

## = Brooklyn Free School =

The Brooklyn Free School is a private , ungraded , democratic free school in Fort Greene , Brooklyn , founded in 2004 . Students range in age from 4 to 18 years old . The school follows the noncoercive philosophy of the 1960s / 70s free school movement schools , which encourages self @-@ directed learning and protects child freedom of activity . There are no grades , no tests , and classes are non @-@ compulsory . As of 2015 , the school enrolls 80 students and has about 24 graduates .

The school was the first free school in New York City since 1975 . It started in a rented portion of a Park Slope Methodist church , but moved to a brownstone in Fort Greene . Students participate in the design of classes and in the school 's governance , which is done at a weekly Democratic Meeting . Staff and students all have equal votes . The school is funded through sliding @-@ scale tuition , grants , and donations . In 2012 , Lucas Kavner of The Huffington Post called the Brooklyn Free School " arguably New York 's most radical center of learning " .

## = History =

The Brooklyn Free School was founded in 2004 in Park Slope , Brooklyn , and began its first academic session later that year . Its director , Alan Berger , had been an assistant principal at a Manhattan high school before he left to found the alternative school . He had read about a free school in Woodstock , New York , and was " grabbed ... to the core " . Berger published his idea for the school in the October 2003 issue of the park Slope Food Co @-@ op newsletter . About 170 people showed interest , and a group held biweekly planning sessions until the school opened in the 16th Street Brooklyn First Free Methodist Church 's bottom two floors in 2004 . The original class was thirty students with three teachers . It was the first free school in New York City since the Park Slope Fifteenth Street School closed in 1975 . By November 2012 , the school had moved to a four @-@ floor brownstone in Fort Greene . The school had 42 pupils by November 2006 , 60 by 2012 , and 80 by 2015 . As of 2015 , Lily Mercogliano is the school 's director .

## = Program =

The school operates under a " noncoercive " philosophy where students are encouraged to develop their own interests and where all learning is self @-@ directed . As such , Brooklyn Free School has no grades , no tests , and no compulsory classes or homework . Students are free to pursue the activities of their interest , such as reading alone or taking a class . Students are free to leave classes as they please . Classes have included philosophy seminars , cheese @-@ tasting , book discussions , business , astrology , psychology , videography , and Tibet . Some classes are taught by volunteers . By law , students are required to attend for 5 @-@ 5 hours a day . Principal Alan Berger contends that the school provides an education better adapted for the Internet era , as one more original , enterprising , and adaptive in the face of a changing economy .

The Brooklyn Free School holds a weekly , mandatory Democratic Meeting on Wednesday mornings . The meeting runs the school , and students and teachers alike have equal votes . Students are not required to pay attention . Meeting topics range from disciplinary grievances to admissions to computer use . A meeting chair is chosen at the beginning of the meeting and the floor is opened for propositions . Anyone wishing to discuss a school issue can call schoolwide meetings .

As of 2015 , the school enrolls about 80 students , about half of whom are African @-@ American or Latino . The school is divided into upper and lower schools , the former ages 11 to 18 and the latter ages 4 to 11 , though they are not physically separated by age . Children apply for admission and visit for a five @-@ day orientation . Students are admitted by unanimous vote of a teacher @-@ parent @-@ student admissions committee . The group first determines whether applicants ' parents support their decision to attend and whether the school can provide for the students ' needs . The school keeps a waiting list .

The school is funded through tuition , grants , and donations . The majority of students come from middle @-@ class families from Brooklyn . The private school has sliding @-@ scale tuition , and less than half pay full tuition . Founding director Alan Berger said that 20 percent paid full tuition in 2012 . In 2015 , about a third paid less than \$ 500 in tuition , and another third paid half tuition . The sliding scale 's full tuition is set at \$ 22 @,@ 000 .

The school graduated 21 students as of 2012 , and 24 as of 2015 . Students compile their own transcript and nominate themselves for graduation . Some take standardized state and college entrance tests . The majority of Brooklyn Free School graduates continue to college .

= = Reception = =

Lucas Kavner of The Huffington Post wrote in 2012 that the school serves as a model for independent , democratic schools at the forefront of renewed interest in the 1960s / 70s free school movement . He added that critics contend that the school 's environment does not prepare students for real life , and that students from families that cannot hire tutors will suffer disproportionately . The school inspired the Manhattan Free School ( founded in 2008 ) , and , in turn , was inspired by the Albany Free School ( founded in 1969 ) . Kavner called the Brooklyn Free School " arguably New York 's most radical center of learning " .

An article in The New York Times in 2006 wrote that parents hired outside tutors in concern for the school 's academic preparation . A third of the original students left within the 2004 academic year , as did the original teachers .