

C14-067

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

459 BROADWAY
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02138

CHAIR
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VICE CHAIR
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FRAN A. CRONIN
RICHARD HARDING, JR.
KATHLEEN M. KELLY
PATRICIA M. NOLAN
MERVAN F. OSBORNE

--IN SCHOOL COMMITTEE--

May 6, 2014

ORDERED:

That Superintendent's Recommendation #14-46, Approval of a Controlled Choice Policy Amendment be adopted as follows: that the School Committee amend the following policies governing the Controlled Choice Policy as follows:

- A. School Committee Order C13-147 (copy attached), June 18, 2013 Section 3d: Delete entire section that currently states, junior kindergarten and kindergarten will each be balanced for SES separately by grade level.
- B. School Committee Order C13-181 (copy attached), dated July 30, 2013; Delete the last sentence that states SES balance will apply to each grade level.
- C. Page 10 (copy attached) of the Controlled Choice Plan, dated November 2013; Delete the last sentence of 4th paragraph Section IV, B., 2.
- D. Page 14 (copy attached) of the Controlled Choice Plan, dated November 2013; Delete "separately" and replace with "jointly" in the last sentence of Section IV, B. 6.

A true copy:

Attest:


Patricia A. Berry

Executive Secretary to the School Committee

c: Superintendent
Ms. MacFarlane
Mr. Maloney
Ms. O
Ms. Sampson

Background Information

The 2013 revision to the Controlled Choice Policy directed that junior kindergarten and kindergarten each be balanced separately by grade (C13-147, Section 3d). Previously the JK and K classes were combined for purposes of SES balance. The separate assignment directive led to several anomalies in the most recent kindergarten assignment lottery. The separate assignment of JK and K students by SES resulted in reduced flexibility in assignments and a greater number of mandatory assignments. The new policy also will create jamming of the waitlist as we attempt to move students during the summer. Examples of some of the limitations caused by the new policy are as follows:

General Limitations:

- When SES is applied to a separate K class of 50, the maximum paid capacity becomes 33 while the maximum free capacity becomes 26. The assignment of SES policies to a class of 80 (the most common K capacity in schools) results in a maximum paid capacity of 53 and a maximum free capacity of 42. When the rising JK is taken into consideration it reduces flexibility even more so.
- The recent lottery resulted in occurrences where a family picked a school as a first choice and did not get in while families picking the school 2nd or 3rd did get assigned. This would happen when seats reserved for one grade level (JK or K) would be full for the number 1 pick, but seats would still be available in the other category (JK or K) and a second or third choice would get in.

Specific Limitations:

- There were 3 free number 1 picks for the Peabody School that were not assigned because JK SES percentages blocked them, but they would not have been blocked under a joint assignment policy.
- There were 11 paid JK King students that were blocked because the JK SES percentages blocked them, but they would not have been blocked under a joint assignment policy.

By returning to the original policy of calculating SES by the combined JK and K class the general limitations and specific occurrences listed above will be greatly alleviated. Rising JK classes have historically prevented JK/K combination classes from becoming overly imbalanced towards either of the two SES categories of paid or free and reduced.

It should be noted that while the recommended change will improve flexibility in assignments it will not guarantee that a repeat of the situation that occurred at the Olá Program would not occur. The small size of the Olá Program and the K Mandarin

Program could occasionally result in a sibling being denied entry, but a return to the original policy will greatly reduce these chances. Should a similar situation occur, the administrative remedies that are in place and resolved this year's problem will still be in place.

start of February and the announcement of the January lottery results. Families will be notified that they will have the greatest chance of receiving one of their choices if they register during the first registration cycle, held in January of each year. Families will also be notified that those registering during the second cycle or later will be less likely to receive placement in one of their school/program choices.

Following the second cycle, registering families will be notified of schools where there are remaining openings in their SES category and must choose an assignment where there is an open seat. Families may additionally request to be placed on up to three waitlists at that time.

2. Procedures for Assignment of Junior Kindergarten and Kindergarten Students.

CPS will determine the number of seats available for junior kindergarten and kindergarten students as follows:

The total number of junior kindergarten and kindergarten seats combined will be determined based on the number of budgeted classrooms and class size policies;

The total number of seats will be divided into two socio-economic categories based on the October district-wide percentages of JK-5th grade students as follows:

- a) students eligible for free and reduced price meals based on federal eligibility standards; and
- b) students not eligible for free and reduced price meals;

Current year junior kindergarten students and kindergarten appeals students, both of whom will be continuing in kindergarten in the next year, will be subtracted from the seats in each category. ~~Students admitted to a school/program for either the kindergarten or junior-kindergarten grade level cannot exceed the percentages as calculated above for each SES category.~~

As detailed above in section III, B (1), after reviewing the composition of the January applicants for kindergarten, the Superintendent will have the flexibility to propose to the School Committee a plus or minus percentage point range that is sufficient to allow the assignment of applicants.

3. Procedures for Assignment of Junior Kindergarten and Kindergarten Students in First Registration Cycle

- a. The CPS will determine the total number of seats available for junior kindergarten (JK) and kindergarten (K) students as follows:
 - i. The total number of available JK and K seats will be determined based on budgeted classrooms and class size policies;

assigned unless his/her assignment brings the kindergarten or the junior kindergarten enrollment over the maximum capacity number of the school's first grade. If the assignment of the first child from the waitlist would result in a grade level enrollment number greater than the first grade capacity, the Family Resource Center shall move down the waitlist until a child in the other grade is reached or leave the seat open. The established socio-economic diversity goals of this Plan will be applied the kindergarten and to the junior kindergarten grade levels separately jointly.

7. Junior Kindergarten/Kindergarten Waiting List

- a. If the District is not able to accommodate any of the parents/guardians' three choices, then the Family Resource Center will assign the student to another school where seats are available, consistent with the diversity factors in this Plan and in consultation with the parents/guardians.

The Family Resource Center will facilitate parents/guardians contacting and/or visiting the schools with available seats, to support parents/guardians in making a decision. Parents/guardians will have the option of requesting assignment to any of the schools that the Family Resource Center has identified as having a seat available. If the parents/guardians do not state a preference among the schools identified by the Family Resource Center, then the Family Resource Center will assign the student to a school where seats are available, consistent with the diversity factors of this Plan.

- b. Children who apply in the first registration cycle for junior kindergarten or kindergarten, who do not receive any of their choices will be placed at the top of the waiting list for those schools or programs. This means that students who are not assigned to one of the parents/guardians' three choices will be given priority placement on such waiting lists over students who have been assigned to one of their three choices.
- c. Children who apply in the first registration cycle for junior kindergarten or kindergarten, who receive their parents/guardians' second or third choice will be placed automatically on the waiting list for any of the choices that are higher than the one to which the child was assigned.
- d. Children who apply in the second registration cycle for junior kindergarten or kindergarten, who receive their parents/guardians' second or third choice will be placed automatically on the waiting list for any of the choices that are higher than the one to which the child was assigned. Children receiving none of their three choices in the second registration cycle will be placed on the waitlist for all three choices, but not prioritized. Waitlisted children from the second registration cycle are on the waitlist behind waitlisted children from the first registration cycle and children renewing their waitlist position (see e. below).

C13-147

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MAYOR HENRIETTA DAVIS

VICE CHAIR
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ALICE L. TURKEL

—IN SCHOOL COMMITTEE—

June 18, 2013

ORDERED:

That the following be removed from the Calendar and adopted as amended:

That Cambridge Public Schools' Controlled Choice Plan be revised to support the district's core values of academic excellence and social justice for all students, by providing equal access to an array of highly attractive, excellent quality schools, which offer students the benefits of learning alongside and engaged with a diverse group of fellow students. And further that the following recommendations put forward in the document *Controlled Choice in Cambridge a Comprehensive Review and Recommendations* be adopted:

1. Strengthen the Rules Governing Balance
2. Increase Access to Attractive Choices
3. Strengthen the Rules that Govern Access
4. Improve and Clarify Controlled Choice Practices
5. A Coherent Controlled Choice Policy will be Drafted by the Superintendent

Below is a description of the five recommendations above. Further information on each recommendation is on pages 8 – 23 of *Controlled Choice in Cambridge, A Comprehensive Review and Recommendations*, these pages follow this recommendation.

1. Strengthen the Rules Governing Balance

1a. The $\pm 10\%$ band will no longer be used for assignment purposes. For only the school year 2014/15 a $\pm 5\%$ band will be used as 'at least one strand will be opened for September 2014 (see 2b). Starting for the school year 2014/15 no band will be used as 2a is implemented.

After reviewing the composition of the January applicants for kindergarten, the Superintendent will have the flexibility to propose to the School Committee a \pm percentage point band sufficient to allow the assignment of all applicants. This \pm percentage point band will require approval by the School Committee and will be used for that one year only.

And further the $\pm 10\%$ band will continue to be used as a measurement and reporting standard for indicating the range of acceptable SES balance.

1b. Balance will be calculated separately for the lower schools and for the upper schools to best capture the most current enrollment trends and to better support the implementation of the Innovation Agenda (IA). And the remaining JK-8 school will also calculate balance separately for its upper school students.

1c. Assignments will be allocated by enrollment starting for the first grade to maximize the beneficial effects of balanced grade level cohorts. Capacity will continue to be used for JK/K assignments.

2. Increase Access to Attractive Choices

2a. The Superintendent will work with administrators, teachers and school councils of schools and programs throughout the district, that are under chosen by either or both SES categories, to develop a comprehensive plan, which may include programmatic change or other changes, designed to achieve socio-economic balance in those schools and programs. The process for addressing this issue will be presented to the School Committee by October 2013, and the plan for changes designed to achieve socio-economic balance will be proposed by May 2014 and will include a timetable for implementation. The timetable will include at least one initiative ready to enroll students for the 2015/16 school year.

2b. Additional strands will be added to existent schools West of Harvard Square. And further, at least one strand will be opened for September 2014, so that additional seats in a highly chosen school are available to families as policies to better balance schools are introduced. More strands will be added in future years as space allows, including potential additional space as buildings are renovated.

2c. District seat capacity will be closely monitored and maintained in alignment with enrollment trends.

3. Strengthen the Rules that Govern Access

3a. The current policy of Proximity Preference Points will be maintained at this time.

3b. Retain and Clarify Sibling Preference

3c. Prior to the joint School Committee and City Council Early Childhood and JK Roundtable, the school administration work with the city administration to develop a list of issues that need to be addressed with the goal of development and implementation of a universal four year old program or programs beginning in September 2014.

~~**3d.** Junior kindergarten and kindergarten will each be balanced for SES separately by grade level.~~

3d. ~~3c.~~ It is recommended that when a Special Education or English Language Learner child is placed in a substantially separate classroom, and is likely to fully mainstream, that their name is automatically placed at the top of the waitlist to be mainstreamed. If the child is ready and a seat at their grade level becomes available and the Controlled Choice requirements are met, the child is mainstreamed. Otherwise, the child remains on the waitlist in the same position. This is not intended to replace a parent's/guardian's ability to place their child's name on up to three waitlists of their own school choices.

3e. ~~3f.~~ The group of children applying in the first round for junior kindergarten or kindergarten will be placed at the top of appropriate waitlists for the schools they chose on their applications. And further, children on waitlists to transfer between schools will be placed behind the new 1st round applicants.

4. Improve and Clarify Controlled Choice Practices

4a. Lottery application will remain in January for JK/K.

4b. It is recommended that in addition to the January Lottery there be one more lottery for the students that register between February 1st and the assignment of January applicants. Following that second lottery, students will be assigned to a school their family chooses on a first come first served model. Each family will be informed about the seats available and be allowed to choose any seat available following SES balance criteria. Families can then, if they wish, place their child on up to three waitlists.

4c. It is recommended that a separate registration period for the programs available to students under the age of K eligibility be held by the FRC each fall.

4d. It is recommended that in-district transfers be accommodated until the December school vacation.

4e. Hardships:

- are only granted for the physical or emotional safety of the student.
- must be for the direct benefit of the student.
- are not granted for parent/guardian convenience.

145

June 18, 2013

Page 3

C13-147

- cannot be used to simply override the Controlled Choice Policy.
- shall not be used to gain admission to a specific school.
- may be used if siblings, upon entry, cannot be admitted to the same school.

Hardship Appeal Process for a Change of School Assignment

The Superintendent will develop guidelines to be used to determine under what conditions a Hardship Appeal will be granted. These guidelines will include specific information about what types of documentation may be presented at a hardship hearing. The guidelines will be available in print and online.

Requests for a Hardship Appeal Hearing will be made to the Family Resource Center using a Hardship Appeal Form. When the Hardship Appeal Process is appropriate a hearing will be held within six weeks of the date it is requested. If a Hardship Appeal Hearing is not appropriate the family will receive in writing a response explaining why and whenever possible a recommendation of other routes to meet their child's needs.

Three Hearing Officers that are designees of the Superintendent will hold hardship hearings and all decisions will be based on the guidelines. Families will receive written notification of the decision made by the Hearing Officers. When a hardship is granted the Superintendent's designee will work with the family to find an appropriate safe school for the student involved. The timing of a hardship transfer will be chosen to maximize benefit for the student.

If the response is not to grant the family's request then a brief explanation and whenever possible a recommendation of other routes to meeting their child's needs will be included in the letter.

Families that wish to appeal the decision of the Hardship Officers may appeal to the Superintendent or his/her designee.

Records will be kept of all requests for appeals and of all appeals heard. The records shall include but not be limited to: the child's grade level, ethnicity and SES status, the school they attend when applying, the reason for the hardship and the family's requested outcome, the Hearing Officers' response and the action taken. Once a year the School Committee will receive a report compiling this data in a way that maintains the privacy of families and students.

5a. A coherent Controlled Choice Policy will be drafted by the Superintendent for adoption by the School Committee by the 1st meeting in October 2013.

A true copy:

Attest:


Patricia A. Berry

Executive Secretary to the School Committee

c: Members
Superintendent
Ms. MacFarlane
Ms. O

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ALICE L. TURKEL

--IN SCHOOL COMMITTEE--


July 30, 2013

ORDERED:

That when enrolling students for kindergarten and/or junior kindergarten, each school or program will admit no more students per grade level than the number of seats that school or program has in its first grade classrooms. Once the number of students admitted to kindergarten or junior kindergarten reaches the number of seats in that school's or that program's first grade, only children from the other grade level will be admitted. ~~SES balance will apply to each grade level.~~

A true copy:

Attest:


Patricia A. Berry

Executive Secretary to the School Committee

c: Ms. Turkel
Mr. Fantini
Superintendent