

--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.

3e. 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.

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.
- 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