

Summary guide to Houston schools

Introduction

Houston provides an assortment of both public (free) and private (fee paid) schooling. Public schools are run by Independent School Districts (ISD's) and there are several in the Houston area which will be discussed below. Private schools are not run by an ISD and have their own governing body. For public school you must live in residential zone, private schools have no zoning boundaries so you can live anywhere.

Private schools fall in to 2 categories: International (non-faith based), and faith-based. Faith-based schools teach around a specific faith, rather than multiple faiths and range from Catholic, to Baptist to Muslim and many more. Fee's range from reasonable to very expensive, but class sizes are smaller than in public schools. Detailed information on Private Schools can be found below.

The schooling system starts officially with Kindergarten and finishes in Grade 12. Children must be 5 on or before the 1st of September of the enrolling year in order to start Kindergarten – this requirement follows through for all grades. This varies from most other countries where children start school the year in which they turn 5 – meaning they start school aged 4. Some elementary schools offer a Pre-K program for 4 year old's, but this is not a State requirement and the programs usually fill up as soon as enrollment starts.

E.g. A child born AFTER September 1 2014, will go into Kindergarten in Fall 2019.

Things to do before you leave home

There are a number of things that can be done before you leave to make enrollment a smoother process:

- Have your children vaccinated to state requirements and recorded in English. Your Destination Services Consultant (DSC) will provide you with the current information. Vaccinations can be done here but it's easier if you do it before you leave.
- Request current teachers provide a report and recommendation, again in English, for your child. If the school provides transcripts that's helpful too. If you can get the last 3 years reports from the school (in English) that's even better.
- Bring birth certificates, not necessarily required but can be helpful.

Once you arrive

Your DSC will assist you throughout the enrollment process, but here's a summary of what to expect.

Public schools

Public schools have specified enrollment dates which vary depending on the school. On the assigned date you need to go to the school that you are zoned for, and complete large amounts of paperwork – some schools have this available on-line for you to complete prior to registration. You will need to bring with you:

- Parents passports
- Children's passports and, if you have them, birth certificates
- Proof of residence – a copy of your lease or utility bill
- Any reports and transcripts that you have
- Proof of vaccinations

You will probably have to wait to see the admissions people who will process your paperwork, have the vaccination records checked by the school nurse, and then provide you with any information that you need.

If you are arriving in the middle of the school year, then your DSC will make an appointment with the Admissions team to register your children. There will be a lot less waiting.

Occasionally, public schools will have reached capacity before you enroll. When this happens, the school for which you are living in zone for will register your child and then advise you that your child will be placed at another school nearby, and which school that will be. You do not have a choice which school they are sent to, this is assigned by the ISD. You will drop your child off at the registered school, and then they will get on a bus which will take them to the overflow school. You can, of course, take them directly to that school should you choose.

Independent School Districts in the Houston area

- Houston ISD <https://www.houstonisd.org/>
- Spring Branch ISD <https://www.springbranchisd.com/>
- Katy ISD <http://www.katyisd.org/Pages/default.aspx>
- Fort Bend ISD <https://www.fortbendisd.com/>

Private schools

Each private school has a different registration process, but they will all require reports and transcripts from your child's previous school (if applicable), copies of passports and visa's for both parents and children, and a registration fee and semester fee in advance. Your DSC will discuss the process for your choice of school, and most of them have on-line registration. Many of the private schools also require testing before a place is offered to your child.

The only school in Houston that operates a different grade system is the British International School of Houston. As they are based on the British curriculum, they base their grades on the “year in which the child turns 5”.

There are many private schools in Houston and, as mentioned above, they are split into 2 categories.

International schools – most popular

- British International School of Houston <https://www.nordangliaeducation.com/our-schools/houston/british-international>
 - Fees from \$19900 - \$27990 per year for full time based on age
- Village School <https://www.nordangliaeducation.com/our-schools/houston/village-school>
 - Fees from \$19925 - \$28075 per year
- Awty International School <https://www.awty.org/>
 - Fees from \$21335 - \$26910 per year

There are many other, smaller, international schools. Some go from Pre-K through Grade 12, but others just cover a specific age range. For more information please discuss your requirements with your DSC.

Faith based schools

There are 100's of private faith based schools in Houston. For more information please ask your DSC who will provide lists based on your preferred faith.

What if you want to put your child in to a different grade?

As the US schooling system starts later than many other countries, you may find that you child is a grade ahead in your home country, then the grade to which they will be assigned here. Both public and private schools can test and assess your child based on English language skills, academic ability, and social development. Unless your child is fluent in English it is highly unlikely that a grade change will be granted. In public schools it is rare that a grade change will be permitted, private schools have a little more flexibility.

Transportation

Public schools are required to provide free transportation if you live more than 2 miles from the school. This will be in form of the traditional “yellow school bus” you’re probably familiar with. The routes will be based on the student’s home addresses and are mapped so that the child does not have to cross any major road in order to get home. It’s really a wonderful service!

Most private schools offer private school buses for an additional fee, and they tend to be expensive. They will pick up and drop off at specific locations based on convenience rather than home addresses, and these locations are limited. You will be required to take your child to the drop off location and collect them from the bus. They will not allow a child to leave the bus unless there is someone there to meet them.

Special Needs

Public schools are required to provide for all children, including those with special needs. This may not, however, be able to be accommodated at the school you are in zone for. If you have a child with special needs, the school and/ or the ISD will assess your child and advise which school is best suited for them and register them accordingly. Katy ISD has a particularly excellent special needs program.

In certain circumstances your child’s requirement may simply be too high for the public schooling system. In which case there are many private special needs schools available throughout Houston. Some deal with minor to moderate special needs, and a couple deal with children with extreme special needs. For more information please discuss with your DSC.