

## **Breakout Session #1 - Entrance Age:**

### **Do you think this issue/process helps diversify our schools?**

- Is it accessible for working families (Tobin)?
- Tobin not centrally located
- JK: have to know about it to take advantage of
- Yes, if age was  $\emptyset$  everyone would have access to free education
- No, doesn't matter achievement-wise
- JK-eligible kids have 2 chances at lottery
- Not convinced that it affects diversity
- May help via financial benefit
- Does "freeze" at Tobin affect this diversity
- Who do we lose when family doesn't like initial JK assignment? Family pays for other K/preschool
- Meta comment: why are we talking about this in this context? (Controlled Choice)
- Free JK/K has neutral effect on school diversity
- Requires families knowing about benefits of early education
- Families don't know about Tobin in time (issue)
- Can help diversity because larger feeder population attractive to all groups
- Financial support

### **Do you think this issue/process is fair to individual families?**

- No, plan your child's birthday better! ☺
- Tobin – def. not fair, so few have access to it
- JK no – kids born on April 1 don't have chance that March 31 kids do
- Eliminate JK, eliminate mandatory assignment
- Sibling preference could exacerbate by doubling spots taken
- Some families get 2 "shots" at getting their desired school
- Kids who are the older ones in their class also have 2 years of K → double benefit
- Some families may be less apt to ask for a 2<sup>nd</sup> year of K if they are on cusp of age. They need it. Cultural biases against being held back/more school
- Montessori program may not be "fair" to people for whom it's not a neighborhood school
- No option for parents who want their 3 year-olds to begin public school but don't want Montessori – unfair
- Must educate all families (eligible) about different access points
- Issue may not be fair if can't get into your 1<sup>st</sup> choice (proximity lock out, Special Start issue)
- New-comers to district/late to lottery

### **Do you think this issue/process helps student achievement?**

- Not based on data shown on slides
- General Comment: The data in the slide seems to contradict national level studies that more early education leads to better outcomes
- Hybrid (4/5 year olds) lead to better or lessen achievement
- Is 4 year old age appropriate to go to school/bus
- Some of us think there is a benefit even if the slide didn't show it
- Does it help w/behavior in class
- Are the developmental differences w/age at 3<sup>rd</sup> grade masking the benefits
- Can't compare unless you count high-quality preschool is taken as an equivalent to JK
- No
- Data doesn't support this; anecdotal evidence does

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- What about Head Start data
- Helpful when there are developmental issues
- Does the story hold true if JK-K data is disaggregated

**Do you think this issue/process is transparent and understandable?**

- The process for age requirement is clear
- Tobin enrollment shows there are a lot of families who want free public schools. Kids at Tobin really want Amigos
- Sibling rule only works for/during lottery-causing families to enroll in school different than siblings or far away
- Dates are confusing to people: birthdays are hard to parse b/c cutoff dates for K: JK are different, this is also confusing (and add Tobin Montessori!)
- Yes, transparent and understandable
- No! (1<sup>st</sup> feeling of families)
- "Algorithm" – glazed over eyes
- Overwhelming paperwork
- Details of the process not clear (what ultimately made the choice?)
- Info is there if searched
- Transparency of waitlist system is good

**Do you think this issue/process leads to increased or decreased district enrollment?**

- No impact
- increased – if you have flex and have JK-aged children may choose Cambridge because of the JK benefit
- Yes, if the schools are seen as all being quality schools
- May be a decrease of families who have means to pay for a year of JK/preschool if they don't get their 1<sup>st</sup> choice
- Possibly increases enrollment in early elementary years
- Barrier is the complexity of the system
- Amount of paperwork can be a deterrent (private vs. public or move to the 'burbs). Some go through lottery then leave
- Mixed bag

**Breakout Session #2 - Availability of seats/classrooms, choice and non-choice assignments:**

**Do you think this issue/process helps diversify our schools?**

- Prevents some schools from being severely imbalanced but may not affect many/some schools that are already located in economically integrated parts of the city
- Leaves some schools still very unbalanced with high concentration of low-income students
- Seats classroom, choice
- January lottery data
- Increase diversity
- Is there obvious way to make it better
- Tension: good of system
- Collective best for FMA – Graham & Parks – off balance
- Does not achieve our intended results
- Better than what it otherwise would be
- More paid in East Cambridge is helping integration
- Housing costs lower on east side-more multi-family with kids
- Census vs. applicants: west side has more private school enrollment
- Most families want to go close to home, so imbalance of seats and students is a problem

**Do you think this issue/process is fair to individual families?**

- Depends
- Is it fair to individual families
- Research on schools very, very time consuming
- Awareness
- Exposure
- Desire
- Structures system HUGE impediment to becoming informed
- Employer outreach to help families understand system
- OVERWHELMING
- Complex
- Unfair: JK families get 2 lotteries if they stay out of CPS
- Would number of mandatories go down if these families only got 1 lottery
- Questioned validity of appropriateness of name lottery. Not true when kids have preferences
- Process feels uneven to many families
- Individually, not fair; especially when west families asked to travel east (geographic concerns for east families can't go west if they want \*for some it works out...\*
- For some individuals, counseling from FRC can be confusing
- Appears to be a need for more open seats on west side vs. east
- Lack of open seats in west diminishes choice for everybody in Cambridge but especially for east families. Families want choice across all of Cambridge
- Should east/west designations change? Different zones
- Should proximity be re-examined
- Should other preferences be considered

**Do you think this issue/process helps student achievement?**

- Still have large achievement gaps in some/most schools
- Achievement patterns don't fit the assumption that high needs/low income children do better in more middle income schools
- Only indirectly
- Positive impact on student achievement
- Not necessarily indirectly
- Mix, you'll get different parent involvement in way that benefits whole school
- Teachers looking out for every kid
- Culture of school (Morse, K/O) ?? (*illegible*) of learning is solid
- Kindergarten ??? (*illegible*) disadvantage
- One school is getting lots of perks for being high % FRL (and low test scores)
- Hurts achievement that schools aren't integrated

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- Supports for at-risk kids varies by school
- Seems like the low % FRL offer less support
- A community that values diversity is supported by controlled choice
- Integrated schools benefit students
- Unsure of how to answer question of achievement. Achievement for whom?

**Do you think this issue/process is transparent and understandable?**

- No. Need a PhD in Controlled Choice to understand
- Video good visual, but still hard
- Is there a way to simplify understanding the process
- Make it as simple as possible
- Process is greatly improved, more transparent and more information

**Do you think this issue/process leads to increased or decreased district enrollment?**

- Enrollment has gone up
- Bad economy affected economy
- Parents with means move out
- Some ??? (*illegible*) enrollment
- Not necessarily if mandatories are few. People may come for diversity; others may not come because of the uncertainty of lottery

**Breakout Session #3 - Algorithm and the effects of '+ or - 10%':**

**Do you think this issue/process helps diversify our schools?**

- For most schools - stay balanced/diverse and process seems to be working
- Consider using '+ or - 5%'

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- No, when % a school is highly imbalanced to begin with, the problem becomes worse over time
- You can control who goes in, but not the attrition
- More open seats in older grades
- Reconsider structure of lottery (e.g. ½ seats filled in January; ½ filled in June)
- Reputation drives choices – misconceptions, quality of only one school that is desired
- If quality of programs was consistent, enrollment would be different
- Is there a “problem” being out of balance? (FMA example)
- Exacerbates economic diversity
- Harvard or MIT professors and graduate students transient population increase the imbalance challenge, especially in schools that have open seats in early grades

**Do you think this issue/process is fair to individual families?**

- Frustrating to families to have open seats
- Smaller classes/peer groups
- Paid lunch families who get mandatory assignments don’t get a choice, get an unbalanced school
- Putting a child in mandatory assignment is good for the health of the school
- Tension between individual interest and benefit of the community
- Can’t key in low SES with low achievement
- Choice among schools possibly affecting choice
- Is the policy affecting choices
- Is the policy supporting choices
- If balance is key, needs to be another factor besides proximity
- Possibility of involving family liaisons in the choice process? (Give parents deeper knowledge of what school offer; they have more opportunity to make appropriate choices)
- Really hard to say

**Do you think this issue/process helps student achievement?**

- Data is mixed
- Fletcher/Maynard has shown growth among high needs kids despite PuFR imbalance
- Parents perceive that certain schools will serve their children better than others
- Depends on culture of school/culture of family
- It depends on how you define achievement and for what group
- Does it hurt lower income/students of color
- Why are some schools better than others at helping lower income/students of color

**Do you think this issue/process is transparent and understandable?**

- Bands and process is confusing
- No, can we explain difference between balanced by enrollment vs. by capacity
- Hard to understand
- Explanation of why? vs. just what
- Mostly transparent, but complicated to understand; Family Resource adds complexity here

**Do you think this issue/process leads to increased or decreased district enrollment?**

- Yes, lets more people into the schools they want
- Get them in the building
- Sell kindergarten
- Hard to say whether it increases or decreases enrollment

**Breakout Session #4 - Ideas, concerns and priorities for the continued review of Controlled Choice:**

- Where do we get information regarding quality of schools? (Social networks, Family Resource Center, school websites, family liaisons, tour of schools, test results (MCAS), knowledge of program (language immersion, Montessori, co-teaching model, etc.)
- What policy does is correct for parent choice

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- Perceived quality of schools - like Montessori (grand name) or Intensive Studies Program (high achievement)
- What data we use to determine “better quality” school
- How to sell the longer day (under chosen – King, Fletcher/Maynard)
- How do we show/prove all Cambridge Public schools are quality schools
- Parent investment, involvement (higher if they get their choice)
- Waitlist change - if you get a 1, 2 or 3 choice, you shouldn't be waitlisted
- Outreach long before JK/K lottery
- Improve parents' understanding before process
- More help for newcomers/personal contact in the Family Resource Center
- More people to help/be ambassadors
- List of families in the school you are assigned to
- Designated caseworker for mandatory families
- Clear path to finding information when not local
- Less emphasis on choosing school you like or choose best school for your child you like when it isn't likely that you'll get a spot
- More information about balance
- Need second/third algorithm to place more kids into one of three choices
- People already trying to pick kindergarten based on reputation of upper schools – what can be done about that
- Parent survey at completion of kindergarten lottery
- Neutrality expressed by Family Resource Center at all times
- No school choice for families when OSE recommends a substantially-separate classroom
- Message: whole district is good
- Don't want too much of a message that you need to be a “good shopper” and focus on making your choices
- Connect preschools to the elementary schools. Make families aware and informed of options
- Visit families in housing community centers to recruit under-represented students
- Proximity and impact on balance – location of housing
- Proximity has different value depending on where you live and which school you want
- Proximity seems to give you an advantage beyond the general controlled choice process- but you might not even want it
- How can we get more families to consider a wider range of schools
- Cambridge city-wide school advisory group – cross school communication
- Fix execution so that JK/K does not exceed +10% FRL (+10%, -5%; hire a programmer to figure it out)
- Families don't know about schools until they are there (music program, etc.)
- Can't visit 12 schools – video
- Some schools have their own open house and others don't
- Another path other than immediate social network
- Video of families happy at their mandatory school
- It's a marketplace, but constrained – a balance of schools
- Train family liaisons to not denigrate other schools
- Perception “in the air”
- Kid vs. community; need not be tension
- Buy-in to larger goal of social justice/diversity
- Differentiate, e.g. Peabody music
- Quality across schools
- Should we have controlled choice? Alt: Neighborhood and Magnet, Alt: Zones

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- Helping to correct unfairness w/r/t lack of information about controlled choice requires outreach
- Outreach – both talk to existing communities (city housing, preschools, and neighborhood associations) and find points where recent arrivals/”unplugged” families contact the City. Library w/books for kids, parking office, etc.
- Information needs to have simple takeaway points, strongly reflect and communicate the city’s values (quality, diversity, etc.), be accurate (more depth than test scores), and invite further engagement. This may not be easy.