Exam School Admission Policy Update

September 10, 2025

BPS

Timeline

Spring

Data

Presentation of data in 5-year review and data simulations exploring potential changes to 3 variables, in response to questions and issues raised by School Committee members and the public

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 policy recommendation, with time for discussion before a vote at a later School Committee meeting

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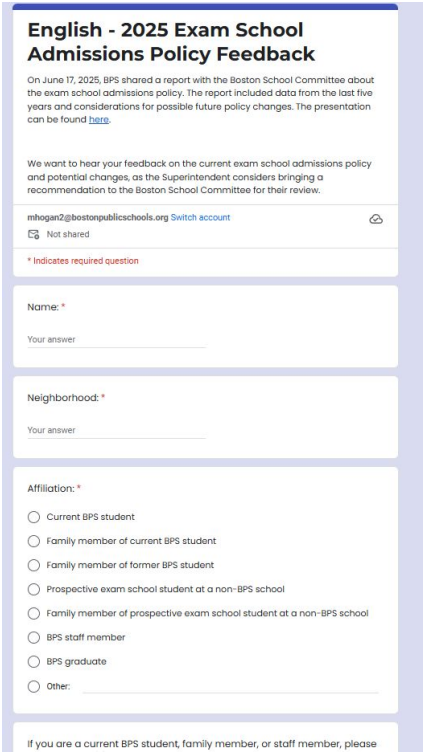
Engagement Process

- Two webinars
  - August 21, attend by 375 participants
  - September 9
- Feedback form in all BPS languages to collect input on policy variables
  - As of 8/29/25, the feedback form has received 220 responses, with 213 responses in English.
  - 85% of feedback form responses are from current BPS students and family members.
  - The remaining 15% of responses are from a combination of BPS graduates, BPS staff, non-BPS students and family members, and other members of the community.
- Website and explainer video shared with BPS families, neighborhood liaisons and community groups



English - 2025 Exam School Admissions Policy Feedback

On June 17, 2025, BPS shared a report with the Boston School Committee about the exam school admissions policy. The report included data from the last five years and considerations for possible future policy changes. The presentation can be found here.

We want to hear your feedback on the current exam school admissions policy and potential changes, as the Superintendent considers bringing a recommendation to the Boston School Committee for their review.

mhogan2@bostonpublicschools.org Switch account

Not shared

* Indicates required question

Name: *

Your answer

Neighborhood: *

Your answer

Affiliation: *

- Current BPS student
- Family member of current BPS student
- Family member of former BPS student
- Prospective exam school student at a non-BPS school
- Family member of prospective exam school student at a non-BPS school
- BPS staff member
- BPS graduate
- Other:

If you are a current BPS student, family member, or staff member, please

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.” Both BPS and non BPS schools can qualify for these points. ● 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.

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Initial Themes from Engagement

Variable: School-based Points

Support for <u>Eliminating</u> School-based Points	**Support for <u>Keeping</u> School-based Points**
• Points are perceived as a departure from merit, rewarding some and penalizing others arbitrarily. • Points are a poor proxy for individual socioeconomic need. • The number of points awarded is not based on clear rationale. • Points can pit one school community against another and can lead to “school shopping.” • The impact of points is poorly understood; eliminating points simplifies a complex process.	• Points are a tool to account for historical resource disparities among schools. • Some individuals perceive that the points give an advantage to students committed to BPS over private school applicants. • Some feel that the points incentivize families to remain in socioeconomically diverse elementary schools.

** The summaries above represent perspectives gathered during the engagement survey. They do not necessarily reflect the actual impact of the policy, nor do they represent or are they authorized by the Boston Public Schools or the Boston School Committee.*

Variable Explored: Sizing Tiers by Applicants

What it is:	We explored the possibility of creating the four socioeconomic tiers with an equal number of applicants in each tier, rather than an equal number of school-aged children living in each tier. To build socioeconomic tiers with an equal number of applicants, the tiers would be rebuilt annually.
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:	• Sizing by applicants creates equally-sized groups in each socioeconomic tier, which would yield a similar invitation rate across tiers. • Applicant-based tiers would likely increase representation from neighborhoods with more applicants, making invitations less geographically representative. • Applicant-based tiers would create operational challenges, could be confusing to some applicants, and could delay invitations.

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Initial Themes from Engagement

Variable: Sizing of Socioeconomic Tiers

Support for Tiers Sized Based on the <u>Number of Applicants</u>	**Support for Tiers Sized Based on <u>Population</u>**
• Tiers sized by applicants ensures each applicant is competing against the same number of peers, with a roughly equal chance of receiving an invitation. • Some respondents feel that this addresses the wide disparity in minimum composite score across socioeconomic tiers. • This approach is based on the actual pool of interested students, instead of the number of resident children estimated by the U.S. Census.	• Tiers sized by applicants would distribute more invitations to neighborhoods that traditionally apply to exam schools in high numbers, making invitations less geographically representative. • Sizing by applicants would create operational delays and add complexity to determining tiers annually.

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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.

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Initial Themes from Engagement

Proposal: Introduce a Citywide Round

Support for Adding a 20% Citywide Round	Support for Maintaining 100% Tier-Based System
• Guarantees that the highest-achieving students citywide - based on grades + MAP test scores - receive an invitation • Sends a message to Boston families that all students interested in an exam school have a pathway • Maintains socioeconomic tiers while increasing the percentage of seats for which each applicant is eligible	• Makes the socioeconomic tier system less impactful • Disproportionately benefits students from higher socioeconomic tiers

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Other Themes from Engagement

- Need for clarity, simplicity, and stability
- Importance of building a portfolio of high-quality high school options beyond exam schools
- Families want a stable policy that will be left alone for a period of years and a more predictable window for future review

Why Not Individual Socioeconomic Status?

Sources of Info	Challenges
City Government via BPS Free & Reduced Lunch Data	• BPS provides universal free breakfast and lunch, so no longer collects free & reduced lunch forms to verify eligibility • Does not account for non-BPS students
State Government via Executive Office of Health and Human Services* based on participation in specific social safety net programs	• Legal agreements necessary for BPS to access records for non-BPS students • Data is imperfect at individual level with multiple groups of students who would not be included due to immigration status, mixed household status, those unaware of, not reporting or who intentionally do not participate in public assistance • State currently seeing a decline in enrollment in programs like SNAP, etc. due to immigration policies (e.g. 10,000 refugees expected to be off programs) • Labor and resource intensive to implement new data collection capacity
Federal Government via IRS Income	• Legal agreement necessary with federal government • Similar challenges as with state data

*Explored this possibility via two meetings with EOHHS.

Recommendation: Do not pursue. Continue using socioeconomic tiers, consistent with recommendation of Task Force.

Areas for School Committee Deliberation

Intent of the policy set forth by the School Committee in 2021:

- Expanding the applicant pool
- Maintaining academic rigor
- Generating a student body that better reflects the racial, socioeconomic, and geographic diversity of all students in the City of Boston

- How might potential changes answer the call for clarity, simplicity, and stability from the community?

- How well do the potential changes balance the community feedback we have heard with the original policy goals?

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Appendix

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 **population** of children grades 5-8 across the city	**No** 100% of invitations are distributed via tier	**Yes** Based on tier differential	**Yes** 15
Simulation A	Sized based on the **number of applicants** to exam schools	**No** 100% of invitations are distributed via tier	**No**	**Yes** 10
Simulation B	Sized based on the **population** of children grades 5-8 across the city	**Yes** 20% of invitations at **each school** distributed citywide; 80% of invitations are distributed via tier	**No**	**Yes** 10
Simulation C	Sized based on the **population** of children grades 5-8 across the city	**Yes** 20% of invitations **overall** distributed citywide; 80% of invitations are distributed via tier	**No**	**Yes** 10

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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%

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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%

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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