

# Boston Public Schools

## Exam Schools Admission Policy Review, 2020-2025

### Executive Summary

Five years ago, the Boston School Committee approved changes to the admissions policy for BPS' three exam schools. The policy changes were the result of many years of advocacy to increase equitable access to the exam schools.

The goals of the policy changes were to:

- expand the applicant pool;
- maintain rigor; and
- lead to a student body that better reflects the racial, socioeconomic, and geographic diversity of all students (K-12) in the city of Boston

Over the last year, BPS has conducted a careful review of the last five years of data to understand the impacts of these policy changes. Some key findings:

**1. Invitations to the three exam schools have become more representative of the school-aged children of Boston.**

By neighborhood, race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language background, and disability status, invitations to the exam schools are more representative of Boston's school-aged population than they were 5 years ago.

**2. The number of applicants has increased from some neighborhoods of Boston and some demographic groups, but decreased in others.**

Some students and families are not applying to the exam schools at all because of a perception—real or not—that there is little chance of receiving an invitation for students attending certain schools or living in certain neighborhoods. Due to the implementation of an eligibility criteria that applicants must have a B or higher beginning in SY21-22, this trend is difficult to track. But comparing the SY25-26 admissions cycle to SY21-22, the number of non-BPS applicants has decreased by approximately 16%.

**3. Students' chances of getting an invitation to an exam school vary widely by sending school and socioeconomic tier.**

Competition for an exam school invitation is much higher in certain socioeconomic tiers of Boston. From SY22-23 to SY24-25, the invitation rate in Tier 1 averaged 99.4%, compared to 45.7% in Tier 8. Students living in higher socioeconomic tiers need much higher composite scores to receive an invitation, compared to students in lower socioeconomic tiers. In SY24-25, for example, students in Tier

1 needed a 80.5 to get into BLS, a 65.6 to get into BLA, and a 64.6 to get into the O'Bryant. For students in Tier 8, the minimum composite score to get into these three schools was 98.8, 97.1, and 96.5, respectively. The disparities in minimum composite score lessened in SY25-26, after consolidating from 8 to 4 tiers, but they still remain.

4. While the school-based points were intended to account for disparities among schools, recognizing that historically certain BPS elementary schools sent a very small number of students to the exam schools, **the school-based points have not had a large impact on the makeup of the exam schools' student body.**

The school-based points only change the degree of competition *within* each socioeconomic tier. In simulations based on the SY24-25 applicant pool, eliminating the school-based points led to only a 1.1 percentage point decrease in the proportion of exam school invitations going to BPS students. The proportion of invitations going to charter school students decreased by 0.4 percentage points, and the proportion of invitations going to private/parochial/METCO students increased by 1.4 percentage points. The district has received feedback from many stakeholders that the school-based points pit school communities against one another, and may disincentivize families from accepting a seat at certain elementary schools, or even including a particular school on their choice list.

5. **A significant number of students with high composite scores are not receiving an invitation to an exam school.**

Roughly half of the applicants who do not receive an invitation enroll in another BPS school. Over the last few years, approximately 60-80 BPS students who applied but were not invited to an exam school ended up leaving Boston Public Schools each year.

The policy revisions 5 years ago successfully moved toward more equitable access to Boston's exam schools and an overall exam school student body that is more reflective of the city's demographics. But every year since then, in response to feedback from students, families and other stakeholders about some of the larger unintended consequences, additional modifications to the policy have been implemented to address these consequences. The district has worked to carefully balance our responsibility to be responsive to feedback with a commitment to carefully monitor the data and understand the impacts.

In December 2024, Superintendent Skipper publicly shared that a fuller analysis was underway to understand the full 5 years of data regarding outcomes of the policy changes and opportunities to revise the policy to ensure that highly-qualified students from every part of Boston and from every school have a pathway to an exam school—and that all students in Boston see a place for themselves within BPS.

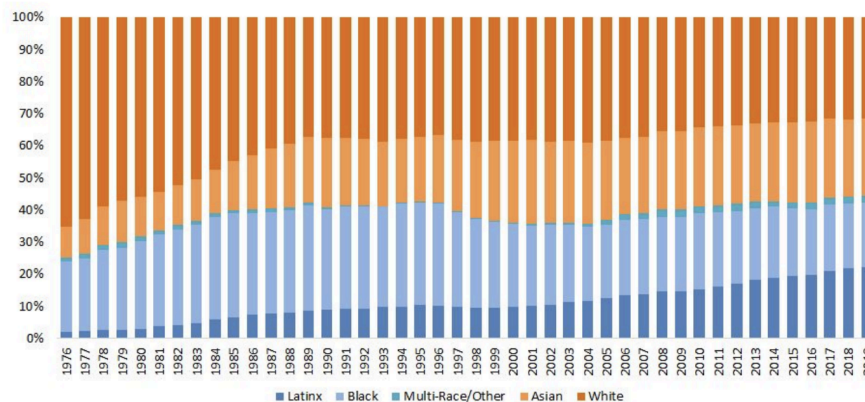
**This report summarizes the results of the last five admissions cycles.** This data is shared as part of the effort to advance community conversations about the exam school admissions policy and to serve as a foundation of common understanding as additional changes are considered.

## Historical Background

Boston Public Schools has three selective admissions high schools: Boston Latin School (BLS), founded in 1635; Boston Latin Academy (BLA), founded in 1877; and the John D. O'Bryant School of Mathematics and Science, formerly Boston Technical High School, founded in 1893.

This chart below shows the racial demographics of students enrolled at BPS exam schools from 1976-2019. Though the demographics of Boston's school-aged children and of BPS overall have changed over time, in general, the exam schools tend to have a higher proportion of white and Asian students and lower proportion of Black and Latinx students than Boston's overall population of school-aged children.

### Enrollment Trend at Exam Schools by Race



Boston Public Schools has been working to increase equitable access to the exam schools for many years:

- In 2016, BPS expanded the number of seats in the Exam School Initiative (ESI), a four-week summer course and seven-week virtual fall course designed to bridge the gap for students in underrepresented elementary schools to focus on test taking and academic preparedness. Last year, summer enrollment in this program was 294 students and the fall enrollment was 198.
- In 2019, BPS began administering the standardized test used to determine exam school admissions—at that time, the Independent School Entrance Examination (ISEE)—during the BPS school day, reducing barriers for families who previously had to sign up in advance and secure transportation to an exam on a Saturday at an off-site testing center.
- In 2020, after a public procurement process, BPS selected the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) Growth as the new exam. The MAP test, which replaced the ISEE, is [bias-tested](#), untimed, aligned to BPS' core standards curriculum, and validated for use with students of all racial identities, multilingual learners, and students with disabilities.

With the onset of COVID, then-Superintendent Brenda Casselius created an Exam Schools Admissions Criteria Working Group to explore temporary entrance criteria for the exam schools, given that the test

could not be administered remotely. The interim changes, which were approved by the Boston School Committee in October 2020, identified students for the applicant pool based on prior report card grades or prior assessment results. The invitations were distributed to students through a zip code-based mechanism, by which up to 20% of seats at each exam school were reserved for the top ranking students in the City based on GPA, and the remaining 80% of seats were distributed by using a combination of GPA and students' home zip code. Each zip code in the City was allocated a number of seats based on the percentage of school-aged children in the City of Boston living in that zip code. The invitations were distributed in 10 rounds, with 10% of each zip code's allocated seats distributed in each round.

The Working Group recommendations also included the creation of an Exam School Admissions Task Force to evaluate longer-term changes to the admissions process.

### ***Exam School Admissions Task Force and 2021 Changes***

The Exam School Admissions Task Force was charged with building upon the work initiated by the Working Group and developing a set of admissions policy recommendations for Boston's exam schools. The desired outcome was to

- expand the applicant pool;
- maintain rigor; and
- lead to a student body that better reflects the racial, socioeconomic, and geographic diversity of all students (K-12) in the city of Boston.

Further, the Task Force was to consider the use of the new NWEA MAP assessment and other factors (identified below) and leverage learning from a full review of the implementation of the SY21-22 admissions criteria, as well as a thorough review of practices in other districts.

Between February and June 2021, the Task force held [24 public meetings and 4 public listening sessions](#), and engaged with 6 experts during public meetings to explore how peer districts managed admissions to selective admissions high schools and to elevate best practices for consideration. The Task Force also analyzed past admissions data to understand the impact of the interim zip code policy on admissions for the 2021-2022 School Year.

The Task Force's ultimate recommendations were the result of deliberation across several decision points:

1. **How should the policy consider geographic diversity in the invitation process?** While the interim one-year policy utilized zip codes, the Task Force recognized that this approach had some limitations, including that some zip codes would receive less than 5 invitations. The Task Force contemplated various versions of the socioeconomic tier system utilized in Chicago Public Schools, ultimately recommending an eight-tier system. The eight-tier system was maintained in the policy ultimately adopted by the School Committee.
2. **What is the appropriate relative weight of grades versus assessment (test) to determine the composite score?** The Task Force recommended weighting the assessment at 30% of the

composite score and grades at 70% of the composite score. This weighting system was maintained in the policy ultimately adopted by the School Committee.

3. **What proportion of seats should be allocated by socioeconomic tier?** The Task Force discussed and [presented](#) to the School Committee allocating the first 20% of seats by straight rank citywide, whereby 20% of invitations at each exam school would be distributed to the top-ranking applicants. Invitations would be extended to the top ranking applicants to their first-choice selection. The remaining 80% of seats would be distributed by socioeconomic tier, with invitations distributed in 10 rounds, with 10% of each tier's seats being allocated in each round. This allocation mechanism was significantly changed in the policy adopted by the School Committee, which allocated 100% of seats by socioeconomic tier, removing the proposed 20% citywide round.
  
4. **Should the policy include measures to level the playing field between students attending high-poverty schools and students attending schools that were not identified as high-poverty?** The Task Force recommended awarding 10 additional points to students attending schools with 50% or more students identified as economically disadvantaged. The policy ultimately adopted by the School Committee lowered the threshold for considering a school to be "high-poverty" to 40%.

### How Does the Exam Schools Admission Policy Work?

**STEP 1:** All Boston census tracts are assessed for percent of persons below poverty; percent of households occupied by the owner; percent of families headed by a single parent; percent of households where limited English is spoken; and educational attainment. Census tracts are grouped into 4 socioeconomic tiers based on the City's ACS-averaged population of school-aged children, grades 5-8 (regardless of where they attend school).

**STEP 2:** All exam school applicants' grades are converted to the same scale and combined with their MAP test scores to form a composite score. Grades make up 70% and test scores make up 30% of the composite score.

**STEP 3:** Additional points are added to applicants' composite scores based on a) whether they attend school where 40% or more of the students are identified as economically disadvantaged, and b) whether they live in BHA housing, are in DCF custody, or are homeless.

**STEP 4:** Invitations are distributed to the highest-scoring applicants in each tier, with an equal number of invitations distributed to each tier. If all the seats at an applicant's first choice school have already been filled, the applicant is invited to their second choice school.

## **Impact of the Policy Changes Since SY20-21**

The last five years of admissions to exam schools have each had different policies for distributing invitations.

Admission Year	Policy
SY20-21	Citywide Ranking (ISEE + Grades)
SY21-22	20% Citywide + 80% Zip code (Grades only)
SY22-23	8 Tiers + Additional (10/15) points (Grades only)
SY23-24	8 Tiers + Additional (10/15) points (Grades + MAP)
SY24-25	8 Tiers + Additional (tier-determined/15) points (Grades + MAP)
SY25-26	4 Tiers + Additional (tier-determined/15) points (Grades + MAP)

The policy adopted in 2021 included a phased approach. In SY22-23, the composite score was based on grades only; in SY23-24, the composite score was based on both grades and test scores.

In SY23-24, it was mathematically impossible for certain students to receive an invitation to BLS if they did not attend a “high-poverty” school, and therefore did not receive school-based bonus points; the minimum composite score to receive an invitation was above 100. Ahead of the SY24-25 admissions cycle, the Boston School Committee approved a change to the policy that impacted the number of additional points a student receives based on the school they attended in the prior year. Previously, students received 10 additional points if they had attended a school in the prior year with more than 40% economically disadvantaged students; starting in SY24-25, students received a number of bonus points equal to the actual differential in composite scores within each socioeconomic tier. Students who lived in different socioeconomic tiers received different allocations of points, up to a maximum of 10, based on historical composite score data aligned to the socioeconomic tier they live in. (Current data on the proportion of economically disadvantaged students at each Boston school can be found [here](#).)

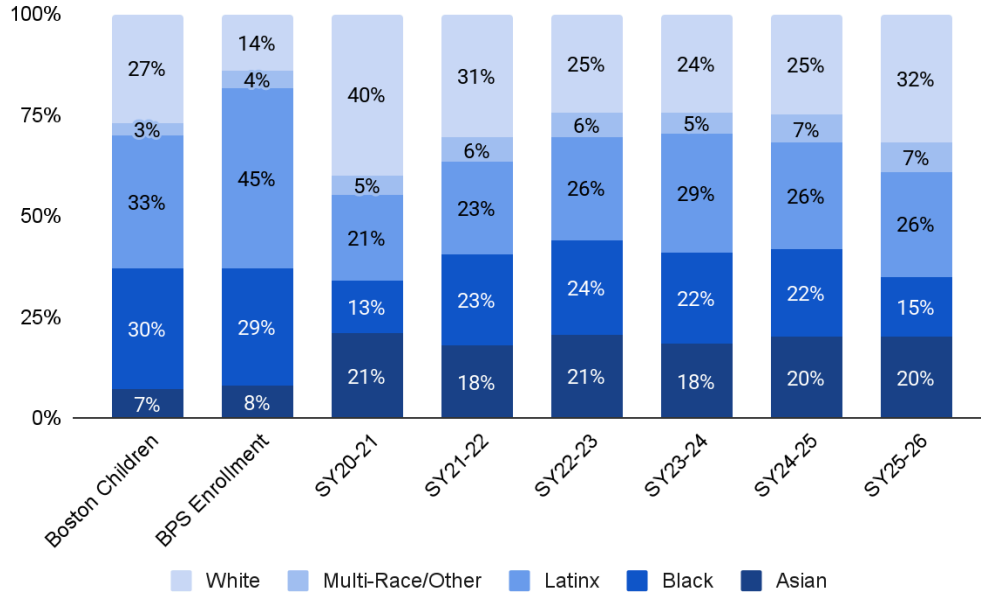
Ahead of the SY25-26 admissions cycle, the School Committee approved a policy change to consolidate from 8 to 4 tiers to mitigate tier changes year-to-year due to minor variability in the census data, and lessen the disparities in access between students in geographically similar areas.

This series of policy changes makes it complicated to conduct longitudinal analyses on the impact of the changes, but the following sections include data and observations related to the exam schools’ applicant pool, invitations, and the student experience.

### ***1. Demographics of Exam Schools’ Student Bodies***

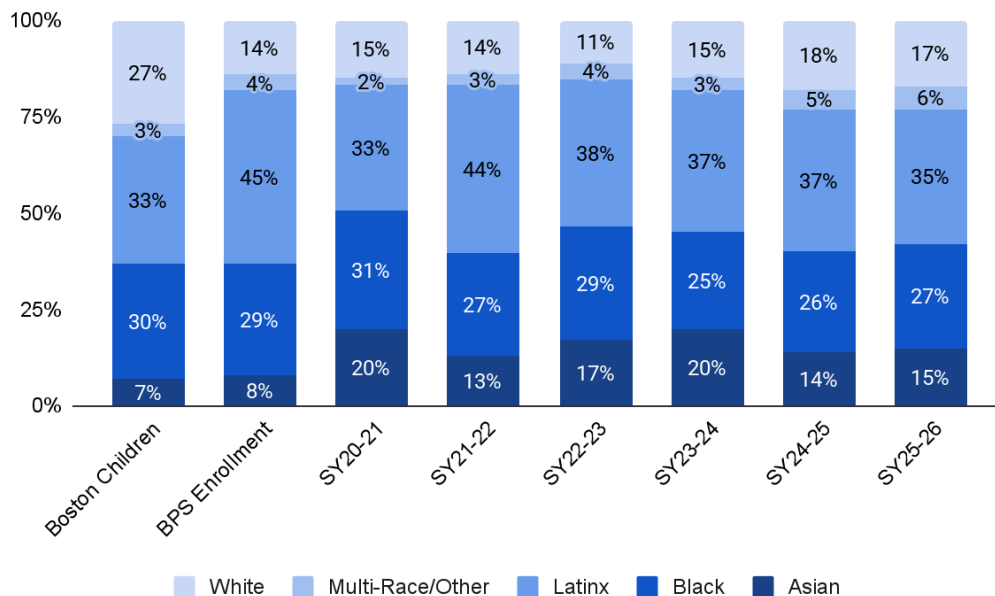
Compared to SY20-21, the policy revisions over the last 5 years have led to a student body across the three exam schools that is, overall, more representative of the school-aged population of Boston. Since 2020, the proportion of Asian students has decreased modestly, the proportion of Black and Latinx students has increased, and the proportion of white students has decreased.

### 7th Grade Invitations by Race SY20-21 to SY25-26



*Demographics of Boston children represents children ages 5-17 according to the 2023 American Community Survey. Demographics of BPS Enrollment represents the BPS student body in SY24-25.*

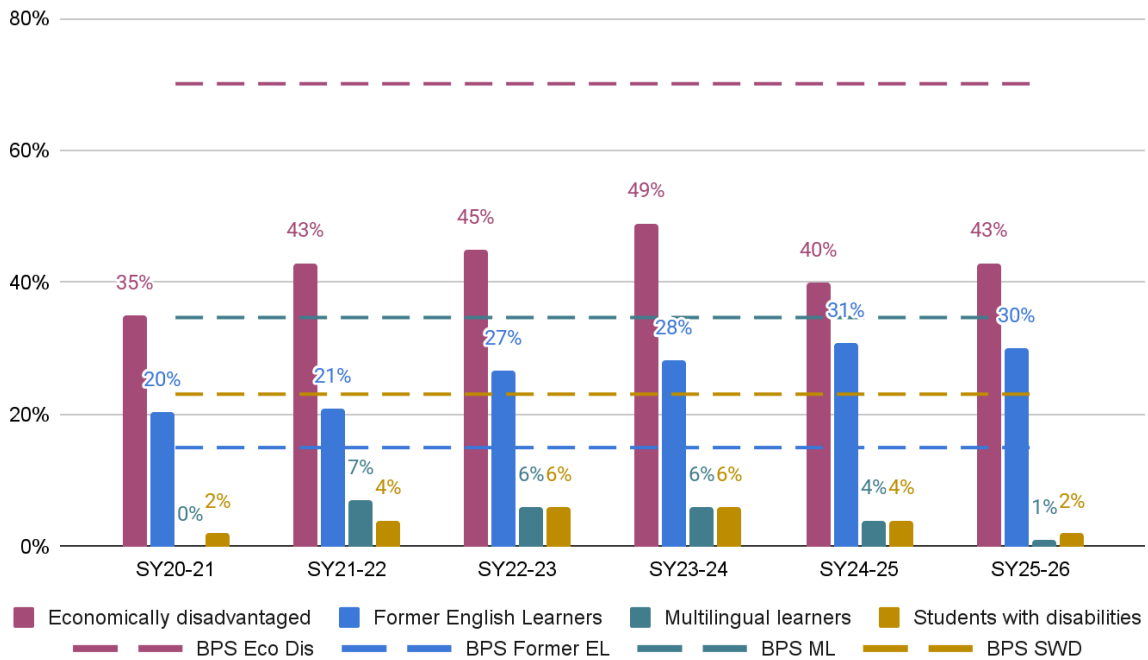
### 9th Grade Invitations by Race SY20-21 to SY25-26



*Demographics of Boston children represents children ages 5-17 according to the 2023 American Community Survey. Demographics of BPS Enrollment represents the BPS student body in SY24-25.*

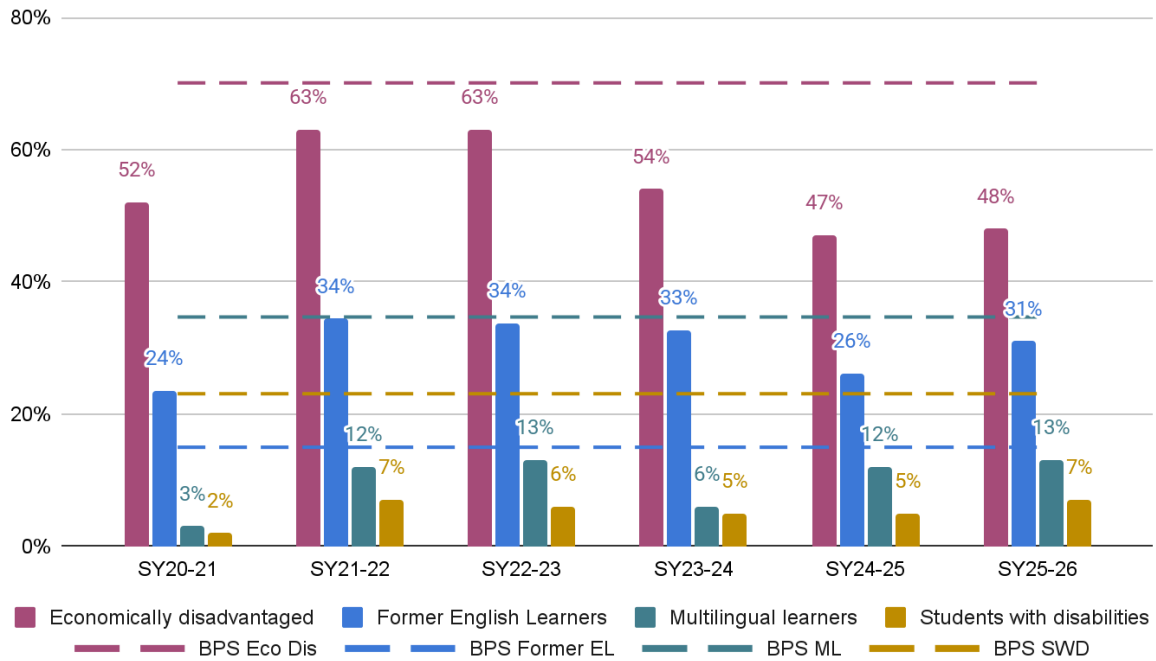
The proportion of economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and multilingual learners has increased – though these student populations continue to be under-represented in the exam schools, compared to BPS overall. Notably, the proportion of former English learners has significantly increased from 20% in SY20-21 to 30% in SY25-26, well above the BPS average.

### 7th Grade Invitations by Student Group SY20-21 to SY25-26



### 9th Grade Invitations by Student Group SY20-21 to SY25-26





The geographic diversity of the exam schools' student body has also become more representative of Boston. The tables below show the neighborhoods with the most significant change in the percentage of invitations received, comparing SY20-21 to SY25-26.

**Zip codes with more than 1 percentage point increase in invitations received, between SY20-21 and SY25-26**

Zip Code	Neighborhood	% of BPS students grades 5-8	SY20-21	SY21-22	SY22-23	SY23-24	SY24-25	SY25-26
02121	Dorchester	8.2%	2.6%	6.9%	5.5%	7.4%	6.7%	5.9%
02128	East Boston	7.4%	5.6%	7.7%	8.9%	8.1%	8.1%	8.7%
02119	Roxbury	3.9%	2.6%	5.1%	5.2%	1.1%	6.6%	5.6%
02135	Brighton	3.1%	5.1%	3.0%	3.8%	3.4%	6.0%	6.8%
02125	Dorchester	6.8%	4.6%	6.1%	6.1%	4.7%	5.9%	6.2%

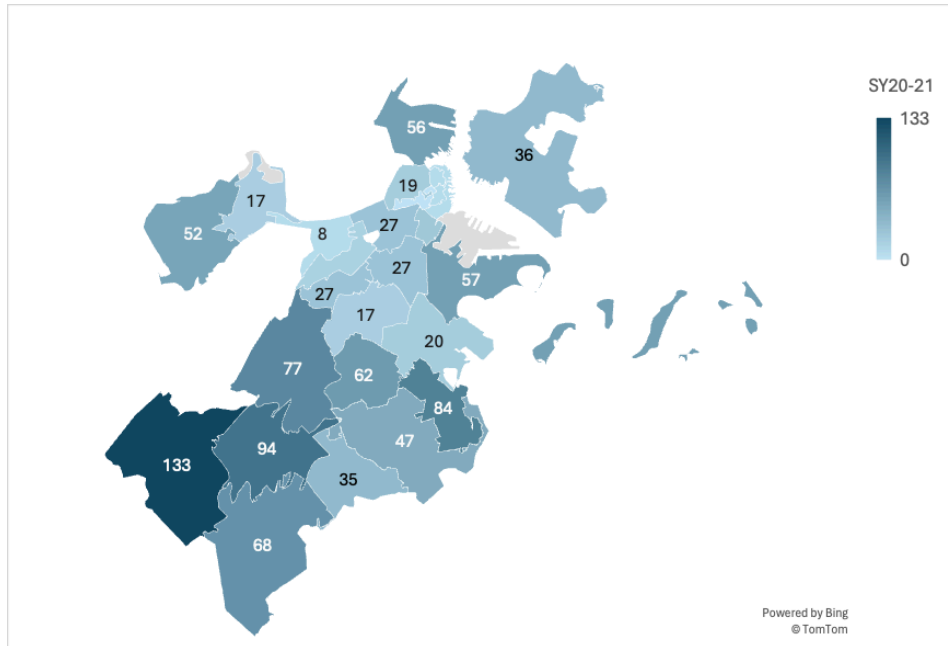
**Zip codes with more than 1 percentage point decrease in invitations received, between SY20-21 and SY25-26**

Zip Code	Neighborhood	% of BPS students grades 5-8	SY20-21	SY21-22	SY22-23	SY23-24	SY24-25	SY25-26
02132	West Roxbury	5.6%	13.0%	7.1%	5.3%	5.2%	3.9%	6.4%
02131	Roslindale	5.6%	9.2%	6.9%	7.6%	6.0%	7.0%	6.6%

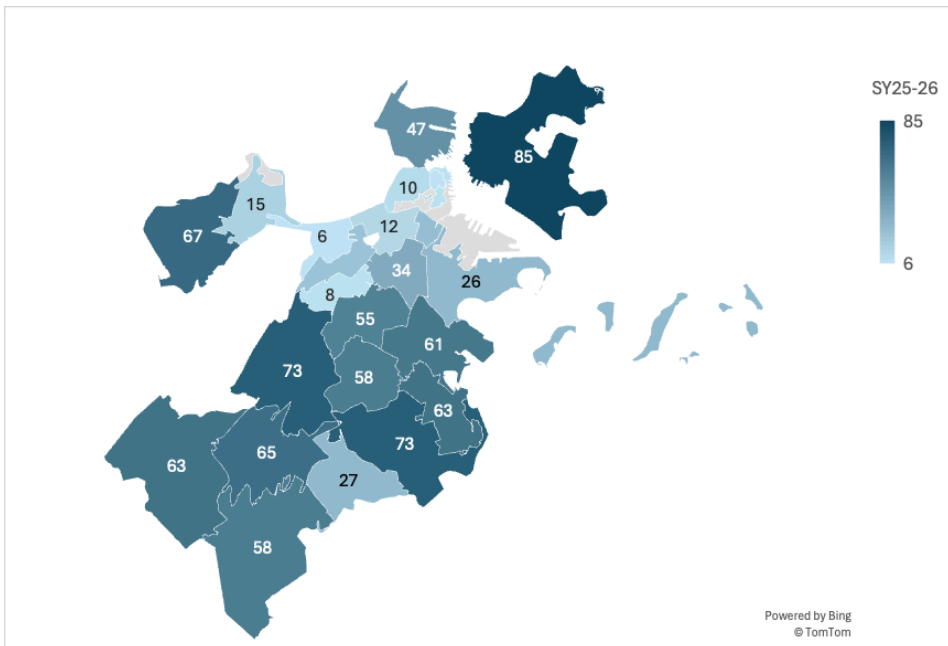
02116	Back Bay	0.8%	2.6%	1.3%	1.5%	1.0%	1.2%	1.2%
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The below maps show a visual representation of how the geographic distribution of invitations has shifted from the last year prior to policy changes (SY20-21) to the most recent year (SY24-25).

**Invitations by Zip Code SY20-21**



**Invitations by Zip Code SY25-26**



*Darker shades represent a higher number of invitations. Zip codes with 5 or fewer invitations are not shown.*

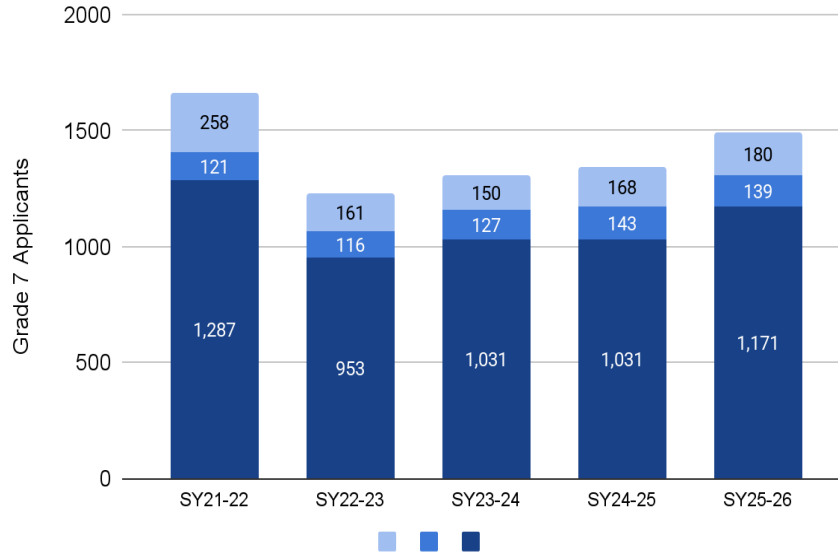
## ***2. Exam Schools' Applicant Pool***

As the policy has changed, the composition of the applicant pool has also shifted. Changes are difficult to measure because of a change in methodology for determining eligibility. In SY20-21 and years prior, students were considered to be part of the applicant pool as long as they had taken the ISEE admissions exam and had submitted grades by the deadline ("default ranking"). Students did not have to meet any other specific eligibility criteria, other than Boston residency.

As part of the one-year interim admissions policy for SY21-22, students were required to have at least a B GPA and rank at least one exam school in order to be considered as part of the applicant pool. These eligibility requirements were maintained in the policy adopted ahead of the SY22-23 cycle, and beginning in SY23-24, also required students to have a NWEA MAP test score to be considered.

Since implementing the full eligibility criteria in SY23-24, the 7th grade applicant pool has ranged from about 1,300 to 1,500 students. The proportion of applicants coming from BPS elementary schools has remained relatively steady, at about 78-79%.

The total number of applicants was higher in SY21-22 and years prior, when the policy did not specify eligibility criteria other than having taken the ISEE test. Since then, the number of non-BPS applicants has decreased by approximately 16%.

**Number of 7th Grade Applicants by School Type**

Beginning with the SY22-23 invitation cycle, invitations were distributed by socioeconomic tier. The tiers were designed to be roughly equal in size, based on the number of children in grades 5-8 living in each census tract, according to the U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS). Each tier has between 12–13% of Boston’s grade 5-8 student population, and between 8–15% of BPS students grades 5-8.

The table below compares the number of children in grades 5-8 to the number of grade 7 applicants for each invitation cycle, as well as the current (SY24-25) BPS enrollment for students in grades 5-8.

Tier	BPS Enrollment (SY24-25)	SY22-23		SY23-24		SY24-25		SY25-26		
	BPS Students in Grades 5-8	# Students Grades 5-8	Grade 7 Applicants	# Students Grades 5-8	Grade 7 Applicants	# Students Grades 5-8	Grade 7 Applicants	Tier	# Students Grades 5-8	Grade 7 Applicants
1	1,608 (13%)	2,868 (13%)	116 (9%)	2,942 (13%)	125 (9%)	2,751 (12%)	115 (9%)	1	5376 (24%)	317 (21%)
2	1,867 (15%)	2,745 (12%)	99 (8%)	2,946 (13%)	131 (10%)	2,717 (12%)	141 (10%)			
3	1,625 (13%)	2,908 (13%)	110 (9%)	2,802 (12%)	111 (8%)	2,765 (12%)	123 (9%)	2	5658 (26%)	382 (26%)
4	1,905 (15%)	2,754 (12%)	134 (10%)	2,733 (12%)	141 (10%)	2,886 (13%)	144 (11%)			
5	1,581 (13%)	2,920 (13%)	115 (9%)	2,864 (13%)	131 (10%)	2,869 (13%)	159 (12%)	3	5526 (25%)	377 (25%)
6	1,595 (13%)	2,792 (12%)	155 (12%)	2,737 (12%)	182 (13%)	2,727 (12%)	197 (15%)			

7	1,266 (10%)	2,899 (13%)	234 (18%)	2,764 (12%)	262 (19%)	2,851 (13%)	199 (15%)	4	5550 (25%)	414 (28%)
8	982 (8%)	2,843 (13%)	320 (25%)	2,883 (13%)	272 (20%)	2,759 (12%)	270 (20%)			
All	12,429	22,729	1,283	22,671	1,355	22,325	1,348	All	22,110	1,490

Over the last few years, grade 7 exam school applicants have disproportionately lived in tiers 7 and 8. Approximately 35–43% of applicants have lived in tiers 7 and 8, compared to 18% of BPS students and 25–26% of Boston students. In SY25-26, the proportion of applicants coming from the new Tier 4 (roughly equivalent to the previous Tiers 7 and 8) declined to 28%.

During this time period, the number of applicants in Tier 1 remained relatively steady and the number of applicants in Tiers 2–6 showed modest growth. In SY22-23, approximately 17% of applicants lived in Tiers 1 or 2; in SY25-26, the proportion of applicants living in the new Tier 1 increased to 21%. In SY22-23, approximately 19% of applicants lived in Tiers 3 or 4; in SY25-26, the proportion of applicants living in the new Tier 2 increased to 26%.

Across all socioeconomic tiers, the majority of applicants rank Boston Latin School as their top choice, though preferences generally vary by tier, as noted in the chart below. In SY25-26, 76% of applicants in Tier 4 ranked BLS as their first choice, compared to 50% of applicants in Tier 1.

#### Top Ranked School by 7th Grade Applicants, by Tier

Tier	SY23-24			SY24-25			SY25-26		
	Boston Latin School	Boston Latin Academy	O'Bryant School	Boston Latin School	Boston Latin Academy	O'Bryant School	Boston Latin School	Boston Latin Academy	O'Bryant School
1	55%	26%	19%	57%	19%	23%	(New Tier 1)		
2	50%	25%	24%	47%	31%	23%	50%	22%	28%
3	41%	35%	23%	59%	21%	20%	(New Tier 2)		
4	50%	32%	18%	66%	19%	15%	61%	20%	19%
5	51%	24%	24%	64%	22%	14%	(New Tier 3)		
6	63%	24%	13%	68%	18%	14%	57%	15%	18%
7	69%	19%	12%	62%	26%	12%	(New Tier 4)		
8	74%	19%	7%	73%	18%	9%	76%	14%	10%

While the majority of applicants rank all 3 exam schools, some students choose to rank only 1 or 2 schools. The proportion of applicants who rank only 1 school is generally higher among 9th grade applicants than 7th grade applicants, as shown below. In SY25-26, the overall proportion of 7th grade applicants who ranked only 1 school was 10.3%, and the overall proportion of 9th grade applicants who ranked only 1 school was 25.1%.

Tier	Percent of 7th Grade Applicants who Rank only 1 School				Percent of 9th Grade Applicants who Rank only 1 School			
	SY22-23	SY23-24	SY24-25	SY25-26	SY22-23	SY23-24	SY24-25	SY25-26
1	6.9%	8.8%	9.6%	8.5%	26.6%	22.8%	19.8%	31.2%
2	18.2%	9.2%	8.5%	12.3%	32.5%	18.9%	23.1%	26.0%
3	9.1%	5.4%	12.2%	10.3%	23.1%	17.0%	22.7%	24.0%
4	9.0%	12.1%	9.7%	9.9%	18.8%	21.4%	30.0%	18.7%
5	11.3%	4.6%	10.1%	–	21.8%	14.6%	19.0%	–
6	7.1%	10.4%	9.6%	–	20.7%	18.2%	27.8%	–
7	5.6%	7.6%	9.0%	–	12.5%	14.5%	15.2%	–
8	10.0%	10.3%	8.9%	–	16.5%	10.1%	13.1%	–
Total	9.1%	8.8%	9.6%	10.3%	22.0%	17.2%	21.2%	25.1%

While the proportion of students who rank only one school does not appear to vary widely by socioeconomic tier, students' exam school preferences do vary by socioeconomic tier, as shown in the chart below.

First Choice School Among Grade 7 Applicants, SY25-26			
Tier	Boston Latin Academy	Boston Latin School	O'Bryant
1	22%	50%	28%
2	20%	61%	19%
3	15%	67%	18%
4	14%	76%	10%

### 3. Exam School Invitations

Because there are more applicants in higher tiers, competing for the same number of seats per tier, the invitation rate is significantly lower in these tiers. In SY22-23 and SY23-24, nearly all applicants in Tiers 1 and 2 received an invitation, compared to approximately 45–47% of applicants in Tier 8. In SY25-26, with 4 tiers instead of 8, the invitation rate ranged from about 59–77% across tiers.

**Invitation Rate by Socioeconomic Tier, SY22-23 to SY25-26**

Tier	SY22-23			SY23-24			SY24-25			SY25-26		
	Applicants	Invitations	Rate	Applicants	Invitations	Rate	Applicants	Invitations	Rate	Applicants	Invitations	Rate

1	116	115	99.1%	125	124	99.2%	115	115	100.0%	317	245	77.3%
2	99	99	100.0%	131	128	97.7%	141	124	87.9%			
3	110	110	100.0%	111	111	100.0%	123	121	98.4%	382	245	64.1%
4	134	133	99.3%	141	128	90.8%	144	124	86.1%			
5	115	114	99.1%	131	128	97.7%	159	123	77.4%	377	245	65.0%
6	155	143	92.3%	182	127	69.8%	197	123	62.4%			
7	234	143	61.1%	262	127	48.5%	199	123	61.8%	414	245	59.2%
8	320	143	44.7%	272	127	46.7%	270	123	45.6%			
Total	1283	1000	77.9%	1355	1000	73.8%	1348	976	72.4%	1490	980	65.8%

Equalizing the number of invitations distributed across socioeconomic tiers is meant to level the playing field for students from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

The following tables show the minimum composite score required to receive an invitation to an exam school in each socioeconomic tier. In both 7th and 9th grade, students in higher tiers required higher composite scores than students in lower tiers given the greater intensity of competition from significantly more applicants for the same number of seats in higher tiers.

**Minimum Composite Score (with points) by Tier**

Tier	Grade 7						Grade 9					
	SY23-24			SY24-25			SY23-24			SY 24-25		
	BLS	BLA	OB	BLS	BLA	OB	BLS	BLA	OB	BLS	BLA	OB
1	83.7	68.7	67.8	80.5	65.6	64.6	94.2	92.71	80.5	95.5	90.5	80.0
2	86.1	71.8	64.8	86.6	77.6	76.2	96.5	92.8	82.8	94.2	89.2	77.0
3	73.5	69.1	68.0	82.3	67.5	63.7	98.5	95.1	84.6	93.7	85.7	74.4
4	83.8	75.7	71.3	86.9	75.9	74.4	98.8	95.9	87.5	97.1	91.5	76.5
5	86.0	74.2	71.1	89.2	76.1	76.0	100.7	92.3	84.3	98.2	88.2	70.2
6	94.4	87.8	86.7	97.9	88.9	88.8	100.5	94.6	84.1	100.0	94.3	78.8
7	100.2	97.5	97.2	97.3	91.1	90.6	101.1	96.7	90.7	97.8	94.7	78.2
8	99.1	97.4	97.1	98.8	97.1	96.5	98.6	93.4	86.4	99.2	97.6	89.2

In SY23-24, it was mathematically impossible for certain students to receive an invitation to BLS if they did not attend a “high-poverty” school, and therefore did not receive school-based bonus points. The minimum composite score thresholds that are above 100 are highlighted in yellow.

Tier	SY25-26					
	Grade 7			Grade 9		
	BLS	BLA	OB	BLS	BLA	OB
1	92.8	82.8	82.7	98.6	87.9	77.8
2	95.1	86.4	88.3	96.1	85.5	74.4

3	95.1	85.6	88.7	96.7	86.9	74.8
4	97.4	91.1	93.2	98.2	92.3	70.3

The policy change ahead of the SY24-25 admissions cycle was intended to ensure that no students required additional points in order to get into any of the three exam schools. This revision differentiated the number of school-based points students receive based on the socioeconomic tier where they live. Under the revised policy, school-based points vary by tier: the number of bonus points in each tier is equal to the difference in average composite score of students at “high poverty” schools versus “non-high poverty” schools in that particular tier. In SY24-25 and SY25-26, the minimum composite score was not above 100 in any tier or for any entry grade.

The below table shows the number of school-based points assigned to students in each tier in SY24-25 and SY25-26.

Tier	SY24-25	Tier	SY25-26
1	8	1	10
2	10		
3	9	2	8
4	5		
5	4	3	5
6	8		
7	4	4	3
8	2		

#### **4. Impact of School-Based Bonus Points**

The school-based bonus points were intended to account for disparities among elementary schools, recognizing that historically, certain BPS elementary schools sent a very small number of students to the exam schools.

The percentage of students receiving school-based bonus points (10 in SY23-24; a tiered differential in SY24-25 and SY25-26) varies widely by socioeconomic tier, as seen in the table below.

Tier	2023-24			2024-25			2025-26 (tiers consolidated)		
	Applicants	% Receiving 10 Points	% Receiving 15 Points	Applicants	% Receiving School-Based Bonus Points	% Receiving 15 Points	Applicants	% Receiving School-Based Bonus Points	% Receiving 15 Points
1	125	73%	23%	115	72%	22%	317	81%	11%



2	131	79%	9%	141	87%	7%	382	82%	6%
3	111	84%	3%	123	84%	4%	377	78%	5%
4	141	83%	6%	144	73%	10%	414	53%	3%
5	131	76%	11%	159	78%	8%	-	-	-
6	182	64%	7%	197	72%	2%	-	-	-
7	262	64%	3%	199	67%	2%	-	-	-
8	272	31%	3%	270	48%	3%	-	-	-

The percentage of students receiving school-based bonus points has increased significantly, from 63% in SY22-23 to 73% in SY25-26.

In addition to the school-based bonus points, students are assigned 15 additional points if they live in Boston Housing Authority public housing, are in the custody of the Department of Children and Families, or are experiencing homelessness. The percentage of students receiving housing-based bonus points has remained relatively consistent over the last several years.

The number 15 was not based on any particular data; in fact, the average composite score differential between students who are homeless, living in BHA, or in DCF custody and their peers is closer to 10 points, rather than 15. In addition to operating public housing communities, the BHA distributes housing vouchers (“section 8” vouchers) to low-income residents to live in leased housing. These Boston residents have a similar socioeconomic status as residents living in public housing, but because of historic challenges with data matching, BHA students living in leased housing are not currently assigned 15 bonus points.

Because the school-based bonus points only affect competition *within* each socioeconomic tier, they may not have a large impact on invitations—particularly in socioeconomic tiers where the vast majority of applicants receive school-based points. Because the vast majority of BPS schools are eligible for school-based bonus points, students and families at the small number of BPS schools that do *not* receive school-based bonus points may be at a disadvantage in exam school admissions.

## **5. Impact on BPS Secondary School Ecosystem**

Of the students who were eligible for and applied for exam schools but were not invited, approximately half enrolled in another BPS school (54%) for SY24-25, the most recent year for which data is available. This percentage has ranged from 40% in SY22-23 to 75% in SY20-21. Students who ranked only one exam school and did not receive an invitation chose to enroll in a different BPS school at higher rates for all five years, except for SY21-22.

### **Percentage of Grade 7 Applicants Not Invited to an Exam Who Enrolled in Another BPS School (as of October of each School Year)**

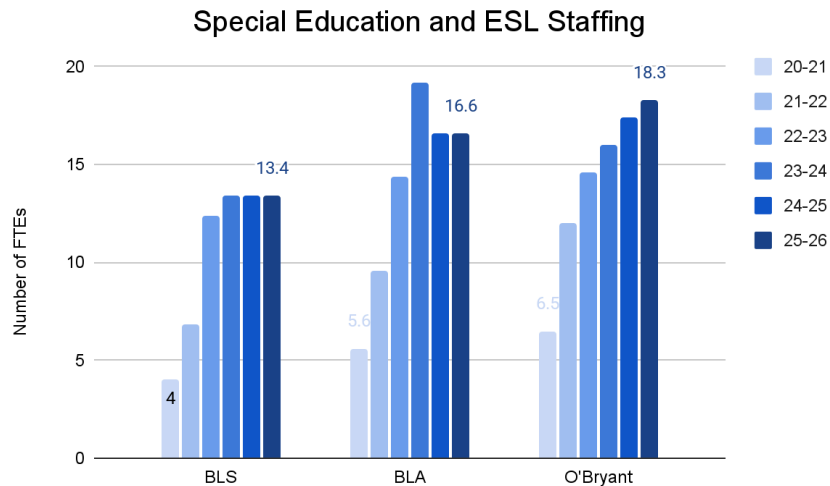
	SY21-22	SY22-23	SY23-24	SY24-25
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	Number of Non-Invitees	Percent Enrolled in Another BPS School	Number of Non-Invitees	Percent Enrolled in Another BPS School	Number of Non-Invitees	Percent Enrolled in Another BPS School	Number of Non-Invitees	Percent Enrolled in Another BPS School
<b>All Applicants</b>	692	70%	283	40%	355	43%	372	54%
<b>BPS Applicants</b>	567	82%	161	67%	228	65%	255	76%
<b>Non-BPS Applicants</b>	125	12%	122	5%	127	2%	117	7%
<b>Applicants Who Ranked Only One Exam School</b>	75	69%	44	61%	49	55%	61	61%

### Resources to Serve Students with Disabilities & Multilingual Learners

Over the last 10 years, BPS enrollment has declined significantly, stabilizing in the last few years with approximately 22,000 secondary school students. As a result, the three exam schools now enroll a larger proportion of BPS secondary school students than in the past.

As the exam schools welcome a larger number of multilingual learners and students with disabilities, staffing allocations have also changed. From SY20-21 to SY25-26, each of the exam schools has seen an increasing number of staff dedicated to supporting students with disabilities and multilingual learners.



*In the above analysis, FTEs categorized as supporting special education and ESL include itinerant pupil support, special education resource teachers, special education substantially separate paraprofessionals, special education substantially separate teachers, and bilingual teachers.*

## **Moving Forward**

In the years since the policy was approved in 2021, many students, families, educators and other stakeholders have shared their perspectives on the impacts of the new policy. The following themes have also emerged as concerns:

1. The policy is difficult to understand—and some of the minor changes made in the last few years have only made it more complicated. Some stakeholders have questioned the rationale for choosing the number of school-based or housing-based bonus points.
2. The school-based bonus points can create tension among school communities. There is a sense that students from similar socioeconomic backgrounds have significantly different chances of receiving an invitation, depending on what school they go to. In some cases, this can skew student and family behavior—for example, incentivizing families to transfer their student into a school that receives bonus points in order to increase their chances of getting an exam school invitation—and subsequently destabilize school communities.
3. Socioeconomic tiers do not account for economic variation within census tracts. Students from a low socioeconomic status background may be disadvantaged if they live in a census tract with a large number of households with a higher socioeconomic status. Some stakeholders have expressed a desire for the admissions policy to take into consideration each individual student's socioeconomic status.
4. Because of the number of applicants in certain tiers, some students with high scores—particularly if they attend schools that are not assigned additional points—have no chance or very little chance of being invited to their top choice school. This concern was, in part, mitigated by the modest policy changes ahead of the SY24-25 admissions cycle, which differentiated the number of additional points students receive based on the socioeconomic tier they live in, but in the SY25-26 admissions cycle, competition remains significantly higher within Tier 4.
5. While invitations sent under the new policy have gone to a population that is more reflective of the city of Boston's socioeconomic and geographic diversity, the percentage of invitations sent to students with disabilities and multilingual learners is still low compared to the student population of Boston Public Schools.
6. Families are demanding high quality options for their children. In SY24-25, 54% of all 7th grade applicants who were not invited to an exam school remained in the district. This concern highlights the need to continue expanding high quality options in high schools across the district as well as to better understand what schools meet that criteria for families.

## ***Additional changes for review and consideration***

In December 2024, we committed to undertaking additional and deeper analysis to better understand the impact and consider potential future changes. The potential areas we identified for additional analysis were:

- **Calculation and sizing of socioeconomic tiers:** What are the impacts of sizing tiers based on number of applicants rather than number of children grades 5-8? Can the policy consider individual socioeconomic status?
- **Top Scoring Students:** Can the policy ensure the top scoring students in the city receive an invitation to the school of their choice?
- **Access for Students with Disabilities and Multilingual Learners:** Can the policy increase access for students with disabilities and multilingual learners?
- **Student Experience:** What is the student experience once they enroll at the exam schools?

In consideration of potential changes, the BPS data team ran many data simulations exploring the impact of three different variables:

- Changing the school-based points
- Changing the way that the socioeconomic tiers are sized
- Adding a citywide round for highly qualified students

Based on this analysis, BPS is sharing three data simulations with the School Committee and the public for consideration. In Fall 2025, after hearing community feedback, the Superintendent may make a final policy recommendation to the School Committee, with time for additional discussion before a vote.

The District has also closely considered the proposal to evaluate students' individual socioeconomic status, using participation in state and federal safety net programs as a proxy, in response to feedback from the public and members of the School Committee. This is not a proposal that can be feasibly recommended at this time. The significant expansion in data collection requirements would create more room for human error and present operational challenges that would undermine public confidence in the admissions process. Furthermore, since many undocumented students or students in mixed-status households may not participate in state or federal safety net programs, using their participation as a proxy would leave gaps that would disadvantage a large proportion of Boston's school-aged children.

Exam school admissions policy changes are only one component of building an ecosystem of schools that meet each student's aspirations, learning styles, and preferences. BPS and City leaders remain intently focused on improving the quality of instruction in *every* classroom, ensuring that *every* student can access challenging, grade-level content in a way that works for them. Over the last couple of years, the district has adopted high-quality instructional materials across all BPS schools, provided coaching and professional development to our educators to support implementation, and are now intensifying the focus on providing high-quality specialized supports for the students who need them. The district is also ramping up investments in the Exam School Initiative, summer and fall programs to help low-income students prepare to apply

to the exam schools, and in Fall 2025, launching the Advanced Math Initiative across 12 elementary schools and 8 high schools to provide access to math competitions and advanced math programming both during and after the school day. BPS must continue expanding opportunities for all our students to find a home in BPS that challenges and supports them academically—at exam schools and across the entire portfolio of schools.