

History and Timeline of Controlled Choice in Cambridge

Drawn from Cambridge School Committee Documents and a report by Edward B. Fiske, "Controlled Choice in Cambridge, Massachusetts", for the Spencer Foundation

1979-CPS adopts an open-enrollment option so that all Cambridge students have the option to transfer to schools outside their neighborhoods, as long as space was available and the move did not increase segregation. Few students took advantage of this option.

1980-CPS redraws its school zones to encourage racial integration for new students.

March 1981-CPS implements its first "Controlled Choice Plan", abolishing neighborhood schools and giving each student the opportunity to attend any school, determining allocations based on race distribution. This policy had multiple goals: to include and treat fairly all students, to empower parents with choice, to promote diversity, and to promote school improvement through the competitive mechanism that should be monitored and managed by the School Department. In addition, the policy was expected to bring white families back to Cambridge and to pre-empt a court order for desegregation.

1989-CPS modified the definition of "walk zone" to allow a broader distribution of nearby students to qualify for priority at the nearest school. The distribution of the defined racial balance—determined by the overall district minority percentage—was amended to reflect a $\pm 5\%$ band, system-wide at each grade level; e.g., if the total number of third graders in the district is 39% minority, then every third grade class should have between 34% and 44% of minority students enrolled.

1997-CPS expands the definition of race to include 3, rather than the 2 categories: White; African-American and Other Black; and other students of color. The allowable disparity was within 10% of the district-wide average for these three categories.

1998-The First Circuit Court of Appeals banned Boston Latin School's voluntary use of Option N50, a racial set-aside for admissions. The Court decided that the admission policy violated the defendant's constitutional rights protected under the equal protection clause of the 14th amendment. Neighboring communities grew concerned that their assignment policies might come into question.

1999-Boston moved away from using race as part of its Controlled Choice Program.

2000-CPS begins a review of its Controlled Choice Plan based on legal concerns as well as concerns that the race-based policy was contributing to, rather than ameliorating, the achievement gap in the system.

December 2001- The review in 2000 of the implementation of the Plan also yielded insight to the effects of high concentrations of poverty within schools. Accordingly, the 2001 revision to the Controlled Choice Plan outlined specific remedies for the disparate distribution of low-income students throughout the District. These included: strategic improvements used to recruit students to schools; the factors used and considered when determining student allocations were expanded to include SES status; and a process of program improvement for schools not meeting the District's student diversity and achievement goals. A timeline was also created with benchmarks to guide the balancing of District schools:

- SY2002-03: each grade in each school to be within a range of $\pm 15\%$ of district-wide K-8 percentages of students qualify for the Federal Free and Reduced Meals Program.
- SY2003-04: each grade in each school to be within a range of $\pm 10\%$ of district-wide K-8 percentages of students qualify for the Federal Free and Reduced Meals Program.

- SY2004-05 and subsequent: each grade in each school to be within a range of **±5%** of district-wide K-8 percentages of students qualify for the Federal Free and Reduced Meals Program.

As per the District's goal of achieving SES integration, some seats may be held open at some grades within some schools to allow for specific meal-status students to enroll.

November 2003- CPS adopts the Superintendent's recommendation of **maintaining the balance band of ±10% in lieu of the proposed ±5% band**. The Superintendent felt the District felt enough strain from undergoing their recent consolidation—resulting in the merger of the two lowest performing schools, the Fletcher School and the Maynard School. The Superintendent explains: “given the great change that the District has experienced over the past year, now is not the time to change guidelines once again,” and “as we attempt to stabilize enrollment, it may be counterproductive to further restrict the likelihood of parents receiving the school of their choice”. The Superintendent also noted that “we may find that we reach a desired SES balance more quickly through revising internal procedures [such as recruitment, rather than by changing the percent guidelines]”.

March 2007-CPS amends the Controlled Choice Plan to use the K-8 district-wide percentage within a range of **±15%** for 2007-08 school year.

December 2007-CPS adopts the recommendation by the Superintendent to amend the Controlled Choice policy for Kindergarten assignments for SY2008-09 to use to use a ±10% band based on the **average of the last three years of Kindergarten enrollment** for SY2008-09.

November 2008-CPS adopts the motion that it will use the **average of last year's Kindergarten enrollment** with a band of ±10%; citing “this will help capture recent trends”.

January 2009-MIT researchers (including Parag Pathak) release a report on the impact of mandatory assignments with the following findings:

- Students receiving their first choice school are 3-8% more likely to spend a year in CPS.
- The wealth of the student's family increases the probability that the students will leave; paid lunch students are 7% more likely to leave if they do not get assigned to their first choice school.

For SY2011-12-CPS adopts a motion to remove the proximity preference given to students applying to the Tobin Montessori School and the three two-way immersion programs with the rationale that every student should have the opportunity to attend a “unique program”.

March 2011-CPS adopts the revised Innovation Agenda (IA) as per the recommendation of the Superintendent. The IA, to begin implementation for SY2012-13, essentially creates 4 upper school campuses to house grades 6-8. The intent of the IA is to address the growing concerns over disparate enrollment and student attrition in the upper grades. The adoption of the IA will reconfigure student transitions throughout the district; each upper school receives students from specific K-5 schools. Additionally, the adoption of the IA created the target enrollment of 88 students per upper school grade.

March 2012-CPS adopts a motion to revise the waitlist policy for the District's two-way immersion programs to better achieve SES balance.

October 2012-CPS adopts six motions that address the immediate concerns for the upcoming January Kindergarten Lottery regarding best practices for information distribution from the FRC, SES balance for the two-way immersion programs and implementation procedures, student transfers, sibling preference, and elementary school enrollment management to achieve stability for the upper school campuses.