

Excerpt from D.C. Policy Brief #2 — Work Group 3

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New Orleans, LA

New Orleans: Citywide Lottery

GOALS:

- Infrastructure efficiencies
- Easy for families to navigate
- Equal access to excellent education
- Parental choice

APPROACH:

- The city is divided into six catchment areas, with each including approximately eight elementary schools.
- City decides on where schools are to be located and what facilities are needed.
- Optional unified city-wide lottery (72 of 88 public schools) with preference criteria.
- Transportation provided by schools.

PREFERENCES:

- Students with siblings currently enrolled in the school;
- Students residing within the school's catchment area (grades PK-8 only; applies to up to 50% of the available seats);
- Students meeting school-specific criteria; and
- All other applicants.

Prior to Hurricane Katrina in 2005, New Orleans had more than 66,000 enrolled students. When the storm damaged or destroyed more than 100 of the 128 Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) schools, OPSB shuttered the New Orleans Public Schools. The state of Louisiana subsequently stepped into the vacuum and transferred 114 schools to the state-run Recovery School District (RSD). Since that time, RSD converted many of the RSD-controlled schools into charter schools, retaining direct control of only 12 schools, and OPSB converted all but six of its remaining schools into charter schools in order to take advantage of available federal funding. Today, chartering authority is held by OPSB and by the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), which has continued to grant new charters. In SY 2012-2013, 84% of the 42,637 New Orleans public school students attended one of the city's 72 charter schools, and the percentage continues to trend upward.

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By 2013, 44 local education agencies (LEAs), including RSD and OPSB, are operating in New Orleans. This division of governance presents a number of challenges,¹ particularly in the areas of taxing, funding, strategic planning, facilities-portfolio management, and student assignment. In 2008, New Orleans established a ten-year School Facilities Master Plan covering all New Orleans LEAs and school facilities. The plan is updated biennially to adjust to actual and projected changes in the city's population, and addresses the need for strategic planning of public-education infrastructure. The plan lays out the number of school facilities to be built or renovated and the locations.

Student Assignment

Student assignment in New Orleans is characterized by city-wide choice. A student residing in New Orleans may attend any traditional public or public charter school in the city that has an available seat, subject to any non-residence-based admissions requirements that the school might establish. In 2013, RSD and OPSB jointly launched a citywide "One App" enrollment application and assignment system covering 72 of the city's 88 schools.² RSD and OPSB advertise the One App process as being "easier for families to navigate [and ensuring] that every child in [the] city has equal access to an excellent education." On the One App, parents may list up to eight schools in order of preference. All applications are processed at the same time. At schools for which demand exceeds available seats, applicants are randomly selected within the following groups in the following order:

- Students with siblings currently enrolled in the school;
- Students residing within the school's catchment area (grades PK-8 only; applies to up to 50% of the available seats);³
- Students meeting school-specific criteria; and
- All other applicants.

Initial data from the 2012 RSD-only implementation of the One App suggest that choice is working for many New Orleans families. In 2012, 84% of Kindergarten and 9th-grade applicants received one of their top three choices and 73% of other-grade applicants received one of their top three choices. Reports from Tulane's Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives describe strong support for school choice among New Orleans parents. An October 2011 poll of New Orleans public school parents found that 90% strongly agreed that it is important to be able to choose their child's school; 95% said that their children attend their first- or second-choice school. In 2013, Cowen polls found that a clear majority of both African-American (59%) and White (76%) parents agreed that bringing in a charter organization to take over a failing school creates the best chance to improve student learning. However, many parents reported the choice process resulted in increased stress, frustration, and worry due to the "high stakes" involved. Many parents also expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of high-quality school options.

Choice has not been without its costs, however. As the choice system in New Orleans has decoupled student enrollment from residence, student travel and transportation costs have increased by an estimated 50%. In SY 2010-2011, just 13% of New Orleans public school students attended a school in their neighborhood, and only 10% lived within a half mile of their school.⁴ Prior to 2005, transportation comprised 4% of New Orleans's education expenditures. By 2010, the percentage had increased approximately to 6% overall, with levels as high as 12% for some LEAs.

¹ Cowen Institute: The State of Public Education in New Orleans (2012), p.8.

² The system uses an assignment algorithm developed by the Institute for Innovation in Public School Choice.

³ The city is divided into six catchment areas, with each including approximately eight elementary schools.

⁴ Cowen Institute 2012 report, p.23.

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Seattle, WA

Seattle: By zone & residence with choice overlay

(Implemented in SY10-11)

GOALS:

- Schools of right
- Ease of navigation for families
- Predictability for families
- Increased efficiencies (reduced transportation and administrative costs)
- Some choice for families
- Racial/economic integration (since invalidated by the Supreme Court)

APPROACH:

- Assignment by residence & attendance zones (ES, MS, and HS).
 - ES and MS zones align into feeder patterns; HS zones do not.
- Some choice is available through a city-wide lottery for
 - 10% of the seats within every neighborhood school and
 - All seats within unzoned city-wide (magnet) ES/K-8 schools.

PREFERENCES:

- Siblings
- Students living within a zone of proximity to the school

Seattle Public Schools operates 95 schools and serves approximately 50,000 students, of which 12% are English language learners, 14% receive special-education services, and 40% are eligible for free/reduced-price meals. In SY 2012–13, there were no public charter schools in Seattle.

Context/History

Between the mid-1990s and 2009, Seattle Public Schools (SPS) utilized a city-wide lottery with preference criteria in an effort to voluntarily integrate its schools, promote parental involvement, and encourage innovation.⁵ Although the system provided for choice and facilitated diversity, by 2005, the Seattle School Board acknowledged that the system was complex and difficult to navigate for parents and families, was not equitable, and did not provide the desired level of predictability for families or for the district in its planning processes. In addition, the system resulted in relatively high administrative costs as well as general-education transportation costs of more than \$32 million in SY 2010–2011, or \$1,650 for each of the approximately 20,700 ES/MS students transported out of a total district enrollment of 47,008. Another 8,300 high-school students used Orca (public transit) cards provided by the school district.⁶ In 2006, the Seattle School Board engaged the community in the development of a new student-assignment plan and policies, which it finalized in 2009. Seattle began implementing the new plan in SY 2010–2011.

Current Student-Assignment Policy

⁵ Although promoting integration was one of the primary reasons for implementing the open choice plan, the “integration positive” tiebreaker criteria has been eliminated following the Supreme Court decision in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*.

⁶ Recommendations of the Superintendent’s Student Transportation Taskforce, Aug. 30, 2012. These figures were higher than the \$1,067 per-student average cost among three other Washington state districts, and were up substantially from the SY 2004–2005 figures of \$26 million (\$1,040 per student for about 25,000 transported students) that helped provoke the change in policy in 2009. Seattle Public Schools, Student Assignment and Transportation Plans 2006–07 (PPT), March 2, 2005.

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Seattle's Student-Assignment Plan divides SPS's schools into two main categories: 1) Attendance-area Schools and 2) Option Schools.⁷ Each student is assigned to an attendance-area elementary, middle, and high school of right based on his or her residence, but may also apply for admittance to another attendance-area school or a city-wide (magnet) Option School.

Attendance areas are created and updated based on demographic data and projections, proximity to a school, safe walk zones, physical barriers, efficient bus routing, municipal bus routes, and opportunities for diversity. Seattle's elementary-school attendance areas combine to match its middle-school attendance areas, thus creating geographic elementary-to-middle feeder patterns for predictability.⁸ However, these feeder patterns do not extend to the high schools. Each high school has its own stand-alone attendance area and reserves 90% of its seats for in-area students and 10% of its seats for out-of-area (choice) students.

Option Schools are city-wide (magnet) schools that offer specific programs or instructional approaches or methods.⁹ During an open-enrollment period beginning in the spring and running through September 30, a student may apply to attend an Option School or an attendance-area school other than his or her designated school. Preferences are given to siblings and, in the case of Option Schools, to residents within a geographic zone of proximity to the Option School. Remaining seats are allocated by lottery.

Although substantially modified for many students through grandfathering policies, Seattle Public Schools as of September 2012 provides the following transportation services to its general student population:¹⁰

- Attendance-area Elementary/K-8 Schools: 1) Busing for students living outside the walk zone but within their service area and within a 1.25-mile straight-line radius of their assigned school; and 2) municipal bus passes for students grades 6-8 living outside of a 1.25-mile straight-line radius.
- Middle Schools: 1) Municipal bus passes for students living more than 1.5 miles but less than 2.0 miles from their assigned school; and 2) busing for students living more than 2.0 miles from their assigned school and within their service area.
- High Schools: 1) Busing for students living more than 2.5 miles from their assigned school and within the boundaries of SPS.
- Option-School Elementary/K-8 Schools: 1) Busing for students living outside the walk zone but within their service area; and 2) municipal bus passes for students in grades 6-8 attending a school outside their service area.

While Seattle's new student assignment policy provides families with schools of right, increased predictability, and some choice, transitioning to it from the previous policy has resulted in substantial complexity. In order to make the transition from the pre-2009 open-choice system to the post-2009 hybrid system while preserving stability for families currently in the district, Seattle has had to extensively employ grandfathering policies,

⁷ In addition, a third category of "Service Schools" includes home-schooling, bilingual-education, special-education, Head Start, and other special program locations, to which students are assigned by SPS administrative units.

⁸ The middle-school attendance areas also constitute "service areas" for the purpose of providing some English-language-learner, special-education, transportation, and other special services, although this is rapidly being changed by drop-in service models.

⁹ As of 2009, seven of Seattle's ten K-8 schools are Option Schools.

¹⁰ This summary omits special provisions for students living in specific locales as well as transportation services for special-education, English-language learners, and other special populations.

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exceptions to rules, and temporary modifications lasting some years. This phasing-in of the new rules has required Seattle to annually publish 30-plus-page Transition Plans to explain the complicated policies and policy adjustments. At least in the short term, this complexity makes it more difficult for families to navigate the system and creates additional costs in terms of staff time required to communicate the policy changes on an annual basis and assist families in understanding them.

Student Assignment in the Washington Metropolitan Region

By geographic zones and student residence

The public school boundary and assignment policies in the small cities and large suburban jurisdictions surrounding Washington D.C. are based almost completely geographic zones and the residence of the student. With limited exceptions, students in Arlington, Alexandria, Prince Georges' County, Montgomery County, and Fairfax County expect simply to attend their attendance-zone schools. For the most part, choice is limited.

In Alexandria, Arlington, and Prince George's County, there are efforts to provide alternatives to the strictly neighborhood-based systems. In Arlington in particular, elementary school choice is provided through specialized elementary and middle school programs that are available regionally or district-wide in addition to International Baccalaureate and access to a magnet high school in Fairfax. Both Prince George's County and Alexandria provide for region-wide, specialized, and magnet programs. However, not infrequently, families are required to provide their own transportation to these special programs and schools.

Montgomery County and Fairfax County in particular operate some magnet and specialized programs, and Montgomery County allows for some choice across a selection of high schools within regional "consortia" of high schools. Within these consortia, students have the right to attend their zone school but may also request any of two to four other nearby high schools. The district takes into account students' sibling status, free/reduced-price meal eligibility, and gender as it evaluates requests in order to maintain "comparable demographics" and manage utilization at the schools within the consortium. Except for Washington, D.C., each of the jurisdictions listed above provides bus transportation for students living more than a specified distance from their school. Some districts provide bus service to stops within ¼ mile of a student's home, while in other regions a child may be required to walk a mile to the nearest school bus stop. In Washington, D.C., DCPS provides busing only for high-needs and out-placed special-education students and for a small number of students whose schools have recently been consolidated with another school.

Although easy to navigate, student-assignment policies in the Washington suburbs do not necessarily provide predictability or stability because school districts frequently re-draw attendance-zone boundaries in order to equalize enrollment pressures in areas of rapidly increasing school populations. Absent grandfathering policies, these boundary changes can force some students to change schools every few years.