

Recommendation of Exam Schools Admissions Criteria for SY21-22

Exam School Admissions Working Group

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Working Group Charter

Develop and submit a recommendation to the Superintendent on revised exam school admissions criteria and invitation mechanism for SY 21-22 entrance in light of the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the applicants during the latter half of SY 19-20 and potential impact on SY 20-21.

Working Group Members

- Samuel Acevedo, Opportunity and Achievement Gap Task Force Co-Chair
- Acacia Aguirre, John D. O'Bryant parent
- Michael Contompasis, Former Boston Latin School Head of School and Former BPS Superintendent
- Matt Cregor, Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee
- Tanya Freeman-Wisdom, John D. O'Bryant, Head of School
- Katherine Grassa, Curley K-8, Principal
- Zena Lum, Boston Latin Academy parent
- Rachel Skerritt, Boston Latin School, Head of School
- Tanisha Sullivan, President, NAACP Boston Branch and former BPS Chief Equity Officer

Admissions Recommendation Recap

Duration & Eligible Applicants

- Suspension of current policy for **one year**
 - The district would revert to the current policy after the school choice process for this school year
- **All Boston residents** who are currently in grades 6, 8 (except current exam school students), or 9, and meet the eligibility requirements, regardless of school type
 - Minimum B average in ELA and Math for the fall and winter marking periods of last school year (between September 2019 and January 2020); **OR** received a meet expectation score or higher on the 2019 MCAS in ELA and Math. **Students do not need to meet both.**
 - School district (or equivalent) verification that the student is performing at grade level based on the Massachusetts Curriculum standards.

Overview of the Invitation Process

- **Distribute invitations** to students based on admissions criteria of prior report card grades and invitation mechanism of zip code.
 - 20% of seats at each exam school are reserved for the top ranking students in the city based on GPA.
 - The remainder of invitations are distributed by using a combination of GPA and student home zip code.

Invitation Process - 20% of Seats

- **20% of seats in each exam school will be filled using GPA only**, placing the top ranking students citywide.
 - The order of placement will be based on GPA rank, with the student having the highest GPA placed first.
 - If two or more students rank the same, a random number will be used to determine which student will be placed first.
 - Students will only be considered for the school that they ranked as their top choice. If a student does not secure a seat in this process, they will be a part of the second process.
 - Students going into the second part of the process have another opportunity to be placed in their first-choice school, and are likely to get a seat in since they rank among the highest in the district.

Invitation Process - 80% of Seats

- The **remaining 80%** of invitations will be **extended based on a combination of zip code and GPA**.
 - Each zip code will be allocated a number of available exam school seats based on the proportion of school-aged children living in that zip code.
 - 10% of seats available within each zip code will be distributed through ten assignment rounds.
 - Students will be placed into a pool of applicants living in the same zip code and ranked by GPA.
 - Zip codes will be ordered from the *lowest median family income (with children under 18) to the highest median family income (with children under 18)* according to the American Community Survey. Students in the zip code with the lowest median family income (with children under 18) will be placed first, followed by students in the next zip code.
 - If a student's first choice seat is not available when it is their turn to be assigned, then the student will be assigned to their second or third-choice seat. If two or more students in a zip code rank the same, a random number will be used to determine which will be placed first.

NOTE: The initial recommendation used the median household income. The district is recommending a change to the median family income with children under 18.

Median Income Modification

- The recommendation reflects a shift from median household income to median family income (with children under 18).
 - Median household income is reflective of all households within a zip code.
 - The American Community Survey defines a family as two or more individuals related by blood, marriage or adoption. Median family income with children under 18 only includes families with school-aged children within a zip code.

Special Provision: Homeless Students and those in DCF Care

- **Students experiencing homelessness or in DCF care outside of Boston**, will be placed in a separate “zip code”, 99999.
 - This zip code will be treated as the zip code with the lowest median family income (with children under 18) and students from this zip code will be placed first.
 - The order of student placement will be based on GPA rank, with the student having the highest GPA placed first.
 - If two or more students rank the same, a random number will be used to determine which student will be placed first.
 - Non-BPS students will be verified through standard BPS residency verification process for exam schools.

Clearing up Misinformation

- This is an **one-year recommendation** after which the district reverts to the current policy.
- **All Boston residents can apply** regardless of school attended (BPS, charter, home school, METCO, private, or parochial).
- **This is not a lottery system.** Merit is incorporated throughout while increasing geographic distribution.
- MCAS and GPA are eligibility criteria. **One is not weighted more heavily than the other and both are not required.**
- Remote administration of the NWEA Map Growth Assessment **for selective admissions** is not allowed by the vendor.

Misinformation: Eroding School Quality

- **The recommendation will not reduce rigor at the exam schools.**
- **Exam schools currently admit students with A and B averages. This is not a change to current practice.**
- **Students with a “B” GPA during the application process persist and remain enrolled in an exam school at rates similar to those of students applying with an “A+” or “A” GPA.**

Percentage of Students Still Enrolled in 10th Grade by Race and GPA Upon Application

GPA Upon Application	Asian		Black		Latinx		White		All Students	
	Total	% Still Enrolled	Total	% Still Enrolled	Total	% Still Enrolled	Total	% Still Enrolled	Total	% Still Enrolled
A+	296	93%	127	86%	176	81%	568	84%	1215	86%
A	285	89%	234	82%	294	83%	356	77%	1201	82%
B	25	88%	31	84%	40	68%	38	74%	137	77%

Cohorts included are SY14-15 → SY17-18, SY15-16 → SY18-19, and SY16-17 → SY19-20.

Misinformation: Limited Access to Each Exam School

- Zip codes are **not limited to a specific number of seats at each exam school**; seats within the zip code rounds are assigned to students based on the student's preference.
- In simulations run, the last seat at BLS was assigned during the 5th or 6th zip code round. Students in the **top 50% of each zip code had access to BLS**.
- The last seat at BLA was assigned during the 9th zip code round, meaning **90% of students in each zip code had access to BLA**.
- In simulations run, more students whose first choice school was BLS had a perfect GPA than seats available at BLS in the top 20%. However, **all students with a perfect GPA received an invitation to their first choice school in all simulations run**.

The Vote Specifics



Proposed Vote

- Suspend current policy for admissions for entry in SY21-22 only - a one-year suspension
- Implement the Working Group's recommendation for entry in SY21-22 to:
 - Develop an applicant pool based on average GPA of B or higher in ELA and Math for the fall and winter terms of SY19-20 OR a score of Meets/Exceeds Expectations on the 2019 ELA and Math MCAS. All grades and assessment results would reflect pre-COVID work, and require school district (or equivalent) verification that the student is performing at grade level based on the Massachusetts Curriculum standards.
 - Assign 20% of seats at each exam school based on a straight GPA rank citywide
 - Assign 80% of seats proportionately by the percentage of school-age children in Boston living in each zip code. Use a GPA straight rank within each zip code, prioritizing zip codes with the lowest median family income (with children under 18) first. Homeless students and those in DCF care outside of Boston will be placed in their own zip code, which will be treated as the lowest median family income (with children under 18).
 - Accept the additional recommendations

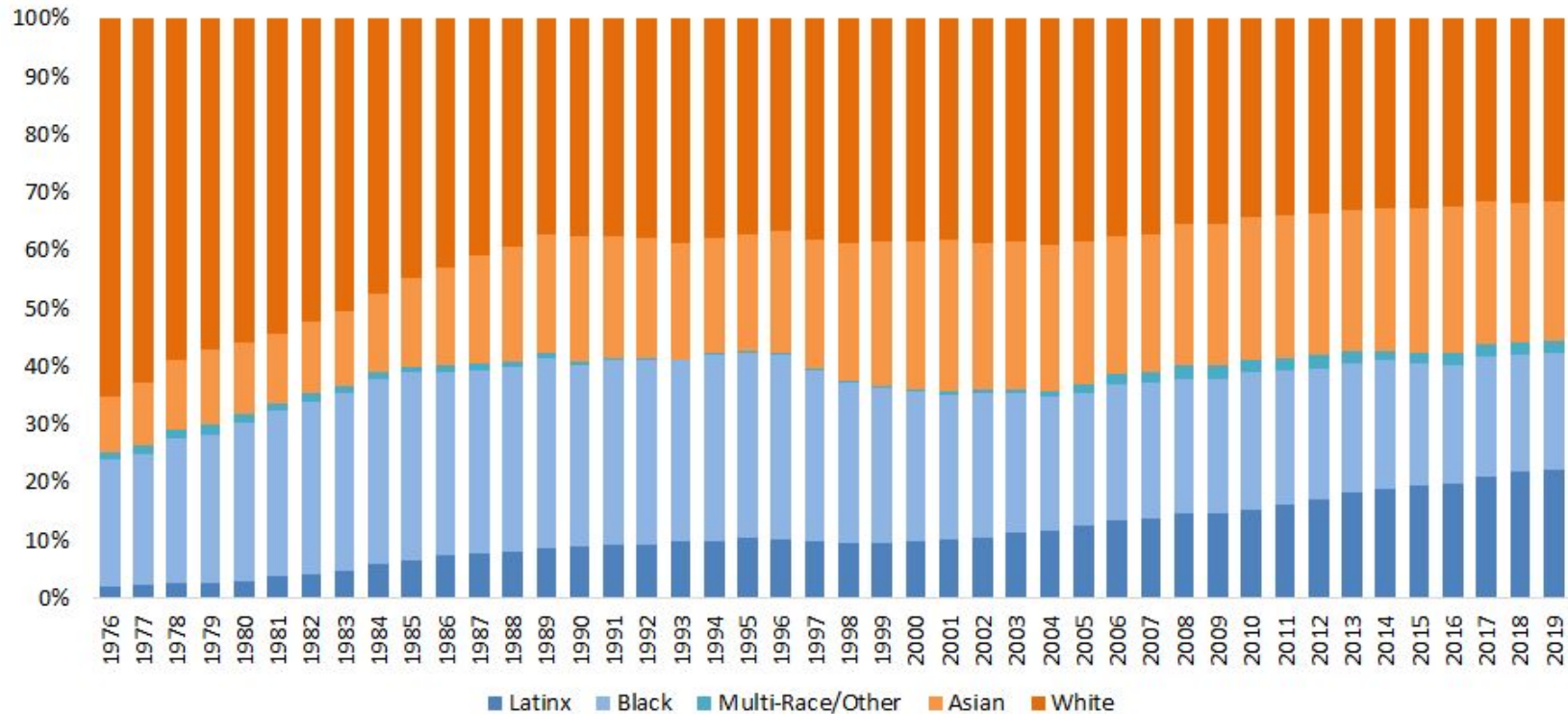
Proposed Vote - Additional Recommendations

- Provide appropriate support – both before and during the school year - for SY21-22 admittees who, while academically prepared for exam school content, may require more time to get acclimated to the pace of exam school study.
- Expand the Exam School Initiative (ESI), beginning as early as 4th grade and running through October of the 6th grade year, focused on academic acceleration in both ELA and math
- Secure the appropriate additional funding required for student support and ESI as outlined above.
- Continue convening a working group to advise on permanent efforts to expand the applicant pool, considering use of the new NWEA test and other factors, based on what can be learned from applying the recommendations to this year's admissions and what the working group has learned in reviewing practices in other districts.
- Amend current policy to remove “[non-traditional entry](#)” (approved December 16, 1992) and “[deferral of acceptance](#)” (approved September 16, 1992) provisions.

Appendix



Enrollment Trend at Exam Schools by Race



Increasing Equity of Access to Exam Schools

- Increased the number of seats available in the Exam School Initiative (ESI) in summer 2016
- Offered the exam school admissions test during the school day to all currently enrolled BPS students, beginning in Fall 2019
- Engaged in an RFP process for a new exam, which resulted in the selection of a bias tested exam that is untimed and aligned to core standards curriculum (NWEA MAP Growth)

Considerations for Fall 2020 Testing

- Logistics for in-person exam administration, including social distancing, honoring family choice for students to learn remotely, and availability of technology to administer the exam
- Inability to ensure test security in remote test administration
- An exam's ability to assess students' preparedness for exam school classes given the continued educational disruption caused by COVID-19
- Disparate impact of educational disruption on low-income families and families of color
- Contingency plan if Boston's COVID-19 rates escalate this fall

Equity Impact

Desired Outcomes

- Ensure that students will be enrolled through a clear and fair process for admission in the 21-22 school year that takes into account the circumstances of the COVID-19 global pandemic that disproportionately affected families in the city of Boston.
- Work towards an admissions process that will support student enrollment at each of the exam schools such that it better reflects the racial, socioeconomic and geographic diversity of all students (K-12) in the city of Boston.

Data Analysis

- Considered implications based on the effects of COVID-19
- Looked at past and current data and number of simulations
- Examined other cities and districts
- Most data unequivocally confirmed racial inequity persisting over decades

Stakeholder Engagement

- Working group was the stakeholder engagement team for this process
- Internal Staff, BSAC and various stakeholder groups have engaged in this topic for a number of years

Strategies for Racial Equity

- Considering the fairest measurement of student success across the City while minimizing effects of COVID-19, the group recommends establishing a pool of students who earned a “B” average or better in their English language arts and math classes from the Fall and Winter terms of 2019 OR Met or Exceeded Expectations on both the English language arts and math MCAS in 2019
- Invitations will be based on performance (20%) and performance + zip code (80%)
- Additional recommendations to be considered for long term planning during and post COVID-19

Timeline Moving Forward

- October 21: School Committee vote on recommendation
- If approved:
 - November & December 2020: Identify students qualified for the applicant pool
 - January 2021: Students in the applicant pool submit school preferences
 - February 2021: BPS determines students who will receive invitations
 - March 2021: Invitations sent
 - April 2021: Supports for invited students begin

Income and Percentage of School-Aged Children by Zip Code

The American Community Survey provides multiple income variables that could be used. Household includes anyone living in the zip code. Family includes households of 2+ people who are related by blood, marriage or adoption. Family with children includes families with at least one child under the age of 18.

* indicates too small of a sample for the ACS to publish data.

Note: median household income, median family income with children under 18 and percentage of school-aged children provided by BPDA Research Division, sourced from 2014-2018 American Community Survey.

Zip Code	Neighborhood	Percentage of School-Aged Children	Median Household Income	Median Family with Children Under 18	Rank: Median Household	Rank: Median Family w/ Children
02108	Beacon Hill	0.3%	\$136,667	\$245,781	27	29
02109	Downtown	0.1%	\$143,191	\$226,518	28	28
02110	Downtown	0.3%	\$116,932	*	25	24
02111	Chinatown	0.8%	\$40,870	\$38,846	5	5
02113	North End	0.3%	\$100,063	\$167,566	22	23
02114	Beacon Hill / West End	0.7%	\$95,161	\$191,131	20	25
02115	Fenway	1.4%	\$37,340	\$26,958	4	1
02116	Back Bay	1.3%	\$105,559	\$206,054	24	26
02199	Back Bay	0.1%	\$91,125	*	19	18
02118	South End	3.3%	\$65,250	\$51,000	15	9
02119	Roxbury	6.1%	\$30,551	\$29,568	1	3
02120	Roxbury	1.5%	\$33,727	\$34,981	3	4
02121	Roxbury	8.2%	\$30,712	\$28,964	2	2
02122	Dorchester	4.6%	\$60,474	\$51,354	13	10
02124	Dorchester	12.4%	\$53,174	\$45,906	9	7
02125	Dorchester	6.3%	\$56,318	\$53,828	11	11
02126	Mattapan	6.3%	\$52,474	\$50,011	8	8
02127	South Boston	4.2%	\$99,340	\$61,524	21	13
02128	East Boston	9.0%	\$55,483	\$40,313	10	6
02129	Charlestown	3.0%	\$118,226	\$150,000	26	22
02130	Jamaica Plain	5.1%	\$90,813	\$105,750	18	20
02131	Roslindale	6.5%	\$73,199	\$84,670	17	17
02132	West Roxbury	4.8%	\$100,915	\$138,800	23	21
02134	Allston	1.2%	\$58,068	\$62,132	12	14
02163	Allston	0.1%	\$49,659	*	7	15
02135	Brighton	3.7%	\$72,009	\$98,013	16	19
02136	Hyde Park	7.8%	\$64,784	\$58,453	14	12
02210	Seaport	0.1%	\$163,068	\$213,068	29	27
02215	Fenway/Kenmore	0.4%	\$45,337	*	6	16

Admissions Processes in Other Districts

City	Admissions Test	Standardized Test Scores	GPA	Attendance	Essay	Interview	Recommendations	SES/ Tier System
Baltimore		x	x	x				
Boston	x		x					
Chicago	x	x	x					x*
New York City	x							
Philadelphia		x	x	x	may be requested	may be requested		
DC		x	x	x	x	x	x	
San Francisco		x	x					x**
Detroit	x		x		x		x	x***
Providence	x		x	x			x	
Houston	x		x				x	

Admissions Test = students register for an exam to apply for admission

Standardized Test Scores = district assessment given to all students

*30% seats for top scoring students regardless of SES, tier 1 for lowest SES quartile, tier 4 highest SES quartile

**Band 1 accounts for 70% of seats for top scoring students, Band 2 has minimum score requirements and SES factors, Band 3 has minimum score requirements and Principal nominations

***Bonus points for current Detroit PS Community District students, and students that live in specific catchment area