

## **SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

**(Official Report)**

**Roundtable Meeting**

**May 12, 2015**

Called for 5:00 PM in the CRLS Henrietta S. Attles Meeting Room, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, 459 Broadway, Cambridge, for the purpose of a Roundtable Meeting to discuss an update on the impact of the revised controlled choice policy of 2013 as well as any other issues related to controlled choice.

Members Present: Ms. Cronin, Mr. Fantini, Mr. Harding (~~ABSENT~~), Ms. Kelly, Ms. Nolan, Mr. Osborne, Mayor Maher

Also Present: Dr. Jeff Young, Superintendent of Schools  
Dr. Carolyn Turk, Deputy Superintendent  
Dr. Victoria Greer, Asst. Supt. for Student Services  
Dr. Jessica Huizenga, Asst. Supt. of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment  
Ms. Maryann MacDonald, Asst. Superintendent for Elementary Education  
Ms. Claire Spinner, Chief Financial Officer  
Mr. James Maloney, Chief Operating Officer  
Ms. Lori Likis, Chief Planning Officer  
Ms. Linh O, Director of Student Registration and Enrollment  
Ms. Alanna Mallon, Mayor's Office Education Liaison  
Mr. Jefferson Smith, Mayor's Office Chief of Staff

Mr. Fantini in the Chair.

A quorum of the School Committee being present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM.

The Chair turned the meeting over to Mr. Maloney, Chief Operating Officer, who explained there have not been a lot of changes in the controlled choice policy. This policy has been effect since the early 1980's. Our district enrollment continues to go up. He introduced Ms. O, Director of Student Registration, Management and Enrollment. They will be presenting the Controlled Choice Presentation. Mr. Maloney offered to email copies of the presentation, charts, and data if requested. Mr. Maloney referred to his cover letter in the Weekly of the annual review of the controlled choice plan, reminding Members and Cabinet that this data is hard to analyze because there are not a lot of changes but there are a lot of numbers. It tells us that our enrollment continues to go up. Mr. Maloney explained this policy has been in effect since the early 80's and is still successful.

### **CONTROLLED CHOICE PRESENTATION MAY 12, 2015**

#### **DISCUSSION POINTS**

1. Goals of Controlled Choice Policy and are the goals being met?
2. Grades K-8 Enrollment and Kindergarten Lottery Update.
3. How have the Revisions to the policy impacted student assignments?
4. Next steps to gain compliance: in the short term & long term.

### **GOALS OF CONTROLLED CHOICE POLICY**

- ❖ To support the school district's core values of academic excellence and social justice for all students by providing equal access to an array of highly attractive, excellent quality schools, which offer students the benefit of learning alongside and engaged with a diverse group of students.
- ❖ The most significant revision was implemented in 2001 when the primary factor used to integrate the schools was changed from race to socioeconomic status (SES).
- ❖ Many changes, updates, and additions have been made to the Policy since 2001, the most recently and most comprehensively were revisions made in 2013. This policy is still successful and things have improved.

### **COMPARISON OF SCHOOLS IN COMPLIANCE**

- ❖ Numbers show steady improvement. Note that in 2014, Upper schools show 3 out of 4 schools in compliance.
- ❖ While the district is doing better, some individual schools remain unchanged.

### **KINDERGARTEN LOTTERY 5 YEAR HISTORY**

- ❖ Comparing 2011 and 2014, Kindergarten applicant pool increased just over 19%.
- ❖ The 5-year trend shows that the number of Paid lunch applicants typically ranged between 67%-69%, however we saw an increase in Paid applicants to 74% for 2015, a factor that causes complications for assignment flexibility.
- ❖ This increase in overall Kindergarten enrollment is expected for next year.

### **KINDERGARTEN MANDATORIES 5 YEAR HISTORY**

- ❖ Between 2011 and 2013, there was an average of 73 mandatories in the Kindergarten Lottery. In 2014, the number of mandatory assignments increased by 276 and again by 10 more in the current year for a total mandatory increase of 84% since 2011.
- ❖ Of the mandatories, the vast majority continue to be Paid Lunch families averaging 93% within the last 5 years.

### **JK & K ENROLLMENT AS A PERCENTAGE OF CAPACITY**

*It is imperative to note that the closer to seat capacity, the more difficult it is to assign.*

### **ENROLLMENT PRESENTATION**

#### **Overall Research Questions:**

1. To what extent has the CPS enrollment in grades 5-8 and /or kindergarten lottery picks changed since the Innovation Agenda began in 2012?
2. Have those changes varied by Upper School feeder pattern?

### **UPPER SCHOOL ENROLLMENT TAKEAWAYS**

- Upper School enrollment is fairly constant overall over the past three years.
- 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade retention rates have remained relatively constant just before and after the Innovation Agenda.
- Enrollment by cohort by feeder pattern has remained relatively constant.
- Decreases at VLUS and increases at RAUS largely attributable to CPS management of enrollment.

## TOTAL 1<sup>ST</sup> CHOICE KINDERGARTEN LOTTERY PICKS BY FEEDER SCHOOL

### FOR 2009 TO 2015

- **Amigos:** Increased since 2009, but stable since 2012 – very strong 1<sup>st</sup> pick.
- **CSUS:** Virtually unchanged (Feeder schools : Fletcher/ Maynard, C'Port and King Open)
- **RAUS:** Up – the result of an additional Baldwin classroom (20 seats)
- **VLUS:** Down slightly
- **PAUS:** Up significantly (Feeder schools : King, Morse & Kennedy/Longfellow, which are low income schools) the Kennedy/Longfellow is our weakest school in terms of picks.

### KINDERGARTEN LOTTERY PICKS TAKEAWAYS

- Total Kindergarten lottery picks are constant overall across all feeder patterns.
- The percent of paid students has increased at the PAUS Feeder Schools (MLK, MLK Chinese Immersion and Morse).
- The total number of first lottery picks at RAUS Feeder Schools has increased, due in large part to a fifth kindergarten class at the Baldwin.

Mr. Maloney stopped the presentation and asked if there were any questions on what had been shown so far. Discussion took place around the following questions, comments and concerns:

There was a request to have the feeder school explained. Mr. Maloney explained the lottery picks by feeder schools.

There was a request to explain JK-12 enrollments. Mr. Maloney responded that since 2006, our JK-12 enrollment is up by 15 ½ %, which is an increase of 893 students. He also stated that we are over enrolled in the kindergarten level and are adding classrooms to accommodate it.

There was a question about the chart of % Paid 1<sup>st</sup> choice kindergarten lottery picks by feeder school. Mr. Maloney explained we are over enrolled at the kindergarten level. We are and will always be a pyramid shaped district.

The question was raised as to what the projections of our upper, middle and elementary school enrollments are. Mr. Maloney maintains that our enrollments are not down. A concern was brought up that some projections are correct and some are not. Ms. Spinner responded to this concern stating the reason why the school by school projections at the middle school are not as accurate as the school by school projections at the elementary schools is because we don't have the data yet. For each elementary school, projections are based on 5 years of data retention, for the upper schools, she is taking the district average retention for all upper grades 5 through 8. When she has 5 years of experience, she will go back to projecting school by school for the uppers and they should be much more accurate. Feeder schools do not count because they were not feeder school 5 years ago.

The presentation resumed.

### REVIEW OF CHANGES OF 2013 CONTROLLED CHOICE REVISION

*Since the 2013 Controlled Choice revisions, the management of transfers and new incoming students has become more complex.*

1. Specifically, the **lack** of a +/- band for Grades 1-8 combined with calculating SES **over enrollment** rather than by capacity.
2. The need to manage feeder schools by triads and dyad down to 88-100 by grade 6.
3. The restrictive 50 cap on K level students.
4. The Immersion Program language bonus points.
5. The internal transfer policy in Immersion Programs.

### 1A: 0% BAND IMPLEMENTATION

- ❖ Transfers for this school year started on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014.
- ❖ Found that **81 out of 82** grades (1-8) in the district could not take a transfer or a new student under this rule.
- ❖ All grades but 1 were out of balance within the SES of 57% Paid and 43% F/R and 0% band.
- ❖ Only 1 grade was at 57% Paid and 43% F/R, but to add a student at 0% band would imbalance it under these rules.
- ❖ There were many currently enrolled students to move off the waitlist & new students to assign.

### 1B: ISSUES WITH ASSIGNING OVER ENROLLMENT

**When assigning over enrollment, there are a few things to keep in mind:**

- ❖ Total seat capacity is **NOT** used to calculate Paid and F/R seats.
- ❖ Both SES categories are always tied to one another, since the number enrolled changes whenever a student is added or leaves.
- ❖ This causes a **fluctuating** effect on the SERS percentages and there is **no stability** in the SES percentages by grade, by school...a confusing situation with 82 different SES percentages.

### 1C: OPERATING PRINCIPLES: CALCULATING SES WITH A 0% BAND

#### ***3 principles were established:***

1. The integrity of the waitlist is paramount.
2. The existing 7/1/14 SES percentages for each grade at each school the SES became the benchmark for the coming year.
  - Since every school at every grade had its own individual SES percentage, there were **82 different percentage benchmarks to work with.**
3. Transfers and new assignments would not expand the 7/1/14 SES percentages.
  - Transfers & new assignments were processed.

### MANAGING ENROLLMENT BY TRIADS & DYAD

- ❖ Transferring existing students & assigning new students has been made more **complex** due to the need to manage feeder schools by triads & dyad down to 88-100 students by Grade 6.
- ❖ A **CAPS** Report was developed as a guide to manage enrollment into the Upper Schools.

### MANAGING ENROLLMENT BY TRIADS AND DYADS: PROCESS

- ❖ **Grades 1-3:** In order to accommodate all new applicants, we increased the target capacity to from 44 to 46 capacity would return to 44 in September.
- ❖ **Grades 4, 5:** Identify all the schools where we could increase their cohorts to 32.
  1. Fill the dyad first, bringing it up to 88 total students per grade.
  2. Then, we would fill the triad with their lowest aggregate enrollment up to the maximum.
  3. Continue to rotate among triads for enrollment equity.
- ❖ **Grades 6-8:** A similar process was followed as with grades 4,5.

### THE IMPACT OF THE KINDERGARTEN LEVEL CAP of 50

- ❖ The revision of the 2012 Controlled Choice Policy called for a Cap of no more Kindergarten age students than there were 1<sup>st</sup> grades. For example, if there were two 1<sup>st</sup> grades, the cap was 50.
- ❖ This revision was done due to the increase in all schools to four JK-K grades and the concern that there may be too many 1<sup>st</sup> grade students.

- ❖ This probably has been one of the causes of the increase in mandatories.
- ❖ Experience indicates that we may be able to lift the cap.

### **PROBLEMS WITH PROGRAM LANGUAGE BONUS POINTS**

- ❖ Vast majority of language bonus points students are **Paid**.
- ❖ Combined with the fact that the vast majority of Amigos and Chinese Immersion (CI) are **Paid** results in Free/Reduced applicants without language points being overwhelmed by Paid applicants and Paid applicants with language points.
- ❖ The language bonus points appear to be creating a situation where it is more difficult for F/R students to get in.

### **IMPACT OF INTERNAL IMMERSION JK TRANSFER BEFORE K LOTTERY**

- ❖ For the MLK Chinese Immersion (CI) and King Open Ola, mainstream JK students have the option to transfer into CI or Ola for the K year prior to the lottery.
- ❖ The intent of this option was to increase overall applicants to MLK of Paid students and for F/R JK families to consider transferring to CI and Ola.
- ❖ The 2015 Lottery had a rising JK cohort of 16 students and 5 internal transfers leaving the CI program with only 19 available seats for the Lottery.
- ❖ Given that the cohort could only be 25, we had 21 rising JK students, and only 4 K- level seats for the Lottery.
- ❖ In addition, in the three years of the Internal transfers, only 1 Free Lunch family has taken advantage of this opportunity.
- ❖ Kindergarten level seats in the Chinese Immersion program become scarce for the Lottery.

### **NEXT STEPS: SHORT TERM**

1. Raise the Kindergarten level cap to 52.
2. Restore a +/- 10% band for Grades JK-8 and calculating SES over capacity.
3. Review ways to improve the Program Language bonus points with the bilingual Department and the Immersion program principals.
4. Resolve the internal transfer issue (for CI and Ola) with the principals of MLK and King Open & their school communities.
5. Use a **3 year average** of the past JK/K enrollment on October 1<sup>st</sup> to calculate the SES percentages applied.
  - Policy C07-309 called for this to be implemented in SY2008-09
  - If this was used for the January 2015 K Lottery, the SES percentages would be 61% Paid and 39% F/R.

### **NEXT STEPS: LONG TERM**

#### **Community wide discussion of the future of Controlled Choice:**

- ❖ The Controlled Choice Policy has improved SES diversity, but are there other less bureaucratic ways?
- ❖ Can Cambridge achieve balanced schools through neighborhood or regional district assignments within the city?
- ❖ Economic diversity of neighborhoods changed over the last 20 years
- ❖ MCAS, Common Core school level rankings all new since Controlled Choice Policy implemented.
- ❖ Aside from Language Immersion Programs & Montessori, are schools very different in their educational programs.

End of presentation.

Discussion took place around the following questions, comments and concerns:

It was brought up that we can no longer use race to define student SES status.

K/Lo is low income and our weakest school in terms of picks. The Morse went up in the last two years. MLK Chinese Immersion & Morse show strength. Is it a big rise or a small rise on total enrollment JK-12? We are over enrolled for next year for kindergarten. How many do not get accepted and where do they go? Mr. Maloney stated he does not know where they go; probably in the vicinity of about 40 students are not accepted. Their choices follow schools that are full pay. Ola is a weak choice. There are 52 k seats in the system, 1,000 withdrawals a year and we do have some exit surveys.

How have the revisions to the policy impacted student assignments?

Next steps to gain compliance: in the short term and long term

Managing enrollments by Triads and the Dyads are more complex due to the need to manage gender schools by triads and dyads down to 88-100 students by grade 6. It is very confusing.

There was a discussion on The Impact of the Kindergarten Level Cap of 50 and Program Language Bonus Points. Page 15.

Impact of Internal Immersion JK Transfer before K lottery (page 16)

Next Steps: In the Short Term and Long Term. The FRC needs flexibility to assign students.

The 3 year average: we keep looking at the process instead of the policy of controlled choice.

Next Steps: Long Term

Mr. Maloney stated that the schools are more balanced today than when they were first placed. Look at the Morse and K/Lo, they show stronger full pay. Area 4 – Cambridgeport has gone up economically. Mr. Maloney said to not focus on numbers, but to think large. Cambridge is a different city and school system.

End of presentation.

Discussions took place around the following issues, concerns and questions.

Does student profile matter?

The city should be engaged in this discussion also. Is housing and culture reality based on race or economics?

There is no housing policy in conjunction with our school policy. The housing has changed but the school policy does not keep up with the constantly changing housing reality. A large middle class does not exist in Cambridge anymore. We cannot continue to use an 80's system in this current 2015 system.

Parents really only have 1 or 2 choices even though we advertise 3. If they don't get their first choice, they may choose private.

It was agreed that there are a lot of 2 and 3 bedroom units going up at Alewife. We don't have any kindergarten kids on that side of the city.

The FRC gets some angry people when they don't get the schools they want. Some parents don't understand the system. The bureaucracy is confusing especially when people move here from elsewhere and don't understand our system. Third generation Cantabridgians understand the system better.

The 3 year old program has not been addressed. Attrition in our upper schools is not just in Cambridge. There are lessons to be learned from other communities.

How do we improve family engagement when we scatter families across town?

Mr. Harding thanked Ms. O for all of her hard work at being on the front line of all the anger and angst. He also asked is the power point a vote to be taken? What does the School Committee do? Mr. Maloney wants their recommendations for these points by the first or second meeting in September. It was suggested we go to school council and community before we vote it in the fall. In the long term, it will be a complicated discussion on how to fix things. We have to agree on what the values are to be as priorities.

It was concluded quality schools are the incentive.

On a motion by Ms. Kelly, seconded by Mr. Osborne, the meeting was adjourned (6:40 PM).

Dosha Ellis Beard  
Confidential Secretary

**Distributed Back-up Documents** (copy on file in the School Committee office):

- Controlled Choice Presentation May 12, 2015