

**Board of Education Work Session – January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012**  
**Student Assignment Task Force**

**Questions Generated at Board of Education Work Session on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012**

During the Board of Education Work Session on January 3, 2012, the Board identified questions/items for which staff was asked to prepare information. The list of questions/items is below.

Clarifying Questions:

- 1) What is the impact of delaying the start of the Proximity Choice Selection scheduled to begin on January 17, 2012?
- 2) What is the definition of the ‘walk zone’ for the 1.5 mile priority in the selection process?

Questions for Discussion:

- 3) What criteria will be used to examine feeder pattern efficacy? How will the district evaluate and determine if/when a feeder pattern change should be recommended?
- 4) If families are not interested in following their year-round or magnet pathway, can the district guarantee a traditional/proximity seat at a middle school?
- 5) How is the district preparing to assist families that do not have transportation based on their pre-assignments for middle and high school, specific to rising 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders that are pre-assigned to the approved feeder pattern school?
- 6) What thresholds/benchmarks does staff recommend for monitoring schools? What interventions are in place/recommended for schools that do not meet stated benchmarks?
- 7) What is the operational impact of applying set asides?
- 8) What is the impact of moving achievement up in the priorities (i.e. moving priority 4 to the second position on the priority list)?

**Board of Education Work Session – January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012**  
**Student Assignment Task Force**

**Questions Generated at Board of Education Work Session on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012**

**1) What is the impact of delaying the start of the Round 1 Choice Selection Period scheduled to begin on January 17, 2012?**

Answer: There is a significant impact on families, principals and schools.

Background Information:

- Having a 6-week window for Round 1 of the Choice Selection Period:
  - allows families to participate in choice process for 6 week time period, which is designed to allow as many families as possible to participate in the first round
  - allows district to review choice selection trends/patterns and implement interventions to increase choice participation
- Delaying the start of Round 1 will result in timeline modifications:
  - Option 1 – adjust all timelines such that all events are moved out to a future date, resulting in delays in allotment processes
  - Option 2 – reduce the number of days/weeks parents can access the selection tool
  - Option 3 – adjust all timelines

Criteria:

- Reducing the number of days/weeks that Round 1 of the Choice Selection Period is open will impact *families* in the following ways:
  - limits the number of days/weeks that parents can access the choice selection tool, as the round will not be able to be extended
  - reduces the effectiveness of communications and outreach strategies in allowing sufficient time for parent education regarding the plan, and time for parents to investigate their choices
  - decreases participation, particularly with areas that require sustained outreach
  - reduces time for parents to research their school choices
  - reduces opportunities for schools to provide additional marketing to promote choice selections for targeted schools due to reduced number of data points
  - reduces ability to make just-in-time data-driven interventions to increase participation in identified low participation neighborhoods due to reduced number of possible data points
  - increases cost of publicity
- Reducing the number of days/weeks that Round 1 of the Choice Selection Period is open impacts *principals and schools* in the following ways:
  - impacts the allotment processes and timelines
  - impacts hiring processes and timelines
- See attached for additional details

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends maintaining the current timeline.

**Board of Education Work Session – January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012**  
**Student Assignment Task Force**

**Questions Generated at Board of Education Work Session on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012**

**2) What is the definition of 1.5 miles for the proximity priority in the selection process?**

Answer: The area around the school defined as 1.5 miles or less in driving distance.

Background:

- Choice lists are determined based on center of node driving distance to schools
- Plan states that the proximity priorities shall be applied based on a family's residential address and the driving distance to the school from that address
- It is possible that a family may live within 1.5 miles of the school via straight line distance, yet not be within a 1.5 mile driving distance from the school

Criteria:

- For priority 2 in the proximity choice selection rounds, 1.5 miles is defined as 1.5 miles or less in total driving distance by shortest route from the residence to the defined school address. This will be calculated using Google Maps data.

Staff Recommendation:

No action required.

**Board of Education Work Session – January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012**  
**Student Assignment Task Force**

**Questions Generated at Board of Education Work Session on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012**

**3) What criteria will be used to examine feeder pattern efficacy? How will the district evaluate and determine if/when a feeder pattern change should be recommended?**

Answer: Criteria built into the monitoring and evaluation plan will be utilized.

Background Information:

- Feeder patterns in the plan are based on:
  - Capacity at the next grade level
  - Calendar continuity
  - Magnet program pathway
  - Existing/historic feeder patterns based on the majority of nodes in a school's previous base assignment feeding to a single school at the next grade span
  - Proximity of schools to each other

Criteria:

- During annual selection review process data regarding choice trends will be analyzed to evaluate the school choice process. These data will include:
  - The number of students rising into 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade that request a proximity choice school other than their feeder pattern school
  - The number of year-round students rising into 6<sup>th</sup> grade that request a traditional calendar middle school
  - The number of traditional calendar students rising into 6<sup>th</sup> grade that request a year-round calendar middle school
  - The number of magnet students rising into 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade that request a proximity choice school other than their feeder pattern school
  - The number of non-magnet students rising into 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade that request a magnet school other than their feeder pattern school
  - The number of students rising into non-entry grades that request a proximity choice school other than their current school (traditional, year-round, magnet, etc.)
  - Student performance data on all schools by high school feeder group
- As patterns/trends are identified, staff will do more targeted reviews of schools that are impacted the most by requests into or out of their school
- As patterns/trends are identified, staff will do more targeted surveys/investigations that include parent feedback regarding their reasons for participating in choice
- Once specific areas of concern are identified, the district will work through the monitoring and evaluation framework to provide assistance/resources/interventions to schools negatively impacted by parental choice patterns
- When new schools are approved for construction and/or opening, the Board will need to establish feeder patterns for those schools. Staff will bring recommendations as soon as practicable to allow for Board approval as early as possible.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends maintaining the approved feeder patterns for the 2012-13 school year, and that the Board use the criteria built into the monitoring and evaluation plan to evaluate the efficacy of feeder patterns.

**Board of Education Work Session – January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012**  
**Student Assignment Task Force**

**Questions Generated at Board of Education Work Session on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012**

**4) If families are not interested in following their year-round or magnet pathway, what options are available for traditional calendar/proximity schools?**

Answer: Families have several school options available and may participate in the choice process (magnet and/or proximity).

**Background:**

Students are pre-assigned based on their current school assignment and/or the approved feeder patterns in the plan.

**Criteria:**

- Capacity controls will limit, to some degree, the number of students that can change feeder patterns.
- Seat availability at non-feeder middle and high schools will be largely based on the number of students that elect to remain on their feeder pattern in conjunction with the number of students that elect to participate in the choice process and request a different middle or high school.
- Families that would like to request a middle or high school different from their pre-assigned middle or high school may do so during an appropriate choice selection period. If they are interested in requesting a proximity school, they may do so during the proximity choice selection period. If they are interested in requesting a magnet school, they may do so during the magnet selection period.

**Staff Recommendation:**

No action required.

**Board of Education Work Session – January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012**  
**Student Assignment Task Force**

**Questions Generated at Board of Education Work Session on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012**

- 5) How is the district preparing to assist families that do not have transportation based on their pre-assignments for middle and high school, specific to rising 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders that are pre-assigned to the approved feeder pattern school?**

Answer: Options are provided below for consideration by the Board.

**Background:**

The number of students rising into 6<sup>th</sup> grade that have been pre-assigned to a middle school without transportation based on the approved feeder patterns is approximately 600. These students are currently eligible for school district transportation for the 2011-12 school year.

The number of students rising into 9<sup>th</sup> grade that have been pre-assigned to a high school without transportation based on the approved feeder patterns is approximately 550. These students are currently eligible for school district transportation for the 2011-12 school year.

Students are pre-assigned to their middle/high school based on the approved feeder patterns for their elementary school. In the event that the feeder pattern school is not on their proximity choice list, students may not be able to receive school district transportation to their feeder middle/high school. Many of these areas will have older students that are eligible to grandfather, thus transportation may already be available for some of these students for the 2012-13 school year. Specific details regarding the availability this transportation will be available following the completion of the choice selection process.

**Criteria:**

- Option 1: Provide Transportation using the following as options, in no particular order:
  - For all students for 3 years as part of the implementation cycle
  - Grandfathered students for 2012-13 Transition Grades only
  - Grandfathered students plus siblings until older student ages out
  - By student until they all age out
- Option 2: Priority during selection, in no particular order:
  - Run their requests first – separate
  - Add Priority 1a (seat these students immediately after siblings) for 2012-13 only
  - Add Priority 1a (seat these students immediately after siblings) for all years
  - Add Priority 1a (seat these students immediately after siblings) for 3 years
  - Add Priority 0 (seat these students prior to siblings) for x years
- Option 3: Follow plan as approved

**Staff Recommendation:**

Staff recommends that the Board review the identified options and provide a recommendation.

**Board of Education Work Session – January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012**  
**Student Assignment Task Force**

**Questions Generated at Board of Education Work Session on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012**

**6) What thresholds/benchmarks does staff recommend for monitoring schools? What interventions are in place/recommended for schools that do not meet stated benchmarks?**

Answer: As suggested by the Board Chair and as outlined in the monitoring and evaluation plan, the Community-Based Advisory Board in conjunction with staff can develop benchmarks and recommend interventions as the plan is implemented.

**Background:**

The following information was provided to the Board during the work session on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012.

*Response:*

*As approved, the choice student assignment plan calls for three levels of monitoring. First, staff will internally monitor the overall functioning of the assignment plan, and the Superintendent will provide quarterly reports to the Board of Education evaluating the impact of the selection process and may make recommendations as to any modifications for future years. Second, staff will develop a formal school selection review process to help identify and support under-chosen and/or underperforming schools. The WCPSS Data and Accountability Department and the Office of Student Assignment will assume responsibility for this process and develop a standard reporting protocol that will apply to all schools each year. Third, a community-based advisory board will be established to provide external oversight of the implementation of the assignment plan, and make recommendations as to any modifications for future years. Members of the board will be appointed by the Superintendent and the board will be chaired by the Chief Transformation Officer for WCPSS. Membership shall be reflective of the needs and viewpoints of all geographic parts of the county.*

*Data gathered from these processes will guide the internal decision-making process regarding the implementation and maintenance of the student assignment plan. School review processes will strengthen the district's ability to pinpoint our most and least successful programs with respect to increasing student achievement and attracting parents. Community-based review processes will provide external analysis of the selection data and allow for recommendations to the Superintendent regarding the student assignment plan to be sure that the plan continues to meet the needs of the county.*

*Relevant Data:*

*Data to be gathered and/or analyzed will include, but not limited to, the following:*

- *Student achievement*
- *School demographics*
- *School capacity*
- *Data regarding under-chosen schools*
- *Data regarding underperforming schools*
- *Data regarding over-chosen schools*
- *Data regarding high performing schools*
- *Selection patterns/trends in all schools*
- *Analysis of location and nature of magnet programs and other school-based programs (Global/STEM network schools, Renaissance schools, etc.)*
- *Other data as deemed pertinent*

**Criteria:**

See attached.

**Staff Recommendation:**

Staff recommends that the Community-Based Advisory Board be tasked with establishing additional benchmarks for monitoring and evaluation indicators.

**Board of Education Work Session – January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012**  
**Student Assignment Task Force**

**Questions Generated at Board of Education Work Session on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012**

**7) What is the operational impact of applying set asides?**

Answer: Setting aside seats at regional choice schools will increase the probability that students in low-performing nodes will be seated at regional choice schools.

**Background:**

The following information was provided to the Board during the work session on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012.

*Impact:*

*Students that reside in low-performing nodes, including neighborhoods near group 1 magnet elementary schools, which request a regional choice school, are given 4<sup>th</sup> priority during the selection process for this type of request. While this priority does not guarantee that these requests will be accommodated, it does give students in low-performing nodes a higher priority for selection into seats at regional choice schools. If the district identifies a set number/percentage of seats at each school by grade level, the district would put in place measures to ensure that even if the regional choice schools are over-chosen by students that qualify for priorities #1-#3, that seats are available for students that qualify for priority #4. In addition, the district would be restricting the total number of seats available to students that qualify for priorities #1-#3 in the event that the regional choice school is over-chosen by siblings and proximity students.*

*Relevant Data:*

- *According to our analysis, approximately 750-800 Kindergarten students whose closest school is a Group 1 magnet elementary school will not have access to a seat in those schools each year. This is in part due to the fact that there are more students living near Group 1 magnet elementary schools than those schools can possibly hold, and in part due to the seat allocations required to operate the magnet program.*
- *Initial analysis shows sufficient capacity at the schools on the choice lists for students who live nearest a group 1 magnet without setting aside seats.*
- *In order to ensure that each student could be seated at one of the other schools on their choice lists, 8% of the seats in each of those schools would need to be set aside for these "structurally displaced" students.*
- *In order to further ensure that each student could be seated specifically in a "high-performing" regional choice school if they requested it during the choice process, then the percentage set aside for those schools would have to be around 15%, since only about half of the other schools on their choice list meet the criteria for regional choice schools.*
- *Another option would be to set aside around 10% of seats in regional choice schools and around 6% in the other schools on their choice list. This would open up seats in regional choice schools for around 2/3 of the structurally displaced students, and about 1/3 would end up being seated in the other schools on their choice list.*

**Criteria:**

See attached.

**Staff Recommendation:**

Staff recommends that if the Board implements a "set aside" at high-performing regional choice schools, that the value of 15% of seats be utilized as the target.



**Board of Education Work Session – January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2012**  
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**8) What is the impact of moving achievement up in the priorities (i.e. moving priority 4 into the second position on the priority list)?**

Answer: Moving the priority could have a negative impact if there are no controls in place. Set asides are a more efficient and effective method in prioritizing student achievement.

**Background:**

Student achievement is currently priority 4, behind sibling and proximity priorities. The Board asked that staff review the implications of moving this priority into the second position on the priority list.

**Criteria:**

Because the effect of any selection priority is dependent upon how people actually choose, there's no way to forecast exactly how it will play out.

- If we assume students in lower-performing nodes overwhelmingly list high-performing schools as their first-choice schools:
  - Under this scenario, students from lower-performing nodes will distribute themselves almost exclusively into the high-performing schools on their list. Since approximately 1/3 of the kindergarten students in the district reside in nodes designated as "low-performing", this would mean that those students would occupy a large portion of the seats in those high-performing schools. The other schools on their choice list would then have almost none of those students unless they got in via the sibling priority. Based on our simulation in June, however, it is unlikely that this type of scenario would actually happen.
- If we assume students in lower-performing nodes overwhelmingly list their closest (i.e., non-high-performing) schools as their first choice schools:
  - Since in many cases the closest school to each student's address is not the high-performing option, the switching of the achievement priorities with the proximity priorities would have little to no effect on actual student assignments in this scenario (compared to leaving them as they are). Students who qualify for the sibling and proximity priorities would still be seated first anyway in this scenario because the students in the lower-performing nodes would essentially "lose" their priority for those seats if they did not rank those schools first, while students living close to the school did rank those schools first. The information we got from the test drive simulation in June suggested that proximity was the #1 driver in how parents chose schools, although our outreach efforts are focused on helping parents see the value in selecting a high-performing schools.

These examples illustrate how selection priorities serve as a fairly blunt "control" mechanism in a choice plan. The order in which they are stated can sometimes have less of an effect than might be imagined because (a) they only come into play when a school receives more applications than it has seats, and (b) their effects, even under those conditions, are dependent on how people distribute their choices across the schools on their choice list, which can't really be known until after they've chosen.

**Staff Recommendation:**

Staff recommends maintaining the current order of selection priorities.