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Cape Cod Public Schools: A Town-by-Town Guide for Families

A free field guide from the people who actually live here.

Moving to Cape Cod with children means thinking hard about schools — because unlike most of Greater Boston, the Cape is a collection of small, independent districts rather than one large system. Here’s an honest, town-by-town look at what families should know.

The Big Picture: Enrollment Is Declining

This is the first thing to understand: Cape Cod’s public schools have been losing students for more than **20 years**. As housing costs have squeezed out young families — many of whom move inland to find homes they can actually afford — enrollment has fallen across virtually every district. This has led to school consolidations, reduced program breadth in smaller districts, and real questions about long-term sustainability in some towns.

For families moving here, declining enrollment can be a feature (smaller class sizes, more teacher attention) or a concern (fewer extracurricular options, potential future consolidations). Know which lens applies to you.

The Districts

Barnstable Public Schools

The largest district on the Cape. **Barnstable High School** enrolls over 1,100 students — the only school on the Cape that qualifies as a “large” high school by Massachusetts standards. This scale means more course offerings, a full athletic program across all sports, and more extracurricular options than smaller Cape districts. Barnstable also has strong arts and JROTC programs. Elementary and middle schools serve Hyannis, Marstons Mills, Centerville, Osterville, Cotuit, and other villages.

Falmouth Public Schools

Falmouth High School enrolls approximately 800+ students, making it one of the Cape’s larger high schools. Falmouth is generally regarded as academically strong, with solid AP and honors programs. The district serves the full town of Falmouth including East Falmouth, North Falmouth, and Woods Hole. Strong community investment and parental involvement.

Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School District

Serves Dennis and Yarmouth. **D-Y Regional High School** has faced enrollment challenges and budget pressures but remains a full-service high school with athletics, arts, and vocational offerings. The district has consolidated some elementary schools in recent years.

Nauset Regional School District

Serves **Brewster, Orleans, Eastham, and Wellfleet** for grades 7–12 (elementary schools remain town-run). **Nauset Regional High School** in Eastham has a strong academic reputation and is often cited as one of the better public high schools on the outer Cape. Smaller class sizes and a community-oriented culture. Strong arts programming.

Monomoy Regional School District

Serves **Chatham and Harwich** — a relatively newer regional arrangement. **Monomoy Regional High School** in Harwich opened a modern facility in recent years, making it one of the Cape’s newest school buildings. Good athletics and updated facilities.

Bourne Public Schools

Bourne operates its own independent district, partially due to its proximity to the bridges and somewhat different demographics than other Cape towns. **Bourne High School** is a smaller school with strong community ties and proximity to vocational options.

Sandwich Public Schools

Sandwich High School serves a growing year-round community closer to the bridges. Sandwich has been one of the more stable enrollment districts on the Upper Cape and has invested in its facilities.

Cape Cod Regional Technical High School

Worth singling out: **Cape Cod Regional Technical High School** in Harwich accepts students from all Cape Cod towns and offers exceptional vocational and technical programs — automotive, culinary, HVAC, electrical, construction, plumbing, health assisting, IT, and more. Graduates are job-ready or college-ready, and the school's reputation is strong. For families whose children have clear hands-on interests, it deserves serious consideration.

Private Options

Cape Cod Academy in Osterville offers K–12 private education and is the Cape's primary independent school option. Tuition applies, and the school draws students from across the peninsula.

Special Education and Regional Collaboration

The **Cape Cod Collaborative** provides regional special education and related services to students across multiple Cape districts — a critical resource for families with children who have IEPs or require specialized support beyond what smaller districts can offer in-house.

Frequently Asked Questions

Which Cape Cod town has the best public schools? This is genuinely subjective and depends on what matters most to your family. Falmouth and Nauset Regional are frequently cited for academic strength. Barnstable offers the most breadth due to its size. Cape Cod Regional Tech offers exceptional vocational pathways. Visit schools, attend a school committee meeting, and talk to parents in the town you're considering.

Are Cape Cod schools affected by declining enrollment? Yes — enrollment has been falling across most districts for two decades as housing costs push young families off the peninsula. Class sizes are generally smaller as a result, but some programs have been cut and consolidations have occurred. This is an ongoing challenge across the region.

Can students from any town attend Cape Cod Regional Technical High School? Yes. CCRTS draws students from all Cape Cod towns through a regional agreement. Students apply and are admitted based on interest and program capacity. It's a strong option for students with clear vocational or technical interests.

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