

# **Exam School Admission Policy Review**



**June 17, 2025**

# Context



In 2021, the Boston School Committee voted to amend the BPS exam school admissions policy to promote more equitable, city-wide access to the district's three selective admissions high schools.

- A School Committee Task Force explored possible admissions policies, with the goals of:
  - expanding the applicant pool;
  - maintaining academic rigor; and
  - generating a student body that better reflects the racial, socioeconomic, and geographic diversity of all students in the City of Boston
- Based on the work of the Task Force, the Superintendent recommended and the School Committee approved a new admissions policy that:
  - Considered students' composite scores, made up of GPA and scores on the MAP assessment
  - Distributed an equal number of exam school invitations to each socioeconomic tier of Boston, and
  - Assigned students additional school-based (Title I) points, as well as points for students in public housing, experiencing homelessness, or in the care of DCF (15 points)
- The policy required a full review after 5 years to analyze the outcomes of the policy changes. In December 2024, we announced we would be conducting an analysis to explore opportunities to revise the policy to ensure that highly-qualified students from every neighborhood and from every school have a pathway to an exam school and that every student and family in Boston has a place in BPS.

# Desired Outcomes of Policy Analysis



- Maintain the basic structure of distributing invitations across socioeconomic tiers
- Ensure that highest-scoring students from every neighborhood and from every school have a path to an exam school.
- Simplify the policy to be as easily understood as possible for all constituencies, where each element has a clear rationale and can be implemented effectively by BPS.
- Craft a policy designed to remain stable for multiple years.

# Current Admission Policy



**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 a 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 experiencing homelessness.

**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.

# Changes in Admissions Policy (2020 - 2025)



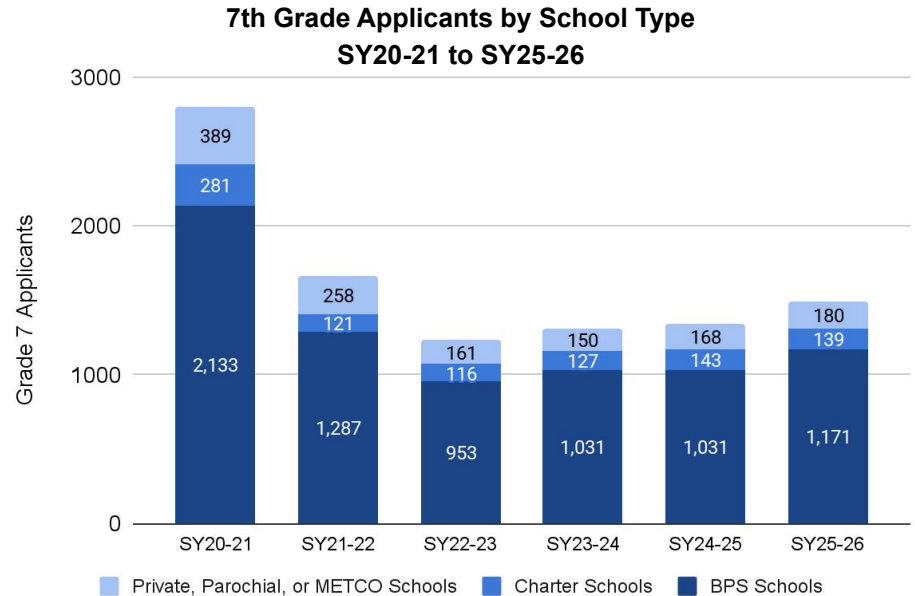
Although the current policy requires a review every five years, BPS has made some annual adjustments in response to data analysis and feedback. These changes are reflected in the table below.

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

# Policy Impact on Applicant Pool



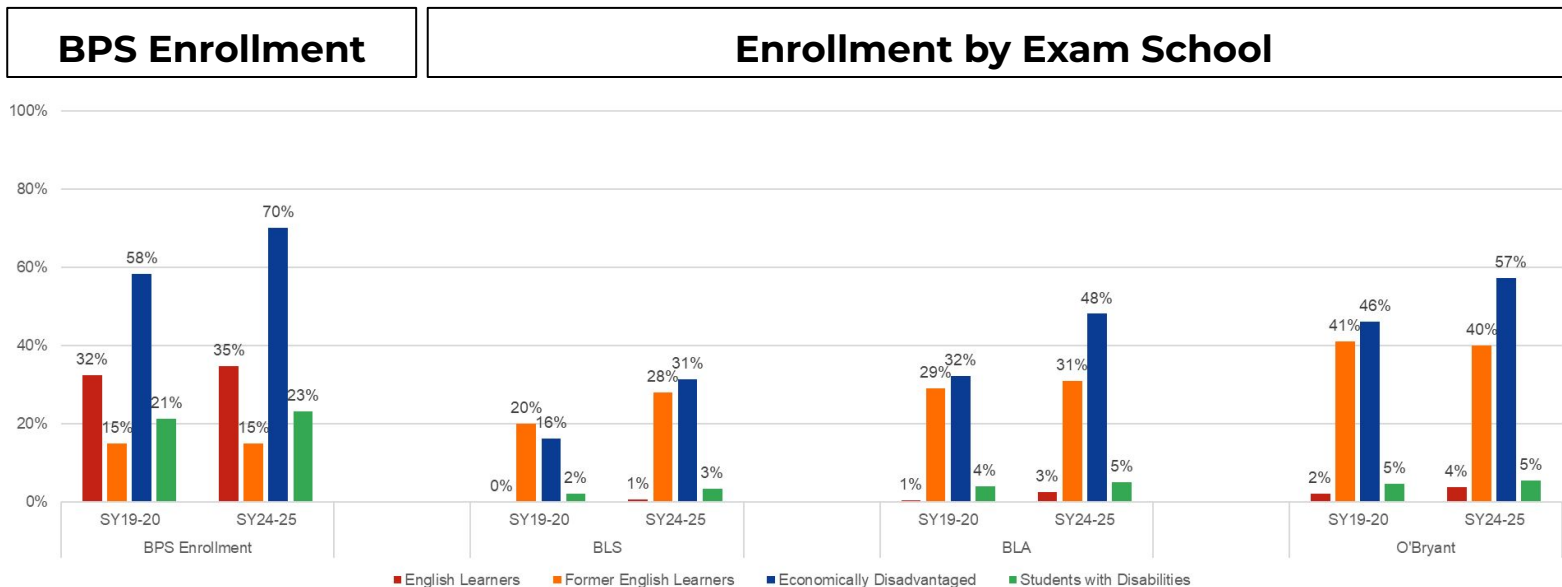
- The number of applicants to exam schools for 7th grade has increased from SY22-23 to SY25-26.
- Policy changes contribute to the decrease in applicants from SY20-21:
  - School-based testing was introduced in SY20-21, resulting in a higher number of BPS applicants than previous years.
  - In SY21-22, the policy introduced a requirement of a B GPA and students to rank at least one exam school to be considered an eligible applicant. Prior years did not have eligibility requirements.



# Policy Impact on Enrollment: Student Groups



The graph below shows the percentage of English learners, economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities enrolled at each exam school and the district overall for SY19-20 and SY24-25.

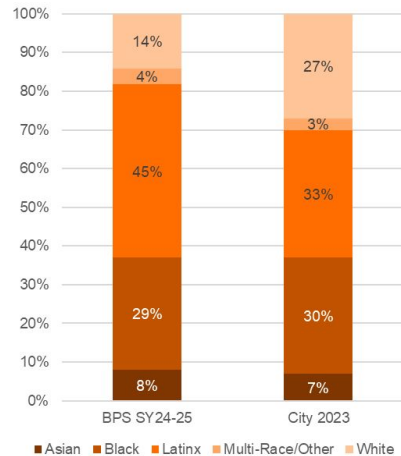


# Policy Impact on Enrollment: Race & Ethnicity



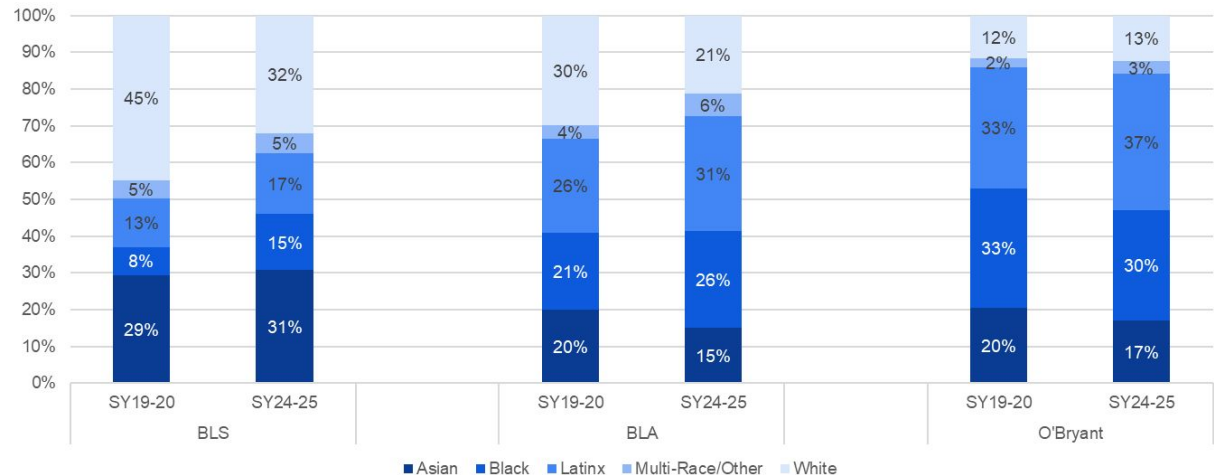
The graph below shows the racial breakdown of students enrolled at each exam school and the district overall for SY19-20 and SY24-25.

**BPS & City\* Demographics**



\*Boston Children Aged 5-17, source: 2023 American Community Survey

**Enrollment by Exam School**



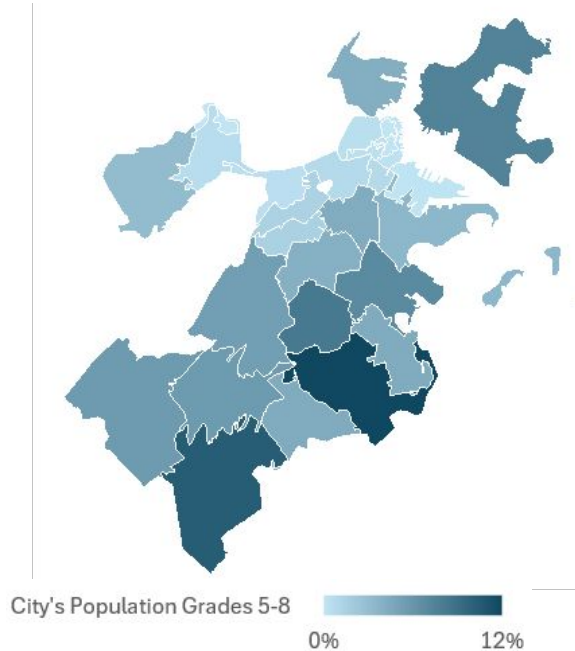


# Policy Impact on Invitations: Geography

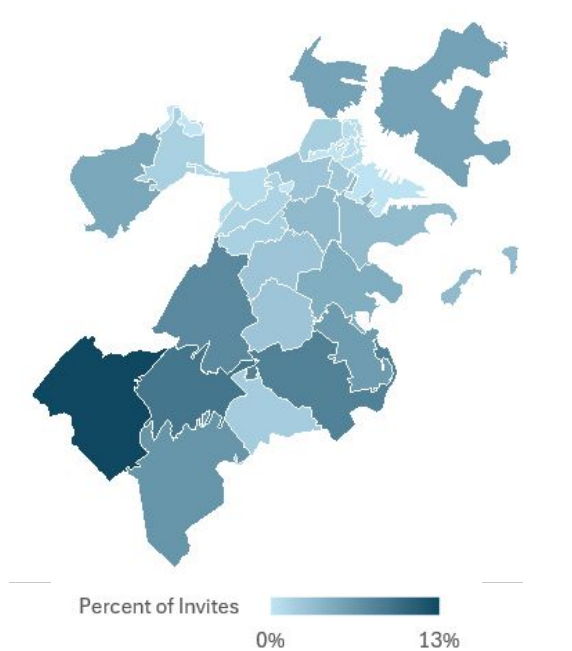


Invitations are now more distributed across the city, compared to invitations sent in SY20-21.

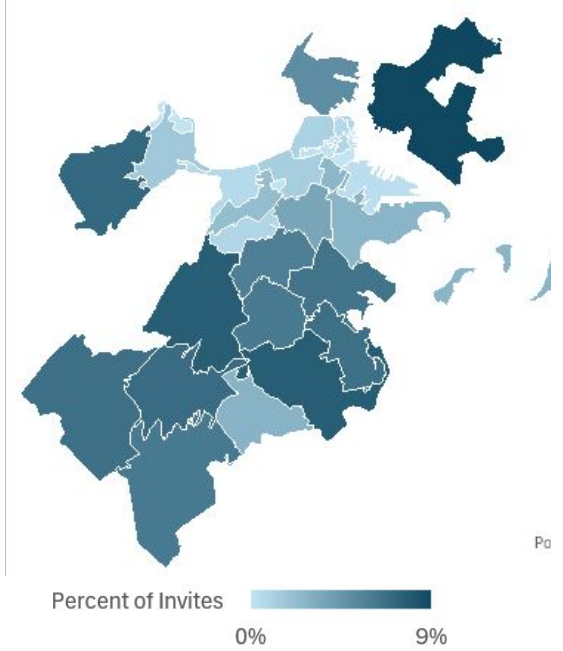
**Citywide**



**SY20-21**



**SY25-26**



# Policy Impact on Invitations by Tier



- Students' chances of getting an invitation to an exam school vary widely by sending school and socioeconomic tier.
- There are more applicants, and therefore more competition for an exam school invitation, in higher socioeconomic tiers. From SY22-23 to SY24-25, the invitation rate in Tier 1 averaged 99.4%, compared to 45.7% in Tier 8.

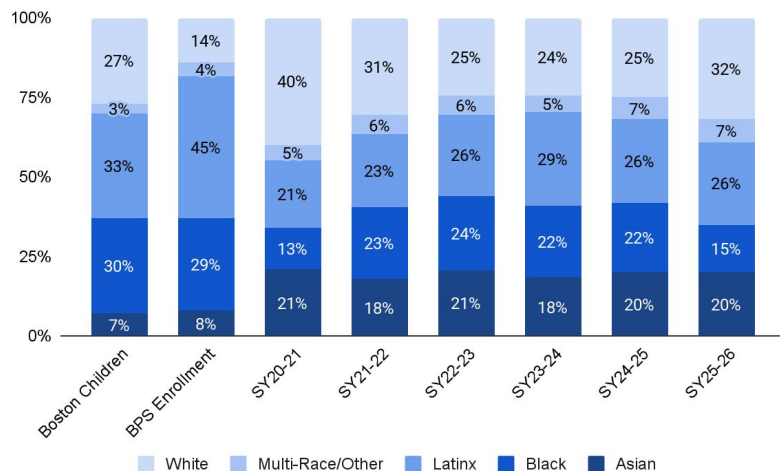
	SY22-23			SY23-24			SY24-25			SY25-26		
Tier	Applicants	Invitations	Rate	Applicants	Invitations	Rate	Applicants	Invitations	Rate	Applicants	Invitations	Rate
1	116	115	99.1%	125	124	99.2%	115	115	100.0%	317	245	77.3%
2	99	99	100.0%	131	128	97.7%	141	124	87.9%			
3	110	110	100.0%	111	111	100.0%	123	121	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%

# Policy Impact on Invitations: Demographics

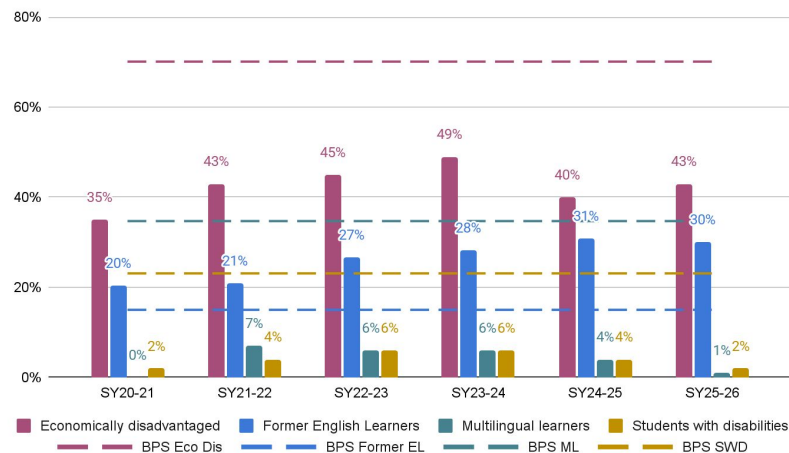


- The groups of students receiving invitations to one of the three exam schools have become more representative of the school-aged children of Boston.

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



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



# Policy Impact: Composite Scores



- The minimum composite score to receive an invitation varies by socioeconomic tier and by exam school. (Each socioeconomic tier is made up of Boston census tracts with comparable socioeconomic characteristics.)
- Students in Tier 4 need higher composite scores to receive an invitation to the exam schools, compared to students in Tier 1.

Tier	Grade 7 - Minimum Composite Score of Invitees								
	SY23-24			SY24-25			SY25-26		
	BLS	BLA	OB	BLS	BLA	OB	BLS	BLA	OB
1	83.7	68.7	67.8	80.5	65.6	64.6	92.8	82.8	82.7
2	86.1	71.8	64.8	86.6	77.6	76.2	95.1	86.4	88.3
3	73.5	69.1	68.0	82.3	67.5	63.7	95.1	85.6	88.7
4	83.8	75.7	71.3	86.9	75.9	74.4	97.4	91.1	93.2
5	86.0	74.2	71.1	89.2	76.1	76.0	–	–	–
6	94.4	87.8	86.7	97.9	88.9	88.8	–	–	–
7	100.2	97.5	97.2	97.3	91.1	90.6	–	–	–
8	99.1	97.4	97.1	98.8	97.1	96.5	–	–	–

# Analysis of Policy Options



In December 2024, we announced we would be conducting an analysis to explore 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 every student and family in Boston has a place in BPS.

We asked the following questions:

- **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?
- **Students with exceptionally high scores:** Can the policy ensure students who have exceptionally high scores 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?

# Analysis of Policy Options



- Students with disabilities and current multilingual learners continue to be underrepresented at BPS' exam schools. The student body at the exam schools has a higher proportion of former English learners than of the district overall (15%).
- Our work to increase access to exam schools must go beyond admission policies alone, and requires more time to develop a broader, longer-term structure of supports, staffing, and facilities changes (at both the district and school levels) to accompany any change in policy.
- Researchers from Tufts University and Loyola University of Chicago are conducting a study of the student experience at the exam schools, which will be available later this year. The report will help identify which structures and practices should be prioritized to support students and the school environment at exam schools.

# Desired Outcomes of Policy Analysis



- Maintain the basic structure of distributing invitations across socioeconomic tiers
- Ensure that highest-scoring students from every neighborhood and from every school have a path to an exam school.
- Simplify the policy to be as easily understood as possible for all constituencies, where each element has a clear rationale and can be implemented effectively by BPS.
- Craft a policy designed to remain stable for multiple years.

# The Process



## Spring

### Data

Examining data aligned to the desired outcomes and areas for review

## Summer

### Engagement

Engagement around the data, variables and possible scenarios with the School Committee and the Superintendent

## Fall

### Policy Update

Following engagement, Superintendent may make final recommendation including any changes to the policy, with time for discussion before a vote



# Variable Explored: School-Based Points



## **What it is:**

School-based points are currently given to students in the following categories:

- Students attending schools with 40% or more economically disadvantaged students (Title I) receive up to 10 points, equal to the “tier differential”
- Students in the care of DCF, experiencing homelessness or live in BHA public housing receive 15 points.

---

## **Possible Decision Points:**

- To keep or remove school-based points
- To keep, remove, change, or expand eligibility for BHA/Homeless/DCF points (to include students living in section 8 leased housing)

---

## **Connection to the Desired Results:**

- School-based points are hard to explain and change competition for seats within a socio-economic tier.
- By raising some students' composite scores above 100, the school-based points can make it mathematically difficult for some students with high composite scores, without points, to receive an invitation.

# Impact of Additional Points



- While the school-based bonus points were intended to account for disparities among schools, the bonus points have not had a large impact on the makeup of the exam schools' student body.
- The percentage of students receiving points has increased each year.

Admission Year	School Points	Housing Points	No Points
2022-2023	63%	6%	31%
2023-2024	65%	7%	28%
2024-2025	70%	6%	24%
2025-2026	73%	6%	21%

# Variable Explored: Citywide Round



## What it is:

Some exam-based schools in the U.S. use a citywide round to invite students with the highest composite scores, prior to distributing the remaining invitations via tiers. For example:

- First 20% of seats in each school are distributed to students with highest composite scores who ranked that school as their 1st choice; OR
- First 20% of seats overall are distributed to students with highest composite scores, who get an invitation to their first choice school

---

## Possible Decision Point:

- Whether to have a citywide round or not
- Within citywide round: 20% of seats overall or 20% of seats by school

---

## Connection to the Desired Results:

- A citywide round is a means to ensure that students with the highest composite scores have a pathway to the exam schools.
- The adoption of a citywide round will redistribute some seats that were previously allocated by socioeconomic tier, and would have an impact on the demographics of invitees.

# Variable Explored: Sizing Tiers by Applicants

**What it is:**

We explored the possibility of creating the four socioeconomic tiers based on the applicant pool, rather than by the number of school-aged children in census tracts.

---

**Possible Decision Point:**

To keep the neighborhood tiers based on the number of school-aged children, or change to tiers based on the number of students who apply to exam schools

---

**Connection to the Desired Results:**

- Census-based tiers have the same number of school-aged children (but the number of applicants by tier varies), while applicant-based tiers are sized annually to have the same number of applicants in each.
- Sizing by applicants creates equally-sized groups in each tier, which would yield a similar invitation rate from each tier.
- Applicant-based tiers would likely increase representation from neighborhoods with more applicants, making it less geographically representative.
- Applicant-based tiers would create operational challenges, could be confusing to some applicants, and could delay invitations.

# Simulations



Simulations use data from previous admission years to create “what if” scenarios.

- They can give you good insight on how a change in policy could change outcomes using real data
- They assume the applicant pool does not change significantly from year to year
- They are not perfect. Simulations cannot predict how policy changes might change behavior

# Simulations Overview



This table shows an overview of three simulations, using applicant data from SY24-25 and SY25-26:

	Tiers	Citywide round?	School-based Points?	Housing points?
Current Policy	Sized based on the <b>population</b> of children grades 5-8 across the city	<b>No</b> 100% of invitations are distributed via tier	<b>Yes</b> Based on tier differential	<b>Yes</b> 15
Simulation A	Sized based on the <b>number of applicants</b> to exam schools	<b>No</b> 100% of invitations are distributed via tier	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b> 10
Simulation B	Sized based on the <b>population</b> of children grades 5-8 across the city	<b>Yes</b> 20% of invitations at <b>each school</b> distributed citywide; 80% of invitations are distributed via tier	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b> 10
Simulation C	Sized based on the <b>population</b> of children grades 5-8 across the city	<b>Yes</b> 20% of invitations <b>overall</b> distributed citywide; 80% of invitations are distributed via tier	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b> 10

# Simulation Results: SY24-25 Applicant Pool



The table below demonstrates how the invitation rate by tier changes across the four scenarios.

Tier	Current Policy			Simulation A			Simulation B			Simulation C		
	Applicants	Invitations	Invitation Rate	Applicants	Invitations	Invitation Rate	Applicants	Invitations	Invitation Rate	Applicants	Invitations	Invitation Rate
1	261	244	93%	335	244	73%	261	213	82%	261	214	82%
2	290	244	84%	340	244	72%	290	226	78%	290	221	76%
3	383	244	64%	336	244	73%	383	246	64%	383	248	65%
4	414	244	59%	337	244	72%	414	291	70%	414	292	71%
Total	1348	976	72%	1348	976	72%	1348	976	72%	1348	975	72%

# Simulation Results: SY25-26 Applicant Pool



The table below demonstrates how the invitation rate by tier changes across the four scenarios.

Tier	Current Policy			Simulation A			Simulation B			Simulation C		
	Applicants	Invitations	Invitation Rate	Applicants	Invitations	Invitation Rate	Applicants	Invitations	Invitation Rate	Applicants	Invitations	Invitation Rate
1	317	245	77%	372	245	66%	317	216	68%	317	212	67%
2	382	245	64%	370	245	66%	382	232	61%	382	227	59%
3	377	245	65%	373	245	66%	377	247	66%	377	246	65%
4	414	245	59%	375	245	65%	414	285	69%	414	295	71%
Total	1490	980	66%	1490	980	66%	1490	980	66%	1490	980	66%



# Simulation Results: Student Groups



The tables below show the percentage of total invitations that are sent to students in each of the different student groups, using the SY24-25 applicant pool and SY25-26 applicant pool, across each of the simulated options.

Student Group	BPS SY24-25	SY20-21 Invitations	SY24-25			
			Current Policy	Simulation A	Simulation B	Simulation C
Multilingual Learners	35%	0.5%	3.4%	1.5%	2.5%	2.6%
Former English Learners	15%	20%	30.2%	27.4%	27.7%	27.6%
Students with Disabilities	23%	2.2%	4.0%	3.2%	3.8%	3.6%
Economically Disadvantaged Students	70%	34.7%	39.2%	34.2%	35.5%	35.3%

Student Group	SY25-26			
	Current Policy	Simulation A	Simulation B	Simulation C
Multilingual Learners	1.3%	1.1%	1.1%	1.1%
Former English Learners	30.0%	28.4%	28.4%	28.0%
Students with Disabilities	2.4%	2.8%	3.1%	3.2%
Economically Disadvantaged Students	42.8%	40.3%	40.3%	39.7%

# Simulation Results: Race



The tables below show the percentage of total invitations that are sent to students disaggregated by race, using the SY24-25 applicant pool and SY25-26 applicant pool, across each of the simulated options.

Race	Boston Children	SY20-21	SY24-25					SY25-26				
		Invitations	Applicants	Current Policy	Simulation A	Simulation B	Simulation C	Applicants	Current Policy	Simulation A	Simulation B	Simulation C
Asian	7%	21%	16%	20%	20%	20%	20%	16%	20%	19%	20%	19%
Black	30%	14%	20%	20%	18%	19%	19%	19%	15%	15%	15%	15%
Latinx	33%	21%	27%	25%	22%	22%	22%	30%	26%	25%	24%	24%
Other	3%	5%	7%	6%	6%	6%	6%	7%	7%	8%	8%	8%
White	27%	40%	29%	27%	31%	31%	31%	28%	32%	33%	34%	34%

# Simulation Results: Composite Scores



The first table below shows the minimum and average composite score for each exam school, using the SY24-25 applicant pool and SY25-26 applicant pool, across each of the simulated options. The second table shows the maximum score for students who did not receive an invitation to any school across each of the simulated options.

School	SY24-25								SY25-26							
	Current Policy		Simulation A		Simulation B		Simulation C		Current Policy		Simulation A		Simulation B		Simulation C	
	Min	Avg	Min	Avg	Min	Avg	Min	Avg	Min	Avg	Min	Avg	Min	Avg	Min	Avg
BLS	84.5	99.1	84.5	95.7	82.7	95.3	84.2	95.7	92.8	101.0	86.2	96.4	87.2	96.6	88.0	96.7
BLA	72.7	91.2	73.5	87.8	69.9	87.5	69.7	87.0	82.8	92.7	77.3	88.1	76.3	87.9	76.5	87.9
O'Bryant	72.7	89.9	73.7	85.8	70.9	85.1	71.3	85.3	82.7	94.0	77.4	88.3	77.8	88.5	77.8	88.5

	SY24-25				SY25-26			
	Current Policy	Simulation A	Simulation B	Simulation C	Current Policy	Simulation A	Simulation B	Simulation C
Not Invited	97.4	95.0	95.0	89.7	96.9	95.9	93.5	93.5

# The Process



## Spring

### Data

Examining data aligned to the desired outcomes and areas for review

## Summer

### Engagement

Engagement around the data, variables and possible scenarios with the School Committee and the Superintendent

## Fall

### Policy Update

Following engagement, Superintendent may make final recommendation including any changes to the policy, with time for discussion before a vote