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PRESS RELEASE
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Board Approves New Student Assignment System for San Francisco Schools

Still a choice system, student's home address plays bigger role

March 10, 2010 (San Francisco) – The San Francisco Board of Education has unanimously approved a new policy for the way students are assigned to San Francisco's public schools. The new policy will take several years to fully implement and will begin with students entering transitional grades (kindergarten, sixth and ninth) in Fall 2011.

Both the old system, which has been in place since 2002, and the new one give families the option to choose from all SFUSD schools. What is different is how students will be assigned to those schools when there is more demand than available seats, and that where a student's family lives will play a more prominent role.

The new system will be simpler. It will look at where a child lives and which schools the family selected and will use fewer factors to determine a student's placement offer. In the previous system, parents would submit a ranked list of up to seven schools to the district and, when there were more applicants than available seats at a given school, the system would assign them using a lottery that took into consideration five factors, including a family's economic status, English language proficiency and previous academic performance.

Unlike the current system, the new system will be applied in different ways at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

At all grade levels, the assignment system will be taking into consideration which census tract area a student lives within. Standardized test score data will be computed for each combined census tract, and those combined census tracts will be divided into quintiles based on average scores. In the policy this preference is called Census Tract Integration Preference "CTIP1" and "CTIP2". CTIP1 tracts will be the quintile with the lowest average CST scores, and CTIP2 tracts will be the four remaining quintiles.

In middle school, the district will offer an initial school assignment to all fifth grade students to establish a more predictable feeder pattern so middle schools can work more closely with the feeder elementary schools to create more instructional alignment and continuity for students and families.

Board President Jane Kim said that she thought that after years of discussing student assignment, this policy was a good compromise.

“This has been a lengthy process with a lot of community input. We spent a tremendous amount of time trying to achieve our priorities, which we set two years ago in our strategic plan. I didn’t think we could come up with a hybrid policy, but we did—incorporating choice, diversity, simplicity, proximity all in one process,” said Kim.

Here is how the majority of school assignments for kindergarten, sixth and ninth grade will take place under the proposed new system.

Elementary Schools

Families will submit an application form that includes their home address and the names of the schools they would like to apply to listed in order of preference -- the assignment process will try to assign students to their highest ranked school. All applications will be processed at the same time, and all applicants will receive a single assignment offer. Students will be assigned to schools using the preferences listed in order below; students who are not assigned to one of their choices will be assigned to their attendance area school if it still has openings after the choice process, or to the school closest to where they live that has openings.

1. Siblings - younger siblings of students who are enrolled in and will be attending the school during the year for which the younger sibling requests attendance.
2. SFUSD PreK - students who live in the attendance area of the school and are also attending an SFUSD PreK program in the same attendance area.
3. CTIP1-students who reside in CTIP1 census tracts.
4. Attendance Area - students who live in the attendance area of the school.
5. Densely populated attendance areas - students who live in attendance areas that do not have sufficient capacity to accommodate all the students living in the attendance area.
6. All other students.

Middle School

All elementary schools will feed into a particular middle school. At the beginning of the enrollment process, SFUSD fifth graders will receive an initial assignment offer to a middle school based on the elementary school they attend. Students will have an opportunity to accept their initial assignment or participate in a choice process. Students who participate in the choice process will maintain their initial assignment unless they get an assignment to a higher ranked choice. Students will be assigned to schools using the following order of preferences:

1. Initial assignment – students who received an initial assignment to attend that school.
2. Siblings - younger siblings of students who are enrolled in and will be attending the school during the year for which the younger sibling requests attendance.
3. CTIP1 - students who reside in CTIP1 census tracts.
4. Attendance Area -students who live in the attendance area of the school.
5. Densely populated attendance areas - students who live in attendance areas that do not have sufficient capacity to accommodate all the students living in the attendance area.
6. All other students.

High School

Families will submit an application form that includes their home address and the names of the schools they would like to apply to listed in order of preference -- the assignment system will try to assign students to their highest ranked school. All applications will be processed at the same time, and all applicants will receive a single assignment offer. Students will be assigned to schools using the preferences listed in order below; students who are not assigned to one of their choices will be assigned to their attendance area school if it still has openings after the choice process, or to the school closest to where they live that has openings.

1. Siblings - younger siblings of students who are enrolled in and will be attending the school during the year for which the younger sibling requests attendance.
2. CTIP1 - students who reside in CTIP1 census tracts.

3. All other students.

Although every family will have an attendance area school, some elementary/K-8 schools will not have an attendance area and will not offer a local preference to students – these are called city-wide schools.

The choice algorithm was designed with the help of a volunteer team of market design experts who have previously been involved in designing choice algorithms for school choice in Boston and New York City. Volunteers from four prominent universities contributed to the effort, including Clayton Featherstone and Muriel Niederle of Stanford University, Atila Abdulkadiroglu of Duke University, Parag Pathak of MIT, and Alvin Roth of Harvard.

“We are pleased that the district has decided to adopt a choice architecture that makes it safe for parents to concentrate their effort on determining which schools they prefer, with confidence that they won’t hurt their chances by listing their preferences truthfully,” said Niederle and Featherstone, the Stanford research team.

SFUSD staff will continue to work with this team of researchers as well as community members and demographers to develop a range of administrative regulations, including drawing new attendance area boundaries around each school (except those that are designated “city-wide”) and determining the number of school choices a family can submit.

The superintendent will conduct an annual assessment of the student assignment system to monitor and adjust as necessary.

For more information about the new system, including how students will be assigned to city-wide schools as well as language and special education programs, go to www.sfusd.edu/studentassignmentredesign.

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