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## Letter to Members

Dear Fellow School Committee Members,

The policy and practice recommendations on the following pages are the result of listening to the thoughts and concerns of Committee Members, school department administration, school-based leaders, the public's thoughts and concerns both in small group meetings and at our controlled choice public hearing.

On the following pages you will find one general recommendation and four policy recommendations noted below:

1. Practices to support Controlled Choice (general recommendation).
2. Enrollment management to meet the upper school target of 88 students per grade.
3. Sibling preference for entering at the kindergarten, junior kindergarten or the 3 year old level.
  - a. If the older sibling will be enrolled in that lower school.
  - b. If the older sibling will be enrolled in an upper school.
4. Transfers between schools for 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade students.
5. Immersion school/programs.
  - a. Entry into the language immersion school/programs.
  - b. Transition to a new policy for entry into the language immersion school/programs.

We are respectfully asking for more advice on the fourth item above. In grappling with the issue of transfers between schools for 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade students we have come to recognize an operational conflict between the desire to allow the families of students already enrolled in the school system the opportunity to transfer and the need to register newly enrolling students in a timely fashion. We hope to frame the discussion with the following objectives:

1. Fairness to both students desiring to transfer and to those new to the district (especially during the summer period).
2. A system that places the maximum number of students before the start of each school year.
3. Equality between and among the 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade campuses.
  - a. Socio-Economic Status in similar proportions.
  - b. Grade level cohorts of similar size, except for Amigos.

For this issue you will see five ideas outlined with some pros and cons listed for each. We plan to take your input and draft a recommendation for our next meeting. We apologize for what will be a two-week delay of the second reading of this policy.

Thank you,

Co-chairs Fred Fantini and Alice Turkel

## **Recommendation on Practices to Support Controlled Choice**

To support the Controlled Choice Policy it is strongly recommend that when feasible the following practices be developed and/or maintained by the Superintendent and staff:

1. Broad and targeted out-reach to families with children who will be of age to enter the school system.
2. Materials explaining programmatic differences among schools and programs, including materials specifically designed to target groups that historically have not highly chosen certain schools or programs.
3. Information about how the Controlled Choice Policy works.
4. Information potentially affecting the number of seats available in each school or program for kindergarten/junior kindergarten.
  - a. Number of kindergarten/junior kindergarten seats in each school or program
  - b. Current junior kindergarten enrollment numbers
  - c. Number of known siblings likely to apply
  - d. Proximity schools for each residential address
  - e. Previous years' number of students with proximity choosing a program/school 1<sup>st</sup> choice.
  - f. The above by S.E.S. status

**Enrollment Management to reach Upper School Target # of Students**

To enable upper school grade level cohorts to reach the Innovation Agenda target of 88 students per grade, with a cap of 100 students per grade, enrollment will be controlled in the feeding JK-5<sup>th</sup> grade schools and the Tobin Montessori School.

The yearly Controlled Choice review will include 5-Year enrollment projections for the upper schools.

## **Sibling Preference for Entering the Cambridge Public Schools**

**For Kindergarten, Junior Kindergarten or 3 year olds for Montessori**

1. When an older sibling will be attending\* a school that includes kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade, their sibling entering the Kindergarten Lottery will have a sibling priority for that school.
2. When an older sibling will be attending\* an upper school, their sibling entering the Kindergarten Lottery will have a sibling priority for the school where the older sibling completed fifth grade.

\*The two policies above refer to the older sibling's school placement for the fall the younger student will be entering school system, not that sibling's placement in the January of the lottery.

## Policy Ideas for Upper School Transfer Policy

### General overall comments regarding upper school transfer policy

An important issue to be mindful of when considering the options below is that historically with a dozen or more school choices for grades 6,7 & 8 there were always plenty of open seats with no waitlists in the majority of schools, hence students wishing to transfer were not competing with new students entering the school system. New students could always be placed in a school without overriding the district's SES policy or the target number of students per class. Now with only four choices (plus Amigos which few children have the linguistic ability to enter in 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade) and with high enrollment numbers there are expected to be very few open seats without moving beyond the 88 student target.

#### **For all five of the options on the following pages:**

- A. Waitlists for schools ending at 5<sup>th</sup> grade will expire on the date transfers end for the 5<sup>th</sup> grade year.
- B. Students who are ready to mainstream from Special Needs classrooms or English Language Learner classrooms will be offered available seats at the dyad or triad where their program is located before seats will be offered to new students entering the school system or to transfer students.
- C. The SES balance of the grade level must follow the Controlled Choice Policy of the Cambridge Public Schools as then in effect. Currently, as of the date of adoption of this policy, the SES balance of the grade level set forth in the Controlled Choice Policy is within +/- 10% of the district percentage of students qualifying for the federal free and reduced price meals program.

**Options 1, 2 & 3 share much of their language; to highlight the differences they are printed in red.**

## **Policy Ideas for Upper School Transfer Policy**

### **Options 1: Lottery and waitlist**

The Superintendent will determine, on April 1<sup>st</sup> of each year, how many seats will be available within SES balance, with the target of 88 students for each upcoming 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. If seats are available at that time, parents/guardians of current 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> grade students will have the month of May to sign up for a lottery of those seats. Assignments will be made by early July, in order to assist parents/guardians and students to enroll in a timely manner, while providing sufficient time to enroll new students entering the district to the upper schools to a max capacity of 100 seats per grade.

Students in the lottery not receiving a school they chose will be placed on waitlists. These lists will not move over the summer as new to the district students are placed.

Students new to CPS will be enrolled, after the lottery is complete, in the order in which they apply, to the school that has the fewest students in the requested grade. All assignments will be by SES and may not exceed the contractual limit of 100 per grade for an upper school or 50 for Amigos.

Students may transfer from the lottery waitlist during the first trimester as open seats are identified and not are allowed, except under hardship, after the start of the second trimester. A seat will be considered open if a grade level is below 88 students and the entering student will maintain SES balance. To remain on the waitlist the parent/guardian must renew the student's placement on the list by February 1<sup>st</sup>. For the following grade, students on the renewed list will be placed before students in the lottery for available seats, within the SES balance of the Controlled Choice Policy as then in effect.

#### Positives:

- a. The upper schools will have more equal numbers of students and more equal socio-economic balance, than with a system allowing some schools to fill to 100 students per grade while others lose students, students whose exit may cause further SES imbalance.
- b. New to district students can be more efficiently placed over the summer and are more likely to have seats for the start of the school year because the extremely time consuming task of calling down a wait list before a seat is considered available is not done during the summer months.

#### Negatives:

- a. Families on a waitlist are passed over as new to district families are placed in school. Families whose child is at or near the top of a waitlist may feel it is very unfair that their child is not placed before a new student.

## Policy Ideas for Upper School Transfer Policy

### Options 2: Double lottery

The Superintendent will determine, on April 1<sup>st</sup> of each year, how many seats will be available within SES balance, with the target of 88 students for each upcoming 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. If seats are available at that time, parents/guardians of current 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> grade students will have the month of May to sign up for a lottery of those seats. Assignments will be made by early July, in order to assist parents/guardians and students to enroll in a timely manner, while providing sufficient time to enroll new students entering the district to the upper schools to a max capacity of 100 seats per grade.

Students new to CPS will be enrolled, after the **early summer** lottery is complete, in the order in which they apply, to the school that has the fewest students in the requested grade. All assignments will be by SES and may not exceed the contractual limit of 100 per grade for an upper school or 50 for Amigos.

Students in the lottery not receiving a school they chose will **receive a letter explaining that they are already enrolled in a second lottery that will take place in late September. The second lottery will be for the seats, which are held for the first 10 days of school for enrolled students who do not arrive at school.** A seat will be considered open if a grade level is below 88 students. The entering students must maintain SES balance. **Students not placed in the second lottery will be given priority in the lottery for the following year if the parent/guardian renews the student's place in the lottery pool by February. 1<sup>st</sup>.**

#### Positives:

- a. The upper schools will have more equal numbers of students and more equal socio-economic balance (than with a system allowing some schools to fill to 100 students per grade while others lose students, students whose exit may cause further SES imbalance).
- b. New to district students can be more efficiently placed over the summer and are more likely to have seats for the start of the school year because the extremely time consuming task of calling down a wait list before a seat is considered available is not done during the summer months.
- c. Families not receiving a place in the early lottery may still be able to transfer early in the school year. Because they are not first on a list it may feel less unfair; they are not watching and waiting for the next open seat they are waiting for the second lottery.

#### Negatives:

- a. New to district students are placed in schools ahead of students not placed in the early lottery.

## Policy Ideas for Upper School Transfer Policy

### Options 3: Lottery and active waitlist

The Superintendent will determine, on April 1<sup>st</sup> of each year, how many seats will be available within SES balance, with the target of 88 students for each upcoming 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. If seats are available at that time, parents/guardians of current 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> grade students will have the month of May to sign up for a lottery of those seats. Assignments will be made by early July, in order to assist parents/guardians and students to enroll in a timely manner, while providing sufficient time to enroll new students entering the district to the upper schools to a max capacity of 100 seats per grade.

Students in the lottery not receiving a school they chose will be placed on waitlists.

Students new to CPS will be enrolled, after the lottery is complete, in the order in which they apply, if there is an available seat in a school with no waitlist for the student's SES category. If there are no available seats within the 88 student target and a seat must be opened it will be offered to CPS enrolled students on the waitlist before it is offered to the new student. All assignments will be by SES and may not exceed the contractual limit of 100 per grade for an upper school or 50 for Amigos.

Students may transfer from the lottery waitlist during the first trimester as open seats are identified and not are allowed, except under hardship, after the start of the second trimester. A seat will be considered open if a grade level is below 88 students and the entering student will maintain SES balance. To remain on the waitlist the parent/guardian must renew the student's placement on the list by February 1<sup>st</sup>. For the following grade, students on the renewed list will be placed before students in the lottery for available seats, within the SES balance of the Controlled Choice Policy as then in effect.

#### Positives:

- a. The upper schools will have more equal numbers of students and more equal socio-economic balance (than with a system allowing some schools to fill to 100 students per grade while others lose students, students whose exit may cause further SES imbalance).
- b. Families on a waitlist are not passed over as new to district families are placed in school.

#### Negatives:

- a. This system is extremely inefficient, the extremely time consuming task of calling down a wait list before a seat is considered available would hold up placing new to district students. It is likely many students; especially those enrolling later in the summer would not be able to be placed by the first days of school.

## **Policy Ideas for Upper School Transfer Policy**

### **Options 4 Active waitlist filling to 100 seats per grade**

Families of 5<sup>th</sup> graders will have the month of May to sign up for a lottery for open seats in an upper school or Amigos (Amigos has additional language requirements at the upper school grade levels). Grade levels will be considered full when 100 students are assigned per upper school or 50 for Amigos. Assignments will be made in early July and students not assigned will be placed on a waitlist. These waitlists will be maintained and active as has been the practice in JK-8<sup>th</sup> grade school previous to the introduction of the Upper Schools.

#### Positives:

a. This maximizes choice for families already enrolled in the district.

#### Negatives:

a. The possibility of the upper schools becoming significantly unequal in total number of students and socio-economically imbalanced is increased by this system.

b. Filling classes to 25 leaves no room to allow for the part-time mainstreaming of English Language Learners and Special Education Students.

c. Filling classes to 25 leaves no room to fully mainstream English Language Learners and Special Education Students when they are ready.

## **Policy Ideas for Upper School Transfer Policy**

### **Options 5 *No transferring for 6<sup>th</sup> grade***

Any of the options above with no transferring at the start of 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

Positives:

a. This maximizes cohort stability.

Negatives:

a. For children who transfer this interrupts their upper school years.

b. For families desiring a transfer for logistic reasons this delays meeting their needs.

## **Assignment Policy for Language Immersion Programs Oct. 2012**

The Cambridge Public Schools will assign students whose parents/guardians choose an immersion program or school in accordance to the Controlled Choice Policy as follows:

1. Kindergarten/Junior Kindergarten assignments for the immersion school and programs will provide assignment priority to students who qualify as either program language dominant or bilingual while controlling for Socio-Economic Status (SES).
  - a. Priority will be given to students who qualify as program language dominant or bilingual. This priority will be equal to the proximity preference offered to the other schools within the school district.
  - b. The SES balance of the grade level must follow the Controlled Choice Policy of the Cambridge Public Schools as then in effect. Currently, as of the date of adoption of this policy, the SES balance of the grade level set forth in the Controlled Choice Policy is within +/- 10% of the district percentage of students qualifying for the federal free and reduced price meals program.
  - c. The waitlist policy for Junior Kindergarten/Kindergarten cohorts starting SY 2013-14 will reflect the above assignment policy and provide assignment priority to students who speak the program language.
  - d. Additionally for language immersion programs within a school (Mandarin Immersion at Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. School and Olà at King Open School):
    1. Students who have a sibling within either the immersion or the regular program will have priority to both programs.
    2. Junior Kindergarten students will be offered the opportunity to move between the school's immersion and regular programs for their Kindergarten year, prior to the Kindergarten Lottery. Program to program transfers must follow the Controlled Choice Policy as then in effect.

## **Policy for Transition to the Assignment Policy for Language Immersion Programs of October 2012**

Previous admission policies—based only on language—have created SES imbalance in some grades of the immersion school/programs far from the District’s goals. To transition to the Assignment Policy for Language Immersion Programs of October 2012:

- a. Implementation will be phased in over two years for the Kindergarten/Junior Kindergarten grade-level.
  - i. For the school year starting in fall 2013 only incoming students will be considered when balancing the JK/K class. The number of pre-assigned<sup>1</sup> students will be subtracted from the total number of seats in for the Kindergarten/Junior Kindergarten grade level in each immersion school/program and the resulting number will be considered 100% of seats for the purposes of applying percentages as described in the policy.
  - ii. For SY 2014-15 and future years, the policy will be applied across all Kindergarten/Junior Kindergarten students as it is in other district schools.
- b. For the grades that were admitted to the immersion schools/programs under previous policies (grade levels admitted before the January lottery of 2013) open seats will be filled from the waitlists giving priority to program language dominant or bilingual students. Each grade’s SES balance on October 1<sup>st</sup> of 2012 will be maintained as a baseline and each grade will admit students that do not cause that grade to vary further from the district’s policy of SES balance. Further for higher-grade levels, each school/program may have requirements in language proficiency designed to facilitate success for students entering an immersion program.

<sup>1</sup> Pre-assigned students are returning Junior Kindergarten students that become Kindergarteners or Kindergarten students that are retained.