindergarten 2014, her family looked at a number of options. “We wanted a really academically engaging (and challenging) environment, so we applied and were accepted at Marylhurst in Oregon City, which has very small class sizes and a high level of academic rigor,” says Chelsea. “Within PPS, we looked at [lottery schools] Winterhaven for its math/science focus and Buckman, which in addition to decent test scores, had a vibrant community feel. We did successfully lottery into Buckman.”

Her family ended up choosing to go to Arleta instead, looking past historically mediocre test scores. “We believe strongly in every kid's right to a good public education, and it felt really hypocritical to think about doing differently for our kids instead of being involved and trying to be a part of the solution at our neighborhood school,” says Chelsea. “There are so many benefits to attending your neighborhood school, and we loved the idea of our kids being able to walk to school, make friends right here in the neighborhood. Plus, once we visited Arleta and talked with the assistant principal and met the K teachers, we saw that we could find a lot of what we loved about the other schools right here in our own neighborhood.”

Chelsea now has a 4th and 1st grader at Arleta and has gotten very involved with the school, starting with being a classroom volunteer and attending PTA meetings. “I was impressed with the work they were doing and really enjoyed the people,” she says. “It didn't fit any of the negative PTA stereotypes, everyone was very chill and genuine. So I became the vice president the next year and I've been the PTA president this year and last. I also coach my 4th grader's Oregon Battle of the Books team.”

Chelsea has a hard time just picking one thing that she likes best about the Arleta community. “The students are great — so many unique and curious kids! I have seriously been blown away by their talent from seeing the band play at the First Grade Parade to watching the Theater Club performances, to shopping the student vendors at the Holiday Festival,” she says. “And I feel incredibly thankful for so many of the teachers my kids have had. The multitude of dedicated parents that generously give their time to the school consistently impresses me, too.”