



Early Access Process Policy

Revised September 25, 2024

Pursuant to House Bill 14-1102 and CSL 22-20-204(2), young children who meet the criteria for the Colorado Department of Education’s definition of “highly advanced gifted” may benefit from early entrance into kindergarten (for children aged four) or first grade (for children aged five) and may therefore be eligible for early admittance to Thomas MacLaren School. Such children constitute the top one or two percent of the gifted population, and score in the 97th percentile or above on normed cognitive assessments, as well as achievement tests in reading, writing, and math, and must demonstrate school readiness at a level that is substantially above same-aged peers—i.e., a child could satisfy the criteria for giftedness but not be *highly* gifted and would therefore be ineligible for Early Access. Early Access is intended to serve only a very few children, those who require rigorous academic acceleration; as such, potential candidates are screened using a number of normed assessments, and formal decisions are made by a team of school professionals in collaboration with parents to ensure that every child’s needs are met. The final decision as to whether or not a child is academically, emotionally, and behaviorally ready to enter the desired grade level at Thomas MacLaren School is at the sole discretion of the school. Because the Early Access process is time-intensive, applications are only accepted within the lottery enrollment window outlined below; students who are placed on the wait list after the lottery are ineligible for Early Access.

The Early Access process at Thomas MacLaren School

1. Parent/guardian gathers a portfolio of documents that collectively constitutes a body of evidence for the child’s enrollment in the desired grade level. A complete portfolio includes the following:
 - a. A signed letter from parent/guardian articulating the case for considering Early Access for their child.
 - b. A set of work samples. Work samples should constitute a genuine reflection of the child’s own thought process: worksheets, etc., are not strong indicators. The body of evidence requires compelling work samples in each of these areas:
 - i. Reading ability
 - ii. Writing ability
 - iii. Higher-level math skills
 - iv. Problem-solving ability
 - v. Creativity
 - c. A copy of the child’s birth certificate.
 - d. A letter of support from the child’s current or most recent preschool teacher, if applicable.

- e. A signed records-release form, if applicable.
 - f. A \$250 evaluation fee to pay for cognitive and aptitude assessments. This fee is waived for families who qualify for Free or Reduced-price Lunch. (See below.) The fee will be returned in the event that the Review Committee's initial screening does not advance the child to the evaluation process.
 - g. Proof of Free or Reduced-price Lunch qualification (Economic Survey or Qualification Letter), if applicable.
2. Parent/guardian submits the Early Access application portfolio to the school. Thomas MacLaren School begins accepting portfolios immediately after October Count of each year. (October Count Day is a moveable date at the start of every October that is the state of Colorado's Official Pupil Count Date; it marks the beginning of MacLaren's enrollment season.) As with Letters of Intent submitted as part of the normal Enrollment process, Early Access portfolios submitted no later than 10 days before the lottery will be entered in our lottery, which will take place on January 31 (unless this date falls on a weekend, in which case it would be on the Friday preceding January 31) of each year. Portfolios submitted after that deadline will not be accepted.
 3. A MacLaren Early Access Review Committee (composed of the Head of Lower School, the Director of Student Services or designee, the Gifted and Talented Coordinator, and a teacher qualified to teach Kindergarten and 1st grade) screens the application to determine whether or not it meets the requirements to proceed to the evaluation process.
 4. If the Review Committee determines that the application warrants moving forward in the process, the child's name is placed in the January 31 (unless this date falls on a weekend, in which case it would be on the Friday preceding January 31) lottery *pending formal qualification through Early Access as described below*.
 5. The child undergoes standardized achievement testing as determined by the committee.
 6. If the achievement testing merits cognitive testing, the school administers formal aptitude and cognitive testing.
 7. Concurrently, the child is observed by the Review Committee in order to assess his or her social interactions relative to prospective peers.
 8. Within 60 days of the school first receiving the application portfolio, the Review Committee makes a formal decision about the child's eligibility for Early Access and gives written notice to parents/guardians.
 9. If granted Early Access, the child's parent, in collaboration with the school team, develops an initial Advanced Learning Plan in order to meet the child's needs upon entrance to MacLaren.

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