

Equity in School Choice (updated March 9, 2018)

Suggested Changes to Discover BPS

Back in 2012 I contributed to the community proposals for a new school assignment system. At the time I pushed for all parents to be able to go through the lottery system. BPS said that they didn't have enough schools throughout the district to make that work for students with special education needs or ELL needs. BPS created cluster maps for assignments for these groups. It is not always clearly stated on the Discover BPS website what Special Education services and ELL options are available for the home based schools so families might miss knowing that they have better opportunities closer to home. Not all home based schools that are inclusion schools are listed as inclusion schools. Also home based schools do not list the full information for ELL programs either. I recently sent a proposal of how Homebased ELL and SPED information could be set up more clearly on the DiscoverBPS website. The proposal included the following items:

- Each school would list ELL Offering, SPED Offering, Fit Score, Travel, Hours, and Quality Tier. These would show up for the Home based listings, the ELL listings, and The Special Education listings.
- In the detailed information for each school there would be new information added. It would list details about SPED offerings including strands, and the type of program (inclusion, sub-separate, resource room, etc). For ELL it would list languages and the type of program (dual language, SEI language specific, SEI multilingual, SLIFE, etc)

I am hopeful that this suggestion will move forward. The plus of sharing this information on the Discover BPS website is that families, the special education department, and the ELL departments might make more placements closer to a family's home address, which could save money on transportation. It also would allow students to have more choices to consider including schools with higher tiers.

Increasing Diversity for High Schools

I would recommend that all non-exam schools stop using applications for assignments and go back to assignments through the lottery. This would increase diversity for most of high schools and have less clustering of students by income, ethnic background, ELL or SPED. When schools are more diverse, student achievement is higher for a greater number of students. This is more important than increases in Title 1 dollars. It is also more fair and ethical.

Equity with Build BPS

Ideally with the Build BPS process there would be the goal of having more Special Education options, and ELL options dispersed throughout the city so that families could choose schools themselves. In the short term there would be a goal to have ELL and SPED students that are placed by BPS go to more level 1, and level 2 schools. This would be to make sure that ELL and SPED students are not being assigned to level 3 and 4 schools more than general education students. Also, when BPS does the placements there would be a goal to not cluster students by income.

If schools have more of a mix of populations, there might be some division in those schools. It is important for all families to know that they are valued. Each student equally belongs to their school.

In addition, currently there seems to be a range of percentages for special education seats in inclusion schools throughout the district. The schools that have bigger percentages have a harder time giving students the time and attention they need. As part of the Build BPS process I would recommend adding inclusion to more schools so the percentage of special education students at each school could be less. 20% would be ideal. 30% or more is too much. Perhaps a cap could be at 25%. If the percentages were district wide, and not set school to school, that would help with equity.

Also adding more dual language schools should be considered as well, through the Build BPS process.

The other issue that I have been thinking about is how so much of school funding comes from enrollment. I think the Build BPS process also needs to think carefully about how many seats each school has so that all schools have a chance to thrive. If there are more seats available than can be filled, then that makes it possible for one school to have higher enrollment than another. If the seats available more closely matched the students applying, then there could be the possibility that all schools could be fully enrolled. The budgets need to be stabilized from year to year so either the funding needs to solidify, or the enrollment of students needs to.

Equity with Advanced Work

It appears that the district is going in the right direction in moving towards the "Excellence for All" program. It is more equitable and doesn't split students into separate groups. It also makes it easier for ELL and SPED students to have access to advanced work. In deciding which schools are next in the roll out perhaps priorities could be made to schools that have a high percentage of high poverty students, and/or students of color. Also, to include schools with high ELL and SPED populations would be great.

One other thought is that currently if a student is placed in advanced work in one year, then has poor test scores at the end of the year then that student is not allowed to stay in advanced work. I would like that process to end if the student wants to stay in the program. Sometimes a student has a tough year, and they should be given another chance, and to not lose their chance to receive help preparing for the exam school test which is one of the benefits of the advanced work program.

I welcome thoughts and feedback on these issues.

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