

Community Guide to Conversations on D.C. Student Assignment and School Choice

The purpose of this Community Guide is to help community groups, individual school communities, and neighbors facilitate their own discussions among parents and other residents about the District of Columbia's student assignment and school choice policies and practice.

The community discussions can accomplish 4 important goals:

1. **Provide guidance on the public processes** needed for effective public dialogue and input on student assignment and school choice.
2. **Increase the knowledge and understanding** of parents and other residents about what student assignment, school boundaries, and feeder patterns are, and their relevance and role for families and communities.
3. **Capture input on concerns** related to current policy and practice.
4. **Help build consensus on the principles and values** parents and other residents think should guide how families secure access to their public schools.

Step 1:

- A. Begin by providing some background on the public processes associated with the student assignment and school choice policy revision initiative.

Starting this October, an **Advisory Committee on Student Assignment** appointed by the Deputy Mayor for Education began its work on student assignment and choice. It includes parents, community leaders and civil rights advocates from across the city and agency representatives from DCPS, DC Office of Planning, the Public Charter School Board and the Deputy Mayor for Education. The Advisory Committee will issue preliminary recommendations to the public in May and final recommendations to the Deputy Mayor for Education in late July 2014.

There are 8 **focus groups** being held across the city in November and December. The purpose of these focus groups is to get in depth input from parents and residents on their concerns about the current system of student assignment and school choice, and to hear from them what principles they think should guide decision making for revisions to current policy and practice. These are small group structured discussions which use the same questions for each group.

Starting in March, there will be separate geographic **working groups**. These working groups will vet various ideas and options for how the current system might change and these groups will explore the impact of various options on their own specific communities.

In May and June there will be **city-wide community meetings** where parents, residents and school staff will provide input into preliminary recommendations of the Advisory Committee. During this time there will be **online surveys and other interactive web based venues** to bring public insight and opinion to the process.

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- B. Ask participants to provide the Office of the Deputy Mayor for education their thoughts or suggestions about how to make this a public dialogue that builds community and does not divide our communities?

Step 2:

- A. Read a short excerpt from a draft policy memo on student assignment. The full draft policy memo can be found on the DME website. This resource can be used as a reference or as a background paper for participants to read prior to the community conversation, which will provide a brief history of student assignment in DC and a factual overview of current student assignment and school choice policy. Use this to begin the discussion about what is working and what is not, related to current policy and practice.

“Student-assignment policies and practices refer to the processes that determine which school or schools each student living within a jurisdiction may or must attend. Student assignment is a key component of a community’s system for managing the demand for education services and allocating the supply of education services.

Student assignment is also inextricably enmeshed with school choice. Although a community may compel every child to go to school, which school(s) a student attends ultimately belongs to the student’s parent or guardian. Which options are available and how families access them is a crucial part of student-assignment policy. When it comes to the utilization of public resources for education, communities must weigh competing values to make decisions about how to allocate those resources. In assigning students to schools, the community must balance its values, needs, and desires with those of individual families.”

The current system of student assignment in DC is:

- Elementary, middle, PS-8th grade and high school geographical attendance zones for the DCPS neighborhood schools;
- Feeder patterns and rights for out of boundary parents to stay in a particular DCPS feeder pattern;
- Lottery for attending schools outside the attendance zone or feeder pattern;
- Lottery for PS and PK if there is more demand than seats;
Lottery for public charter schools when they are oversubscribed;
- DCPS select admissions to its application high schools.

Please note, there are also policies that affect transfer and involuntary or administrative assignment in DCPS, but there is little policy about transfers between DCPS and charter schools.

Step 3:

- A. Go around the room and ask each person to respond to the following questions:

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1. What is good about the current system and what would you want to keep? WHY?
 2. What is not working about the current system and what would you want to change. WHY?
- B. Have a note taker try to capture the comments of participants.

Step 4:

- A. Use the Worksheet of Guiding Principles to initiate a discussion about what is most and least important to participants in the community conversation.

Please rate how important each principle is to you with 5 being the MOST important and 1 as LEAST important. There is a space for you to rate the principles for elementary age students, middle grade students and high school students. You can also let participants know that they can add items to the Guiding Principles worksheet if they believe certain principles are missing from this worksheet. Discuss the principles that are most and least important at the three broad grade levels:

- Elementary School
- Middle School
- High School

For each grade level try to focus on describing **why** these principles are important to you - - and important to the city. Is there anything missing?

Try to identify where you have strong agreement in your group and where you do not. Try to understand why there is agreement or disagreement.

- B. Have the note taker try to capture what principles were important or not important, which principles had strong agreement and disagreement and write down the principles participants felt were missing from the list.

The Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education is interested in the input gathered through community discussions. If you and your group are interested and willing to share the information collected and discussed at your community discussion, please provide a summary of notes and completed rating forms to dme.studentassignment@dc.gov. The 21st Century School Fund is the technical team assisting the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education with this process. Please provide the date, time and place of meeting, the number of participants, the ward of residence of each participant, and if the participant is a parent of a current public school student (either DCPS or PCS).

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Please rate each guiding principle on a scale of 1-5 with 5 as "most important" for Elementary, Middle School, High School	ES	MS	HS
Simple for parents to understand: <i>How important is it that school choice and assignment policies are simple to understand?</i>			
Simple to administer: <i>How important is it to have policies that are simple for LEAs (DCPS and Charter) to administer?</i>			
Predictable for families: <i>How important is it for families to have predictable school assignments?</i>			
School proximity to residence: <i>How important is it that the schools be close to where a student lives?</i>			
Opportunities for racial/cultural diversity: <i>How important is it for students to attend racially and culturally diverse schools?</i>			
Opportunities for economically diverse enrollments: <i>How important is access to schools that are economically diverse?</i>			
Opportunities for academically diverse enrollments: <i>How important is access to schools with academically diverse students?</i>			
Maximum choice for families: <i>How important is it for families to have as many choices as possible?</i>			
Equitable access to high quality programs, staff & facilities: <i>How important are quality programs, staff and facilities?</i>			
Efficient use of public funds: <i>How important is it that the city is using its funds for public education efficiently?</i>			
Flexibility for LEAs: <i>How important is it for DCPS and the charters to have flexibility in student assignment and school choice?</i>			
Strengthens system of neighborhood schools: <i>How important is it for policies to strengthen neighborhood public schools?</i>			
Fully Utilizes public school buildings and grounds: <i>How important is it that the District fully use its public school facilities?</i>			
Others?			