

**DRAFT Policy Brief: Entry, Transfer, & Exit Policies—FOR DISCUSSION ONLY**

10/21/16 – For review and feedback by Task Force members

This policy brief reviews potential mid-year entry, transfer, and exit policy proposals that task force members discussed during the September 27 Task Force meeting and during a follow up conference call on October 13. The policy proposals are described below along with key questions related to each in order to facilitate further discussion. These policy proposals could be implemented either one at a time or as a group of policies gradually over time. This policy brief is not intended to be a final recommendation, but intended to facilitate further discussion and get clarity on the components of these policies as we consider them.

**I. Description & Purpose**

New students who enter the public school system mid-year (i.e., after October 5<sup>th</sup>) almost exclusively enroll at DCPS rather than at public charter schools. In addition, the majority of students who transfer between schools in DC transfer to DCPS rather than charters. Thus, DCPS experiences a significant net increase of students over the course of the year, while public charter schools experience a net decrease. As schools-of-right, DCPS schools cannot limit the number of new students who join them mid-year; public charter schools, however, can limit the number who join mid-year. For many DCPS schools, especially those East of the River, these dynamics contribute to high levels of mid-year entry and exit (i.e. high churn) which is correlated with low student performance. This imbalance puts a strain on DCPS school staff, students, and resources, and doesn't afford students the opportunity to attend public charter schools after the October count. The intended purposes of these policies are as follows:

1. Better understand why students enter, transfer, or exit mid-year.
2. Better facilitate mid-year entries and transfers.
3. Ensure that schools are better prepared for new students who transfer or enter mid-year by providing the school with information on incoming students.
4. Equitably distribute new mid-year students or transfer students to schools across both sectors so as to reduce the concentration of mid-year transfer students in high-churn schools.
5. Ensure that students and families are aware of their school choices should they enter or transfer school mid-year, across both sectors.

**Policy proposal 1: Centralized citywide process for students who enter, transfer, and exit mid-year**

The task force discussed implementing citywide policies for counseling and collecting information on all new students entering the public school system and transferring within public schools mid-year.

Potential Parameters

1. The central transfer office could be managed by My School DC.
2. This process would be in effect for the entire school year after October 5. There will not be a designated window for transfers or new entries.
3. All PK3-12 schools would participate, including DCPS out-of-boundary schools, DCPS citywide, DCPS selective, and all public charter schools. It also includes DCPS in-boundary schools (which are currently not included in the My School DC application process).
4. All PK3-12th grade students entering the public school system mid-year from out-of-state or transferring between schools would have to go through this centralized process for enrollment.
5. This process would maintain students' rights to attend their in-boundary DCPS school. Mid-year entries to an in-boundary school are to go through the centralized process.

6. The centralized entry and transfer office would provide counseling to students and families regarding the transfer and mid-year entry of students. In the early stages of implementation, the office would not accept or reject transfer requests. It would focus on providing sector-neutral counseling.
7. The process would be timely so that there is virtually no delay in a student's enrollment. The acceptable period of time to enroll through the process will be determined.
8. All transfers would go through the office, including hardship transfers, safety transfers, and any other changes in enrollment. Out-of-state entries would not be classified as hardship transfers.
9. The process would ensure that key information about the incoming student is shared with the new school in order to be prepared and better serve the student (e.g., information via OSSE's Special Education Database System (SEDs), OSSE's Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System (SLED), and other LEA specific information such as high school transcript).
10. Students who exit the public school system would be encouraged to participate in this process and share with staff information on why they are leaving the public school system. This will not be mandatory, but encouraged.

#### Related Questions

1. The task force agreed that there will not be a vetting or approval process for transfers when this process is first implemented (i.e., some transfers can be denied or approved). But what do task force members think about implementing a vetting or approval process for transfers after the process runs smoothly?
2. The task force did not agree on whether or not there should be waitlists after October 5. After October 5, should this office exist alongside waitlists or should waitlists be eliminated?

#### **Policy proposal 2: Hardship transfers and hardship set-asides**

The task force discussed mechanisms to encourage public charter schools to accept "hardship transfers" or students already enrolled in DC schools who are experiencing special circumstances and need to change schools mid-year. Charter schools may need to "set-aside" seats for hardship transfers and will need permission from the DC PCSB to go above public charter schools' enrollment ceilings. Hardship transfer students would not be part of the waitlists and could be enrolled before other students on the waitlist. Students who wish to transfer for reasons other than "hardship" would go through the centralized process and go to the end of a school's waitlist.

#### Potential Parameters

1. Hardship transfers would have supporting documentation and the family must agree to the hardship transfer. Hardship transfers would include:
  - Medical reasons
  - Safety reasons, including bullying
    - In-school and out-of-school safety reasons
  - Changes in legal or educational custody and/or guardianship
  - Change of residence within DC, so long as the move has created a hardship in getting to their original school
  - Non-voluntary transfers/expulsions (?)
2. Public charter schools would "set-aside" seats for hardship transfers, possibly over their enrollment ceiling, with approval from the DC PCSB.
3. Hardship transfer students would not be part of a waitlist and could be enrolled before other students on the waitlist.
4. Hardship transfers would occur at any time throughout the school year. There would be no "transfer window."
5. Public charters would opt in – it would be a voluntary system to offer "hardship seats".

6. Students who wish to transfer for reasons other than “hardship” would go through the centralized entry/transfer process and go to the end of a school’s waitlist.

Related Questions

1. Should the hardship transfer definition include expulsions and other involuntary transfers? Should long-term suspensions be shared cross-sector?
2. Would the hardship transfer process exist alongside the waitlists generated by the lottery, or would waitlists be eliminated after October 5?
3. Does this process include vetting with a disposition (a denial or approval of the hardship transfer)?

**Policy proposal 3: Set-Asides for Out-of-State Mid-Year Entries**

The task force discussed having public charter schools provide specific seats “set-aside” for students moving into the District (i.e., out-of-state entries). This was proposed because DCPS schools disproportionately enroll these new students. New out-of-state entries could be “set-aside” seats above public charter schools enrollment ceilings, with DC PCSB approval. New, out-of-state students could be enrolled before other students on the waitlist. Other students wishing to transfer between schools (not as new entries) would go through the centralized process and go to the end of a school’s waitlist.

Potential Parameters

1. Qualifying students include those who move into the District mid-year or decide to enroll during a school year for the first time after October 5. This includes students who wish to return to public school from being homeschooled or from private school, or have been previously disconnected from school altogether (i.e., drop out).
2. Students would only qualify if there was no proof of enrollment in SLED prior to them entering in the same school year.
3. Out-of-state mid-year entries would occur at any time throughout the school year after October 5.
4. Public charter schools would reserve a set number of seats above their enrollment ceiling as out-of-state seats with approval from the DC PCSB.
5. Public charters would opt in – it would be a voluntary system to offer seats to students entering the District’s public school system mid-year.

Related Questions

1. How would these out-of-state “set-aside” seats work with the waitlist? Would public charter schools enroll these students before the existing waitlist?
2. Should charter schools be required to have out-of-state “set-aside” seats or should charter schools opt-in?

**Potential round-robin lottery system and waitlist mechanism for implementing mid-year hardship transfers and out-of-state set-asides**

The task force discussed implementing a round-robin lottery system to facilitate the assignment of hardship transfers and out-of-state “set-asides” (policy options #2 and #3). The following discusses the potential policy parameters and related questions.

### Potential Parameters

1. The round-robin lottery process could be managed by My School DC.
2. The My School DC team would manage the identification of available seats in at least three schools (including DCPS and public charter), based on agreed upon criteria.
3. If available seats aren't secured in at least 3 schools, My School DC would implement a round-robin lottery process.
4. Once the seat identification process is made (either via available seats or the round-robin lottery process), My School DC team staff would assist the student and family in reviewing options and enrolling.
5. If waitlists are maintained, then:
  - The transfer process would trump the waitlist after a certain date in October until the hardship and out-of-state "set-aside" seats at that school had been filled.
  - Once the hardship and out-of-state "set-aside" seats have been filled, the school would go back to the waitlist to fill seats that became available.
  - A student on the waitlist would not be able to take the hardship or out-of-state "set-aside" seat; the seat would remain available to students going through the transfer office.
  - Schools that have no waitlist could turn regular seats into hardship seats.
6. If waitlists are terminated after October, then:
  - After a determined date in October, all transfers would go through the central transfer office.
  - A student's previous place on the waitlist would not affect the transfer office's process.

### Related Questions

- Should waitlists be maintained after October or not? What are the trade-offs for either scenario?