

Three School Assignment Proposals

from a Fenway Mom, Lisa Jeanne Graf

Proposal 1: A Fair Lottery

All schools in the city can be applied to.

Priorities would be given in the following order:

- A. Sibling preference
- B. Walk Zone (Within one mile from the family's home or one of the three closest schools) This would be 65% percent. This could go up if families outside of the school's walkzone did not use up the other 35%
- C. If the school is the family's closest quality school or closest speciality school (like a dual immersion school or an inclusive school).
- D. The second closest quality school or closest speciality school.
- E. A school where the family was willing to provide transportation.

If a school needs to be filled (not enough kids have applied to it) then 10% would go to walk zone families. 25% Would be assigned randomly to students up to 4 miles away.

Travel would be provided by the city for

- schools that are 1 mile or less if the neighborhood isn't safe
- schools that are more than a mile from the family's home. Once a family has access to the two closest quality schools and at least one speciality school (that was chosen) then travel is not free beyond that distance.

Proposal 2: Neighborhood Choices

1. Each family would have a priority zone and would have at least 3 priority schools. These would be the schools closest to their home and/or walk zone schools (schools a mile from the family's home).

2. Each family would have a free travel zone. This zone would be a certain distance from the family's home address. Each neighborhood would have a different distance from the family's home where transportation would be paid for by the city. For example in one neighborhood the zone could be in a two mile radius from the family's home. Each neighborhood would have a different distance for the free travel zone to make sure that there would be reasonable equity in offering quality schools to everyone. The range might be 2 miles to 4 miles for different neighborhoods.

The free travel zone would include schools that are more than .5 miles from a family's home address and are in:

- their priority zone
- their neighborhood
- a designated distance from the family's home address
- as well as schools that are .5 miles or less if the neighborhood isn't safe

3. Boston would be broken down into the following neighborhoods for school choice. They would be:

- Allston/Brighton
- Charlestown
- Downtown (including the neighborhoods of Back Bay, Chinatown, Downtown, Fenway, Kenmore, Mission Hill, South End, and the West End)

- East Boston
- Hyde Park
- Jamaica Plain
- Mattapan
- North Dorchester
- South Dorchester
- Roslindale
- Roxbury
- South Boston
- West Roxbury

4. Each school would set aside between 80-90% of the seats for the priority zone and neighborhood. Priority zone would have a higher priority. 10-20% of each school's seats would be set aside for students outside of the neighborhood.

Note: Sibling priority would still be included in this proposal.

5. All families could apply to any school in the city if they were willing to take care of transportation costs. This would fall under "outside of the neighborhood" spots.

6. To make this proposal more equitable, changes would also need to happen to schools in the city so that more schools would offer quality.

7. This proposal has a decent amount of flexibility for making changes in the future. Distances for the free travel zones could change. The percentages for what groups will go to individual schools could change as well. Moving forward it could be tweaked many times to keep it as equitable as possible.

Proposal 3: Quality Options

1. Each family would have a priority zone and would have at least 3 priority schools. These would be the schools closest to their home and/or walk zone schools (schools a mile from the family's home).

2. Each family would have a free travel zone. This zone would be a certain distance from the family's home address. Each home would have a different distance from the family's home where transportation would be paid for by the city. For example for one family the zone could be in a two mile radius from the family's home. Each family would have a different free travel distance to make sure that there would be reasonable equity in offering quality schools to everyone. The range might be more than 1 mile to 4 miles for different families. The free travel zone would include schools that are more than 1 mile from a family's home address and are in:

- a designated distance from the family's home address that would ensure access to at least 2 quality schools
- schools that are 1 miles or less if the neighborhood isn't safe
- provide enough seats for the students who do not go to the "priority schools"

3. The free travel zone would be at least a mile from a family's home. It would grow until each family had at least 2 quality schools to choose from, and be 2/3s of the family's options. This means that families in neighborhoods with poor schools would get "quality schools" added to their options until the percentage was at least 66%. As the travel radius enlarged past a mile it would only add quality schools to the list. Another reason for the free travel zone to enlarge would be to ensure that there would be enough seats available for everyone.

Since this plan does not give 100% of the spots to the priority zone, a certain percentage of students would be assigned from their free travel zone. Each neighborhood or zone could have a free travel zone in place to ensure enough seats, and then that could be expanded if more quality schools are needed for equity of access to quality schools.

4. Each school would set aside between 66-90% of the seats for the priority zone. 33-10% of each school's seats would be set aside for students outside of the priority zone. The priority zone percentages could be enlarged if parents from outside of the priority zones did not want seats for their kids.

Note: Sibling priority would still be included in this proposal.

5. All families could apply to any school in the city if they were willing to take care of transportation costs. This would fall under "outside of the priority zone" spots.

6. To make this proposal more cost effective (less transportation costs), changes would also need to happen to schools in the city so that more schools would offer quality.

7. This proposal has a decent amount of flexibility for making changes in the future. Distances for the free travel zones could change. The percentages for what groups will go to individual schools could change as well. Moving forward it could be tweaked many times to keep it as equitable as possible.

Note: These are my rough ideas so far for school assignment. On the next couple of pages I listed some ideas for improving academics and adding fairness to the Walk Zone and Kindergarten Placement. I hope these ideas help improve school assignment in a way that is fair to all families.

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Improving Academics

1. Many students need help learning English. Many other parents are looking for their children to have challenges with their school work. Dual immersion schools serve both groups well. Dual immersion schools respect that students speak a language already and then builds on that knowledge. More dual immersion schools could be created (enough so most students learning English could learn in this setting).

2. Many Special Education students want to be in inclusive classrooms. Many parents whose children do not have special education needs like the smaller class sizes, and better test scores that inclusive classrooms provide. They also like the fact that the schools have mission statements that state that all students have worth. So the schools also tend to come with a good school climate. More inclusive schools could be created (enough so that all Special Education students that can thrive in an inclusive environment have one available).

3. Differentiated teaching is happening more in the Boston Public Schools. The way it is described often sounds like a tool to find student's weaknesses and address them so that students can succeed. I think this approach needs to be broadened to let students with strengths excel as far as they can go as well. For a number of students with weaknesses, they also have areas of great strength. If students who have both strengths and weaknesses could excel in at least one area (be it in the arts, math, reading, etc) that feeling of accomplishment could make growth in other areas feel more possible. I think allowing a child to have deeper instruction in areas of strengths or being able to take a class with the next grade level would be a great motivator and be fair to more students.

Good uses of money

1. Improve the libraries with more books- classics, books that are interesting, beautiful and fun.

2. Better student teacher ratios

3. Offer Advanced work classes in more schools

4. In a school with some good music partnerships and a large Spanish speaking population a El Sistema school like the Conservatory Lab Charter School in Boston could be created. El Sistema is "a unique program designed to effect social change and nurture promising futures for underserved communities through intensive, ensemble-focused music education." The Blackstone school might be one school where this could work.

5. In a school with strong arts partnerships create an Arts Elementary School. Arts could be the framework that the teaching could build from. The Tobin School might be a good choice for this.

Ideas for the "Introducing the Boston Public Schools" booklet

Academics:

- Which Special Needs services are available?
- How are advanced learners needs meet? Also what services are available for students in Kindergarten to Grade 3? (starting kindergarten early, skipping grades, mixed age classrooms, differentiated learning, taking some classes with the next grade, studying a foreign language, etc)
- What unique offerings does the school have?
- How are the needs of the whole child addressed?
- What are the teacher student ratios?
- Is this an inclusive school?
- How often are arts, music and dance classes available a week?
- What foreign language instruction is available?
- What before and after school activities are available? is there a cost?

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Improving fairness with the walk zone.

The walk zone could be determined by the 3 (or whatever number is the most fair) schools closest to a family's home. Then people who don't have many schools in their walk zone will still be given a fair shot.

One of the walk zone school choices could include a school anywhere in the city where the parents are willing to provide transportation.

New schools could be created in underserved neighborhoods. To keep costs down the schools could possibly be small. Or they could be in neighborhoods with less expensive real estate but close enough to be a walk zone school.

With these changes you could increase the % of students in schools within their "walk zones in a way that would get parent support.

Improving fairness with kindergarten placement.

Currently parents are enrolling their kids in Kindergarten 1 because they think it is the best way to ensure that their child gets to go to a good school. Because of this many slots are taken by parents who don't want to put their child in Kindergarten 1 but don't see another option.

The lottery for Kindergarten 1 could possibly work a little differently. When a parent learns what school their child is assigned to, the parent could be given two choices. The first choice could be to have their child go to Kindergarten 1 at that school. The second choice would be to for the child to be guaranteed a place in the same school for Kindergarten 2.

The result would be that some parents would choose to wait a year to send their child to kindergarten 2. This would open up seats to parents who really want their child to go to Kindergarten 1. This would benefit individual families but it would also be good for BPS because they could guess a little better how many families would enroll each year.
