



October 6, 2015

TO THE HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE:

Approval of Revisions to the Controlled Choice Policy

These revisions to the Controlled Choice Policy are being presented for the second reading.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That effective with the 2016-17 school year, the School Committee restore the +/- 10% SES band for assigning students to grades K-8.
2. That effective with the 2016-17 school year, the School Committee restore the calculation of student socio economic status to capacity of a school's grade rather than the actual enrollment of the grade.
3. That effective with the 2016-17 school year Kindergarten Lottery, the School Committee raise the cap on the Kindergarten age students at a school to a number equal to no more than the number of seats in a School's first grade plus two.
4. That effective with the 2016-17 school Kindergarten Lottery, the School Committee restore the 3 year average SES of JK/K enrollment when calculating the SES ratio for Kindergarten Lotteries.

Supporting Data:

Attached Document

Respectfully Submitted,

Jeffrey M. Young, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools



BACKGROUND

On May 12, 2015, a roundtable discussion was held with the School Committee to receive an update on the Controlled Choice Policy. At that meeting, six small revisions were discussed and the School Committee was informed that recommendations on these six revisions would be presented to the Committee in the fall. In addition, to the four recommendations above the other possible issues for revision discussed at the roundtable were, reviewing ways to improve Program Language Bonus Points at the Immersion Programs with the Bilingual Department and Immersion Program Principals and addressing the internal transfer issue (for Mandarin & Olá) with the principals of MLK and King Open Olá and their communities. There are no recommendations at this point on these issues, which are discussed further below.

1. Restore the +/-10% Band for Assigning Students to Grades JK-8

The 2013 changes to the Controlled Choice Policy removed the +/- 10% band for assignment of new and transferring students in grades 1-8, while leaving the band in place for Kindergarten. This revision has proven to be unworkable and impossible to achieve. The plus or minus band gives needed flexibility in the assignment process and without it the District would have to add additional seats not needed for overall enrollment but merely to comply with the policy. Additionally the SES ratio is impossible to reach. At the end of last school year, 81 out of 82 grades (1-8) were out of compliance and could not take an internal CPS transfer student or a student new to CPS under the policy.

2. Restore the Calculation of Student SES to Capacity of a School's Grade Rather than the Actual Enrollment of the Grade

Similar to the issue above, controlling the assignment of students by a school's grade enrollment rather than the grade's capacity has proven unworkable and confusing to all. Each time a student enters or leaves a grade at a particular school requires the resetting of the SES control point. This means that each time we add a student to a class we need to add a second student of the opposite SES category to maintain the ratio. Additionally, the policy means that there are 82 unique SES control points for grades 1-8; a very difficult situation to manage and confusing for parents to understand.

3. Raise the Cap on Kindergarten Age Students at a School to a Number Equal to no More than the Number of Seats in a School's First Grade Plus Two Rather than the Existing Policy which Caps the Kindergarten Age Students at a Number Equal to the Number of First Grade Seats in a School

The existing policy capping Kindergarten age students was put in place when almost all schools increased their number of kindergarten classes from 3 to 4 at the time of the approval of the Innovation Agenda. The cap was put in place as a control to avoid situations where there would be slightly more first grade students than seats. After two years of experience it is clear that we

can raise the cap by 2 students and through attrition by first grade not have a situation of more first grade students than seats. The revision could mean that approximately 25 more kindergarten lottery applicants will receive one of their three choices (often their first choice) without any negative impact on enrollment or budget. It is important to note that the plus two seats will not increase overall capacity of the JK/K grade.

4. Restore the 3-Year Average of the JK/K Enrollment SES When Calculating the SES Ratio Prior to the Annual JK/K Lottery

Historically, the lottery applicant pool has contained approximately 70% paid and 30% free lunch students while the lottery is run by using the SES ratio +/- 10% of all grades JK-5, a ratio that is generally several percentage points lower than 70%. The mismatch between the SES ratios of the lottery applicant pool and the JK/K – 5 SES averages results in an inequity that increases the number of mandatory assignments. The use of 3-year enrollment averages should provide a more accurate representation of the actual make up of the JK-K classes and possibly reduce mandatory assignments.

ISSUES WITHOUT A RECOMMENDATION CHANGE

1. Program Language Bonus Points

The May roundtable included a discussion of the Program Language Bonus Points granted for lottery applicants and proposed more review. At this time, we have not had an opportunity to conduct that review; thus, there is no current recommendation for change.

2. Internal Transfer Rights for Non Mandarin and Non Olá Students at the King and King Open Schools

Currently, students at the King and King Open Schools have preference to transfer into their school's language immersion program. Last year, there was some concern by parents at the Mandarin Program that their child's sibling applicant would be blocked by transfers of King's Ni Hao JK students into the Mandarin Program prior to the running of the lottery. This did not occur, but the possibility exists. This issue was brought before the King Parent Council in June, and no consensus on the issue could be reached with parents. Because of the enrollment of the Olá Program, this does not appear to be an issue in that program. As a result no recommendation for change is proposed at this time. However we will continue to monitor the situation.