



Board of Education Informational Report

MEMORANDUM

Date: November 24, 2014

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Superintendent Carole Smith

Subject: Proposal for Improving and Aligning Enrollment & Transfer Policy with Racial Educational Equity Policy

In 2013, the Board adopted the Jefferson PK-8 Cluster Enrollment Balancing Resolution # 4718 which outlined the following related to the PPS enrollment and transfer system and policies:

“The Board directs staff to develop and recommend a process for a comprehensive review of school boundaries district-wide and policies related to student assignment and transfer to better align with the Racial Educational Equity Policy and promote strong capture rates and academic programs at every grade level.”

“The superintendent directs staff to: Engage the Superintendent’s Advisory Committee on Enrollment and Transfer (SACET) to review student assignment and transfer policies, identify opportunities to address broader city-wide demographic shifts and boundaries and expand possible solutions to present enrollment challenges and align with the Racial Educational Equity Policy.”

Below is my recommendation for aligning the PPS enrollment and transfer system across all grades and school configurations with the Racial Educational Equity Policy. This proposal details each recommended change or action, and notes which recommendations will require policy change, which will require immediate or long-term investments, and which I would operationalize for the 2015 transfer cycle.

I again want to express my gratitude for the tremendous work done by the members of the Superintendent’s Advisory Committee for Enrollment & Transfer (SACET). Managing enrollment and the policies that govern it is one of the most complex challenges for a large urban school district. In order to thoughtfully make changes to enrollment and transfer policies that will improve and infuse equity into the system, this committee committed the time necessary to become experts, study the impact of possible changes, and then make thorough

recommendations. The SACET report was presented to me on November 4, 2014 and my proposal to change the Enrollment and Transfer policy incorporates most of these thoughtful recommendations.

Strategic Action Plan for Equity in Enrollment & Transfer

I am recommending that 11 of 12 specific SACET proposals be incorporated into board policy and/or for immediate implementation in 2015. I am expanding on a few recommendations and I am declining to accept one, and will ask SACET to do more research for possible future implementation.

Consistent with current PPS policy, I recommend that any policy changes only apply to future transfer requests and that students who transferred via the lottery in past years stay in their current school or program through the highest grade.

1. Building an equitable Neighborhood-to-Neighborhood transfer system.

I am recommending that PPS end the neighborhood-to-neighborhood lottery system and apply this change in policy to all grade levels. This has largely been our practice at the high school level over the past four years and has led to the greater health of our high school system. This recommendation would extend this practice to all grade levels. Beginning with the 2015-16 transfer cycle, K-12 neighborhood-to-neighborhood transfer requests would be initiated via the petition system. Practice at the elementary and middle school level has been trending in this direction already. Many schools have not allowed lottery transfers the past few years as they have been experiencing enrollment growth. Lastly, staff will also review guidelines for enrollment in Title I pre-kindergarten programs.

2. Investment to Strengthen the Petition Transfer System.

PPS has managed a petition transfer system for many years. The petition process was established to supplement the lottery system to support families who had specific family reasons for requesting a transfer and could not obtain a transfer through the lottery. PPS has reviewed over 7,000 petitions in the past eight years.

If approved, we will begin strengthening the petition transfer system immediately. We will focus on the following areas:

- Adding staff capacity so the Enrollment & Transfer team can manage an expected increase in petition transfer requests.
- Increased training for staff to improve cultural awareness and skill in the petition transfer process.
- Improved system to track and report trends in transfer requests to help improve neighborhood schools that continue to experience high volumes of requests to transfer away and learn from the schools that generate a high volume of interest.

- In future years, improved access to the petition system by bringing it fully online. This will not be available for the 2015-16 transfer cycle.

To support this recommendation, I will be bringing a budget amendment before the board in January to add additional staff and training for the Enrollment & Transfer Department.

3. Initiate a review of all focus option and alternative K-5 and K-8 schools in 2015.

PPS has several successful and highly valued focus option schools. Student achievement at PPS focus option schools is consistently strong. But as SACET points out in its report, the demographics of the student bodies that currently attend our focus option schools are not representative of the district. This is clearly not in line with our Racial Educational Equity policy and needs to be addressed.

In order to achieve equity and close the educational achievement gap between white students and students of color, we need to provide equitable access to every one of our successful programs. Along with adjusting the focus option lottery and increasing outreach, as discussed below, we need to complete thorough reviews of each focus option program to maximize the positive benefits they bring to our entire school district. As our resources continue to improve, we also need to look at replicating programs that are successful for all students.

SACET correctly pointed out that PPS already has a strong policy to guide a review of focus option schools. During years of disinvestment and budget cuts, we did not have the staff support to conduct the review called for in our Educational Options Policy - "The district shall collaborate with educational options to assess their ongoing assistance needs and determine their future status, including renewal, modification, termination, replication, or transition from program to school."

If approved, we would initiate the steps to conduct this review in 2015 and 2016. The review process will include all focus options, including Dual Language Immersion programs, as well as Metropolitan Learning Center and ACCESS. The review will include the following areas consistent with the policy:

- Reviewing the status of the educational program, and future needs and necessary modifications for each program
- Identifying successful programs for replication
- Considering facility siting
- Enhancing outreach to historically underserved communities

The focus option review will be led by the System Planning and Performance department. To support this recommendation, I will be requesting funding for additional staff support in the January budget amendment.

4. Improve awareness and access for students eligible for free and reduced meals and Head Start programs to attend focus option schools.

The key component of diversifying our focus option schools is ensuring that we have a diverse applicant pool. We will continue to improve our outreach to historically underserved families to increase awareness of the focus option schools and programs. In particular, the Dual Language Immersion program will continue its efforts to make native language speakers aware of the district's dual language offerings.

We know that transportation is a barrier for many families to these programs. We already have a transportation working group meeting that will make proposals as part of the 2015-16 budget for non-mandated transportation.

It is important to note that state funding support of full-day kindergarten, which will start in 2015-16, should also have a positive impact on efforts to diversify the applicant pool for focus option schools. The state currently provides funding for half-day kindergarten. PPS has used Title I funding for schools that qualify, in order to offer free full day kindergarten. However, none of our non-immersion schools qualify for Title I supports, so parents who do not qualify for free and reduced price meals have had to pay for the second half of the kindergarten day, which has had the effect of narrowing the applicant pool. In 2015-16, when all of our schools will be free full day kindergarten, this barrier will be eliminated.

In my recommendation to the Board, I am incorporating SACET's recommendation to increase access to focus option schools for students eligible for free and reduced meals and students who qualified for Head Start for pre-kindergarten. I am compelled by the data that show that PPS focus option programs, which are intended to serve students district wide, have enrollments that are 75% white, and 18% students who qualify for free and reduced meals. Overall PPS enrollment is approximately 45% students of color and 45% of students qualifying for free and reduced meals.

To achieve greater representation in our focus option schools, I am recommending a change in policy for lottery preferences for focus option schools (new preference in *italics*):

- a. Students continuing from their previous school grade grouping, if required by the focus option plan of operations.
- b. Students required by state or federal law or other district policy to receive priority.
- c. *Students who qualify for free and reduced meals or a Head Start program, in a proportion corresponding to a district-wide average.*
- d. Students whose sibling is enrolled in the student's first choice elementary, middle school or high school or program that includes other school grade groupings.
- e. Resident students who have submitted an on-time lottery transfer request.

*These changes will not apply to two-way dual language immersion programs or the new King Mandarin Immersion as the lottery rules for those programs already have factors that take into consideration serving historically underserved populations.

We have heard from many families about the challenges that would come from having children in different schools at the youngest grades. While this recommendation prioritizes socio-economic status, the lottery models produced for SACET show that had this preference been in place for the past nine years, 728 of 732 siblings, all but four sibling requests, would have been awarded a lottery slot to our focus option schools based on the previous applicant pools.

In my recommendation to the Board, I am not including SACET's proposal to require geographic balance in the focus option lottery. It is not clear to me that this change would improve access for historically underserved students to focus option schools, and it would have a more negative impact on sibling access.

Lastly, I am pleased with SACET's endorsement of PPS' current plan to continue to expand dual language programs. In order to continue the process of expanding this highly successful model, I am recommending another increase in slots reserved for native speakers in the Ainsworth Spanish immersion program and the Richmond Japanese immersion program. Last year, we reserved 15% of slots at both programs for native speakers. I am asking that the Dual Language Immersion Department make a recommendation for the number of slots to be reserved for native speakers in time for the 2015 lottery.

We will continue to review the outcomes of our enrollment and transfer policies and will make adjustments in future years, if warranted.

5. Improving Service to Students with Special Educational Needs.

PPS Special Education Department agrees with SACET's recommendations to allow special education students who are required to attend a school other than their neighborhood to access their needed services to stay at the school to the highest grade after they transition to general education placement. This recommendation would allow students to stay in schools where they are currently members of the community. This recommendation is already a part of the strategic plan for special education.

Conclusion

This is only the beginning of infusing equity into our enrollment and transfer system. In the coming months I will be asking SACET to review other areas of our policies, and provide me with proposals, including:

- Policies and rules managing inter-district transfers.
- Rules for students who move to a new neighborhood and for students affected by boundary change to minimize impacts of overcrowding on whole school communities.
- Policy language to align with Racial Educational Equity Policy and possible other changes called for after initial focus option review.

This plan begins the alignment of our enrollment and transfer system to the Racial Educational Equity Policy. The changes I am proposing are also another step toward our efforts to stabilize school enrollment and help build equitable access to strong programming throughout the district. I am making these recommendations in the context of managing an overall district enrollment that is projected to grow to over 54,000 students in the next 15 years - adding over 6,200 students to our overall enrollment by 2028. We are also only at the beginning of our 32 year program to rebuild all of our school facilities - meaning we will continue to face challenges with our school buildings. We know that as we continue to add students to our system, we are going to need flexible school boundaries and enrollment practices in order to maintain equity and optimally sized schools.

I am excited that we are embarking on the next phase of our work – the district wide boundary review process, including an in- depth district- wide survey that will help us identify the community values that will drive decisions like boundary shifts, program placement, grade configuration, and program offerings into the future.