



Admission and Enrollment Policy

The Cottonwood School (the “Charter School”) is committed to providing quality education to all students who wish to attend, in accordance with applicable law. Based on available resources, the Charter School’s capacity may be limited. In the event applications exceed capacity, a public random drawing (“Lottery”) will be held to determine admission.

The Charter School will implement this policy in compliance with the anti-discrimination requirements of Education Code section 220 regarding protected classes. In addition, enrollment preferences will not limit enrollment access for pupils with disabilities, academically low-achieving pupils, English learners, neglected or delinquent pupils, homeless pupils, or pupils who are economically disadvantaged, as determined by eligibility for any free or reduced-price meal program, foster youth, or pupils based on nationality, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. (Education Code Section 47605(e)(2)(B).)

The purpose of The Cottonwood School’s Governing Board approval of the Admission and Enrollment Policy is to accomplish the following:

1. Establish the procedures for admission and enrollment in The Cottonwood School in accordance with the Charter School’s charter petition and applicable law.
2. Establish the procedures under which The Cottonwood School will conduct the Charter School’s public random drawing/lottery in the event that applications for admission exceed the Charter School’s capacity.

Eligibility and Application: The Charter School is a nonclassroom-based charter school that operates solely as an independent study program. Admission to the Charter School is open to any student who resides within the boundaries of El Dorado County or a county adjacent to El Dorado County (Placer, Alpine, Amador, and Sacramento). The Charter School will admit all students who wish to attend, so long as it has the capacity to serve them in accordance with Education Code section 47605(e).

A student who is expelled from any school for the offenses listed in Education Code Section 48915(a) or (c), if documented in CALPADS or otherwise known to the Charter School, shall not be permitted to enroll in the Charter School during the period of expulsion.

Application Procedures

1. Determining Capacity: The Charter School's Board or Superintendent will annually determine the maximum enrollment by "grade level" (by specific grade level or encompassing all grade levels served) for each school year based on, among other factors, the annual budget, staffing, applicable legal requirements, and available resources prior to the start of the Open Enrollment Period. The Superintendent may update the Charter School's capacity throughout the year as needed to meet the Charter School's evolving needs.
2. Open Enrollment Period and Application Deadline: The Board or Superintendent will set an Open Enrollment Period each year. Applications (one per student) will be accepted during the publicly advertised Open Enrollment Period each year for admission for the following school year.

Current Families Required to Timely Confirm Intent to Return: Families with currently enrolled students must submit a form/application, provided by the Charter School, to confirm their intent to return to the Charter School for the next year and/or continue with their current teacher by the end of the Open Enrollment Period to remain enrolled in the Charter School for the following school year. If an enrolled student fails to provide this form/application, they will not have guaranteed admission for the following school year as a currently enrolled student. This means the student loses their spot and will have to submit another application if they are interested in enrolling in the Charter School for the following school year.

3. Determine if Lottery is Needed: Following the close of the Open Enrollment Period, applications shall be counted to determine whether the Charter School has received more applications than it has capacity.
 - If there are more spots available than applicants, the Charter School will not conduct a lottery. The Charter School will admit all applicants and notify them of their admission.
 - If the number of pupils who wish to attend the Charter School exceeds the Charter School's capacity, admission for the impacted grade level(s) will be determined by a Lottery conducted in accordance with the procedures set forth in this Policy and applicable law. Admission preferences will only be extended consistent with this Policy, the Charter School's charter, and applicable law.

Lottery Procedures: If a lottery is necessary, the Charter School will conduct a lottery during the spring semester before the academic year for which enrollment is sought, following these procedures:

1. Enrolling Current Students: Students currently enrolled in the Charter School who timely confirm intent to re-enroll are exempt from the lottery and are guaranteed enrollment in the Charter School.

Admission preferences in the case of a public random drawing shall be given to students in the following order:

1. Siblings of students admitted to or attending the School ²;
2. Students who are the children of teachers and staff of the School
3. Residents of Buckeye Union School District

2. Notice about Open Enrollment and Lottery

Public notice of the Open Enrollment Period and public random drawing rules, deadlines, dates, and times will be communicated on the admission applications and on the Charter School's website.

Public notice for the date and time of the public random drawing will also be posted once the application deadline has passed. The Charter School will inform parents/guardians of all applicants and all interested parties of the rules to be followed during the public random drawing process via mail or email at least two weeks prior to the lottery date. The Charter School will provide sufficient notice to applicants if the Charter School finds it necessary to change the Lottery date.

3. Application of Admission Preferences

The Board of Directors will take all necessary steps to ensure that lottery procedures are executed fairly. Lottery spaces are pulled in order of grade level by the designated lottery official (appointed by the Superintendent). Separate lotteries shall be conducted for each grade in which there are fewer vacancies than pupils interested in attending. All lotteries shall take place on the same day in a single location. Lotteries will be conducted in ascending order beginning with the lowest applicable grade level.

There is no weighted priority assigned to most preference categories; rather, students will be drawn from pools beginning with all applicants who qualify for the first preference category and shall continue with that preference category until all vacancies have been filled.

- If there are more students in a preference category than there are available spaces, a random drawing will be held within that category until all available spaces are filled.
- If all students from the first preference category have been selected and there are remaining spaces available, students from the second preference category will be drawn in a lottery, and the drawing shall continue in this manner until all spaces are filled and preference categories are exhausted in the order provided above.
- Once all seats are filled in designated grade levels and designated slots, applicants drawn through the lottery will be added to the waitlist.

²“Sibling” is defined as an applicant (1) who has at least one biological or adoptive parent in common with an Admitted pupil; or
(2) who has been legally adopted by or placed under the legal guardianship of at least one biological or adoptive parent of an admitted pupil. Step-siblings are only considered siblings if they reside at the same address as the admitted pupil.
“Child” is defined as an applicant (1) who is a Child of staff, including biological, adopted, and stepchildren, as well as grandchildren and children of domestic partners

4. Lottery Procedures

Randomly Drawing Applicants: Admission spaces are pulled by the designated lottery official (appointed by the Superintendent). Unique identifiers will be assigned to each applicant. The conduct of the Lottery will be open to the public, and families are encouraged, but not required, to attend. The Lottery may be conducted using software specifically designed for this purpose.

Transitional Kindergarten and Kindergarten: For the 2026-27 school year and beyond, the capacity for Transitional Kindergarten and Kindergarten is set at 300 students per grade level. Eligible applicants will be drawn for these grade levels first during the Lottery. Once a student is admitted, per the preferences above, their sibling(s) immediately receive the benefit of the admission preference for siblings.

Supporting Siblings: The Board recognizes that schools that serve families are more effective because of the enhanced ability for parents and children to align around a single, unified set of learning and behavioral objectives. This is why the Charter School offers a meaningful high admission preference to siblings of students admitted to or attending The Cottonwood School.

Creation of Lottery Waitlist: Once capacity has been reached, all students who were not granted admission will be added to the waitlist in the order of their draw in the lottery. This waitlist will provide students with the option of admission in the event of an opening during the current school year. In no circumstance will a waitlist carry over to the following school year.

5. Notifying Applicants After Lottery

The Charter School will notify applicants who were successfully drawn from the Lottery to offer admission. Following the Lottery, students who are offered admission to the Charter School at the time of the Lottery will have 10 calendar days, or another

deadline as may be set by the Superintendent, to complete the registration process. If the Superintendent establishes a different deadline, this deadline will be communicated to families when admission is offered after the Lottery. If a student fails to timely complete the registration process, the offer of admission will be rescinded, and the student will be added to the end of the waitlist. The spot will be offered to the next name on the waitlist.

If a student is extended an offer of admission due to one of the admission preferences noted in this Policy and the Charter School's charter, the Charter School may request supporting documentation as part of the enrollment process. The Charter School will conduct a verification of such documentation before finalizing the student's enrollment and may disqualify an applicant who submitted materially false information.

After the Lottery process, and once an offer has been accepted by the family, additional information may be requested as part of the registration process in accordance with applicable law. The Charter School shall not request a pupil's academic records or require the family to submit the pupil's academic records before enrollment in accordance with Education Code section 47605(e).

Enrollment offers are valid only for the academic year for which the Lottery is conducted. There is no option to defer an offer of enrollment. Students accepting admission must complete required independent study agreements within seven (7) days of the beginning of the school year unless otherwise advised by the Charter School.

Waitlist Management: If a spot becomes available because an admitted student declines admission or fails to timely complete the enrollment process, a student leaves the Charter School after the start of the academic year, or as spots otherwise become available, the Charter School may notify families on the waitlist in the order they appear on the waitlist.

Students selected from a waitlist will have 10 calendar days, or another deadline as may be set by the Superintendent, to complete the registration process. Applicants must complete the registration process by the deadline given by the Charter School to confirm enrollment. If a student is offered a spot in writing twice and does not respond or does not complete the application in full, the student shall be removed from the waitlist.

Students who are not offered a spot for the academic school year for which the Lottery was held may remain on the waitlist for that academic year unless the parent or guardian requests that the student be removed from the waitlist earlier.

If there is no waitlist and there is capacity during the school year, the Charter School shall admit applicants in accordance with the Charter School's charter petition and applicable law.

Waitlists shall not carry over from one year to the next. Students who have not been admitted will be required to submit a new admission application for the next school year and are required to participate in the Lottery if space is limited.

High School Academic Pathways

The Charter School offers two academic pathways in grades 9-12:

- Homestudy Pathway
- Cottonwood College Prep Academy (CCPA) Pathway

High school applicants will be provided information about both pathways and will be asked to select a pathway in which to apply, or they can apply to both pathways.

Admission into a pathway is subject to capacity. For the purposes of this policy and for incoming new students, the lottery procedures for each pathway will be executed separately, according to the procedures described above.

Homestudy Pathway: Registration forms must be completed as stated in #5 above, Notifying Applicants After Lottery

Cottonwood College Prep Academy (CCPA) Pathway:

Registration forms must be completed as stated in #5 above, Notifying Applicants After Lottery. After completing the registration forms, an intake interview will be scheduled for the CCPA Pathway. The interview will include an academic assessment. Admission into the CCPA pathway is not guaranteed.

Students not accepted into the CCPA Pathway will have a guaranteed spot in the homestudy pathway.

Existing Cottonwood students seeking to change their academic pathways will be given priority for admission into the new pathway, in accordance with the Cottonwood Board Policy, “Policy for Changing High School Academic Pathways.”

For students who have selected both pathways in their enrollment application, when offered a pathway or pathways, they will be given a deadline by which to confirm their registration or forfeit the offered admission, thereby opening up a space in the unselected pathway for other applicants.

For currently enrolled students wishing to change High School Academic Pathways, please review our Policy for Changing High School Pathways.