

Parent Preference/Managed Choice Policy

The Rochester City School District is legally and morally obligated to educate all the students who are legally enrolled in the school district, to educate students in a way that is fair for all students, and to allow students in under-performing schools to transfer to the extent feasible – to a more successful school within the Rochester City School District.

The District is also obligated to improve the *lowest achieving* and *least chosen* schools and target them for immediate technical assistance and special school improvement initiatives. This student assignment and school improvement policy was developed to ensure that all of the students of this District are provided equal access to high quality educational opportunities. It is also designed to empower all District parents and their children to choose a public school of enrollment, while taking into consideration magnet school or special focus schools that have entrance requirements based on academic or other skills. This policy also promotes socioeconomic diversity in all student bodies and provides for monitoring which will lead to continuous school improvement.

I. Historical Context

In 1996, the Rochester City School Board appointed a Schools of Choice Committee, made up of District staff, parents and community members to study Controlled Choice. The report representing this committee's work was received by the Board of Education in August 1997. In February 2000, the Board of Education took up direct exploration of Controlled Choice by convening a committee of four (4) Board members. This Parent Preference Team formed a set of tentative agreements around which parents could make their desires for elementary student placement known prior to student assignment. In January 2001, the Board of Education voted unanimously to embrace the concept that "parents should choose the public school that is best suited for the education of their child" and to endorse the five fundamentals of Managed Choice:

- All schools should be available to all students via preference selection;
- Commitment to continuous improvement of all public schools and programs;
- Commitment to provide sufficient and timely information and advice to parents;
- A Fair and impartial school selection and assignment process; and
- Continuous monitoring, evaluation, and improvement of the preference plan.

The Board also directed the Superintendent to convene a planning team to help design a Parent Preference student assignment plan for elementary schools, and to present such a plan to the Board of Education. The policy was arrived at following the analysis of financial and administrative data compiled by the planning team, numerous conversations with professional educators, parents, and community members, and expert experience and observations.

Two significant legal changes have taken place since the dialogue on choice first began. First, the New York State Charter School legislation was passed, and charter schools

began competing for Rochester students and the State Aid that goes with them. Second, the recent Federal *Elementary & Secondary Education Act/No Child Left Behind* legislation has changed and now requires districts to offer parents of students in under-performing schools opportunities to the extent feasible – to a more successful school within the Rochester City School District.

II. Scope and Purpose

A. Student Enrollment

This policy provides for an orderly and equitable assignment of all elementary students enrolled in public schools, including those affiliated with low-income and affluent families. To be fair to students in all socioeconomic and racial groups, this policy also calls for new assignment procedures that are tamper-proof, and which prescribe ways of upgrading low-achieving schools and replicating successful schools.

B. School Improvement

This policy is designed to advance the quality of education in all schools in Rochester, New York. District data and expert experience reveal that average student achievement scores tend to be negatively impacted by schools that are racially and/or socio-economically isolated – that is, schools in which 80 percent or more of the student body consists of low income students or students of color. The Board, therefore, recognizes the need to prevent schools from becoming centers of concentrated poverty or racial/ethnic isolation. The Board supports programs that attract students of all sorts and conditions to all schools, not just to some schools.

C. Mobility

This policy is designed to minimize the negative impact of mobility and transience on children's education by allowing students to stay in the school they start in until and unless the parent initiates a voluntary transfer. This is a reversal of previous administrative practice which required that a child change schools every time a residence change involved crossing home-school attendance areas boundaries, unless a parent is able to obtain a waiver.

D. "Home" Schools

Home-school attendance area boundaries, which are the historic backbone of elementary and middle neighborhood schools, were last revised in 1987. Further analysis shows that there is structural displacement: a situation that occurs when a home-school does not have enough capacity to enroll all of the students who reside in its attendance area. This structural displacement is so severe in Rochester that it is no longer possible to redraw home school attendance area boundaries that simultaneously satisfy instructional capacity and provide for socio-economic and/or racial/ethnic diversity.

As of December 2001, resident utilization rates indicate that one-half of the District's 34 "home" elementary schools do not have enough seats to accommodate the resident students and only 59% of the District's elementary students attend their "home" school. Yet no systematic or consistent process identifies the location and number of available seats and how such available seats are filled.

E. Transportation

The District's school enrollment data indicate that nearly every home school is enrolling students who reside in several other home school attendance areas. Many students are transported to schools far from their homes. The Board recognizes that these findings seriously call into question the cost effectiveness of a nominally home-school assignment policy and attendance practice. This policy is built around enlarged attendance zones, which, with proximity preference, is designed in part to minimize unnecessary student transportation costs. The policy is also designed to preserve parents' and students' legal right under the *Elementary & Secondary Education Act/No Child Left Behind* to transfer – to the extent feasible – to a more successful school within the Rochester City School District.

III. **Authority and Responsibility**

A. The Board charges the Superintendent with implementing enrollment and assignment of students at all grade levels – while taking into consideration magnet school or special focus schools that have entrance requirements based on academic or other skills – using a variation of the *Parent Preference/Managed Choice Student Assignment Plan* forwarded by the Superintendent's planning team.

This Board policy endorses and directs implementation of the **three** Student Attendance Zones model that is predicated on the following:

1. Establishing *Parent Information and Student Registration Centers* in each of the three Student Attendance Zones;
2. Establishing a district-wide standard to determine the most educationally efficient and effective use of all elementary school facilities;
3. Implementing a school assignment system that allows parents of students to choose the schools they want their children to attend by their own rank order of preference within their respective Student Attendance Zone;
4. Assigning students to Zone schools of choice by a computerized lottery, which requires that the District program the computer to assign students to their first-choice school in accordance with the following priorities: (a) Sibling Preference when there is one child enrolled at a school already; (b) a 0.50 Proximity Preference for 60% of the available seats; and (c) socioeconomic fairness guidelines (determined by Free or Reduced Lunch ratios at the school level);

5. Assigning students who cannot be accommodated in first-choice schools to their second-choice schools and then to their third-choice schools;
6. Processing all *Parent Information and Student Registration Center* walk-in assignments based on available seats and Reduced or Free Lunch ratios;
7. Allowing all students enrolled in a Rochester public school when this plan is approved to remain in their current school of enrollment until they complete its top grade, even if a “grandfathered” student’s residence is in another Student Attendance Zone;
8. Ensuring that the *Parent Preference/Managed Choice Policy Transfer Option* occurs either at the same time as the assignment lottery or prior to September 30;
9. Coordinating the *Parent Preference/Managed Choice Policy Transfer Option* process to coincide with the assignment lottery or to occur before September 30 of each school year;
10. Permitting students only one school transfer during the school year, and granting no voluntary transfers after September 30;
11. Requiring citywide schools to recruit students from each zone so that no student is denied access to a citywide school because of where he or she lives – and that all are given proportionate access;
12. Locating centrally those citywide special education classes that serve relatively few students with specific needs so that they are accessible to special needs students in each zone;
13. Giving parents of special education students the opportunity to choose the educationally appropriate schools they believe are best suited for their children within their respective Student Attendance Zone;
14. Ensuring that each zone should have sufficient capacity to accommodate the instructional needs of its special education students not enrolled in citywide special education classes; and
15. Giving parents of *Limited English Proficient* students the opportunity to choose the educationally appropriate schools they believe are best suited for their children within their respective Student Attendance Zone.
16. Establish a Zone School Improvement and Visiting Committee in each of the three zones. These committees are charged with monitoring the educational institutions and reporting at least annually in a public document:
 - a. Recommendations for improving low-performing and under-subscribed schools;
 - b. Addressing whether the zone has a similar range of quality educational services as other zones.

Cross ref:

Ref:

Adopted October 17, 2002; Amended February 12, 2004; May 22, 2008.