



C H A R T E R   S C H O O L

YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School  
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## **Student Admissions Policy and Process**

**Admissions Policy.** In accordance with the Charter granted to YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School by The School District of Philadelphia, YouthBuild Philadelphia admits out-of-school youth between the ages of 18 and 20 who are residents of the City of Philadelphia.

**Eligibility for enrollment.** In order to be eligible for enrollment in YouthBuild Philadelphia, applicants must—

- be at least 18 years old, but not older than 20 years, on the first day of the school year,
- be a resident of Philadelphia,
- have dropped out of school and not have received a high-school diploma, and
- successfully complete the four-stage enrollment process demonstrating both punctuality and motivation to attend the school.

**Definition of “Dropout”.** Applicants are considered to have “dropped out of school” if they meet one of the following criteria:

1. They did not attend school for the last quarter (April, May, and June) of the prior school year. This is demonstrated in one of the following three ways:
  - by having a Withdrawal code of either W4C (whereabouts unknown) or W6 (ten or more consecutive unexcused absences) entered in the School Computer Network (SCN) indicating that they were withdrawn from the roll of their previous school;
  - by having any other Withdrawal code entered in the SCN before April of the prior school year without a subsequent re-enrollment code entered; or
  - by having an Active status at their schools in the prior school year but without active attendance during the last quarter (April, May, and June) of that year.
2. They have less than 17.5 graduation credits at the end of the prior school year. This would indicate that, being at least age 18, they would not be able to earn the 23.5 credits required by The School District of Philadelphia to graduate in the coming school year and, thus, are liable to be dropped from the roll of their current school as being overage.

3. They are out-of-school youth in a high-risk category. This is demonstrated in either one of two ways:
  - by being enrolled in the prior school year in one of The School District of Philadelphia’s alternative/credit-recovery schools, or
  - by having a Withdrawal or Transfer code entered in the SCN indicating that they were being withdrawn or transferred to a non-traditional/alternative educational placement.
4. They were not enrolled in the SCN and state that they have dropped out of school and would not be able to graduate in the coming school year. This would be demonstrated by applicants self-certifying that they have dropped out of high school.

Conversely, applicants would *not* be considered to have “dropped out of school” and thus *not* be eligible to enroll in YouthBuild Philadelphia, if they (1) had attended school during the last quarter of the prior school year, (2) had accrued more than 17.5 graduation credits, and (3) did not meet at-risk criteria.

**Enrollment period.** YouthBuild Philadelphia enrolls new students only one time in any school year and that is at the start of the school year in September after the students have successfully completed the school’s four-stage admissions process.

**Recruitment.** Applicants are recruited Citywide. From February through July of each year, YouthBuild Philadelphia actively recruits applicants for the following school year through fliers, targeted mailings to social-service agencies and other community organizations, as well as with paid advertisements on public transportation and social media and in local newspapers. In addition, we seek and receive referrals from the City’s Office of Re-entry, the District Attorney’s Office, the juvenile justice system, detention centers, The School District’s Re-engagement Center, the Department of Human Services, and shelter systems. A large number of applicants learn about the School each year by word-of-mouth—from relatives, friends and neighbors who have attended YouthBuild Philadelphia.

**Four-stage admissions process.** There are four stages to becoming enrolled in YouthBuild Philadelphia. They are:

- **Stage 1: The *Application***  
Applicants can complete the YouthBuild Philadelphia Application Form online at [www.youthbuildphilly.org](http://www.youthbuildphilly.org) or complete a hard-copy form at the school. Applications are available in either English or Spanish. Applications are accepted from mid-February through July 31, prior to the start of a given school year. As long as applicants meet the three main eligibility criteria (*i.e.*, age, residency and proof of out-of-school status), they are invited to the next stage of the process.
- **Stage 2: The *Re-engagement Facilitation Session***  
Eligible applicants who have submitted an Application are invited to attend a mandatory Re-engagement Facilitation Session (RFS). At the RFS, applicants learn about (a) the school program, (b) the graduation requirements, and (c) the

requirements for admission and enrollment paperwork. Applicants must be on-time to the RFS. RFS's are advertised widely in advance (*e.g.*, the School website, at meetings, on Facebook, through flyers), and they are scheduled for maximum accessibility and convenience on weekdays, weekends, evenings. If applicants are not on time, they are re-scheduled for another RFS. Applicants will continue being invited to an RFS until the final RFS, which typically occurs in early August. If an applicant does not attend the mandatory RFS, they will not continue to the next stage.

The RFS is a time for applicants to assess if YouthBuild Philadelphia is the right fit for them at this time and to determine if they want to continue with the enrollment process based on what they have heard. Because the School only enrolls one cohort of students per year (with no back-filling of slots or waiting-lists), it is important that applicants understand the expectations of the School and be committed to the program at that point in time so that they do not inadvertently take an available slot from someone else who does want to be a part of our program.

The RFS is designed to reflect YouthBuild Philadelphia's welcoming climate and culture. It highlights the supports offered to students who have struggled with school in the past, with an emphasis on the human-services supports available through our program (including supports with mental-health issues, learning disabilities, and personal barriers). These sessions are conducted in a small-group format to encourage questions and reduce embarrassment for quiet and shy applicants. In addition to the dissemination of critical information about the School and the admissions process, other goals of the RFS for applicants are to:

- begin to form connections with other applicants to create peer supports and cohesion
- get excited about re-engaging with their education, and
- have a warm point of contact between an application and the beginning of school.

At the RFS, YouthBuild Philadelphia staff are available to guide applicants through how to obtain required paperwork (such as proof of age), including where and how to get it. In addition, if an applicant is experiencing financial hardship in obtaining necessary enrollment documentation (*e.g.*, a copy of a birth certificate costs \$35), the School will provide financial assistance to the applicant. Moreover, the School will provide tokens to applicants who need assistance with transportation. Because the goal of the RFS is to encourage re-engagement with school, YouthBuild Philadelphia allows applicants to reschedule attendance at these sessions multiple times if necessary.

▪ *Stage 3: The Intake Meeting*

Intake meetings are scheduled in person with the applicant at or after the RFS. At this meeting, applicants sit one-on-one with a staff member and are asked

questions about themselves, along with some self-reflection questions. Applicants must be on-time to the intake meeting. Once an applicant attends an RFS and an Intake Meeting, they are automatically invited to the final stage of the admissions process, Mental Toughness Training. If applicants are not on time for the intake meeting, they are re-scheduled for another meeting. If applicants do not attend the re-scheduled intake meeting, they will not continue to the next stage. Intake meetings are scheduled up until approximately a week before Mental Toughness Training begins.

The Intake Meetings provide an important personal touch-point between applicants and School staff. They allow (a) staff to individually encourage applicants to begin to think through potential barriers to re-engaging with their education (*e.g.*, childcare, housing, and/or legal issues) and (b) applicants to ask questions about their situation and the enrollment process. (If an applicant is successful in enrolling as a student, the information obtained at the Intake Meeting will be used by a Case Manager in assessing the new student's needs.) In addition, at the Intake Meeting, applicants are provided with detailed written information about Mental Toughness Training, including the dates, times, and expectations as to rules, dress code, behavior, etc. (None of the staff members who conduct Intake Meetings are involved later in any part of the admissions process, so there is no opportunity for bias.)

- **Stage 4: *Mental Toughness Training***

Applicants attend half-day orientation sessions for between 6 and 8 days at the end of August, called Mental Toughness Training. They must be present, on time, and participate in each day of Mental Toughness Training. If applicants are not on time and do not have a valid excuse for their absence or tardiness (*e.g.*, documentation from a physician, hospital, detention center, court, etc.), or if they violate the stated rules, those applicants can no longer continue on in the admissions process. In that event, each former applicant is given a packet of information on other programs for out-of-school youth and told that, so long as they do not exceed the age limit for eligibility, they can reapply for admission in the next year.

The goals of Mental Toughness Training are to help ensure that the School is the right fit for the applicants, and to prepare the applicants for the rigor of the YouthBuild Philadelphia program. These goals are accomplished by (a) staff explaining in detail the program's components, benefits and expectations through a series of workshops and assemblies, (b) staff attempting to inspire all applicants to believe that they can have successful futures, and (c) having applicants demonstrate their motivation to return to school. The primary methods through which an applicant's motivation to return to school is determined are attendance and punctuality.

YouthBuild Philadelphia places an enormous amount of value on attendance and punctuality in our enrollment process because this is the most objective/least subjective indicator that applicants are ready and motivated to commit themselves to an intensive, accelerated program and post-program placement. (While the field of motivation research is complex and layered, several studies make the link between motivation and persistence at goal-related activities.) Moreover, because the School's rigorous program is only between 11 and 15 months long, it is imperative that students attend regularly.

To eliminate any financial barrier to daily attendance at Mental Toughness Training, the School provides all applicants with SEPTA tokens for transportation every day.

Moreover, data throughout our School's history shows that attendance in the first few weeks of school is highly linked to program success: if a student has above 90% attendance in the first two sessions of school (the first 12 weeks of programming), they graduate at a rate of 93%; if a student has below 60% attendance during that time period, they graduate at a rate of 11%. Importantly, all of our college and employment partners agree that attendance and punctuality are the top indicators of success in postsecondary settings. Helping students establish this expectation has enormous benefits: it helps students know that they can re-engage with a program fully, instills them with important work habits, and helps them start the school year with a feeling of success.

**Notification of admission.** Applicants are notified on their admission to the School in-person on the last day of Mental Toughness Training.

**Enrollment lottery.** Typically, all applicants who have successfully completed the School's four-stage admissions process are enrolled in YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School. However, from time to time, there are more applicants who have successfully completed the School's admissions process than there are openings available in the School. In those cases, YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School uses a lottery to determine which of those successful applicants are enrolled as students. If necessary, the lottery is held on the last day of Mental Toughness Training, and the successful lottery applicants are notified in-person immediately.

That lottery process consists of numbering an alphabetized list of all remaining eligible applicants, and then using an online program to generate a randomly-ordered list of all the numbers assigned to the applicants. The successful applicants then are identified by the series of randomly-ordered numbers, starting with the first randomly-ordered number on the list generated.

YouthBuild Philadelphia has one point of entry for each school year, at the end of Mental Toughness Training. Thus, there is no "waiting list." In any year in which a lottery was required,

the School will provide a copy of the list of unsuccessful applicants, at any time during the term of its Charter, within 10 days of a request for it from the Charter Schools Office.

**Required documentation.** YouthBuild requires that the following documents be submitted before enrollment:

- *Charter School Student Enrollment Notification Form*
- *Proof of age*  
Any of the following is acceptable to document proof of age: birth certificate; notarized copy of birth certificate; baptismal certificate; copy of record of baptism, notarized or duly certified and showing the date of birth; a valid passport; a prior school record indicating the date of birth; or a notarized statement from parents or another relative indicating the date of birth.
- *Proof of residency*  
Any of the following is acceptable to document proof of residency: driver's license; PennDOT identification card; current utility bill; a deed; a lease; current credit card bill; property tax bill; or vehicle registration.
- *Home Language Survey*
- *Parent Registration Statement*  
A sworn statement attesting to whether the applicant has been or is suspended or expelled for offenses involving drugs, weapons, infliction of injury, or violence on school property.

**Immigration status.** An applicant's right to be admitted to YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School may not be conditioned on the applicant's immigration status, and YouthBuild Philadelphia may not ask about the immigration status of an applicant as part of the admission process.