

STUDENTS AND INSTRUCTION 5000

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History and Rationale

The Salem School Committee (the Committee) holds its core values of equity & access in high regard (see SC Policy #6101 for core values). The Committee further believes that when students are assigned to schools based solely on the geographic location of a student’s home address, the likelihood of creating schools with student bodies that are inequitable in terms of the socioeconomic status as well as other factors associated with diversity is increased. For this reason, since the 1980s, the Salem Public Schools has followed a voluntary desegregation plan known as a controlled choice student assignment policy.

SPS Core Value of Equity and Access:

SPS is committed to identifying and eliminating any and all barriers to educational achievement. To this end, we promote policies and practices that are fair and just, and make learning opportunities – in and out of school – fully accessible to all. We commit to ensure every student, regardless of background, meets our high standards for achievement, participation, and growth.

A controlled choice student assignment policy allows Salem families the opportunity to access all of the district’s schools and educational offerings regardless of where they live. A choice based system also helps to ensure that the diversity of our community is reflected in the student body attending all of the city’s schools. Other benefits of a controlled choice student assignment system include:

- Offers parents and families the opportunity to proactively identify their choice of schools, ranked in order of preference, that are best suited for their children
- Eliminates the need to continually redraw attendance boundaries due to changes in the housing patterns throughout the District

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- Offers parents and students an assurance that once students are enrolled in a school, they may remain in that school through the highest grade available
- Promotes academic excellence in all schools by allowing students of different backgrounds to learn with and from each other
- Promotes socio-economic (SES) and other forms of diversity in the schools.
- Allows the District to monitor and manage class size at each building
- Provides the District with the opportunity to monitor school choice trends to better understand the level of “demand” for each school as well as the opportunity to respond to those trends (e.g. intentionally expanding and replicating successful programs that are in high demand and/or addressing challenges in schools that have low demand)

Salem’s controlled choice student assignment policy is designed to create schools that are demographically and economically diverse and academically successful for all students who attend.

Goals of Salem’s Student Assignment Policy

The goals of the Salem Controlled Choice Student Assignment Policy are to:

1. Increase the excellence of all schools so that there are great choices across all of Salem
2. Achieve a more equitable distribution of students across the district based on socioeconomic status and other educational risk factors
3. Maximize, to the extent possible, families’ opportunities to exercise their choice of school(s) that best fits their child(ren)
4. Keep siblings together (to the extent that this is the family’s choice)
5. Increase operational efficiency by making efficient use of our facilities and reducing transportation costs (including students’ time spent on buses)
6. Ensure that the entire process, from beginning to end, is clear, transparent, and easy to understand and follow
7. Ensure that the District (and schools) conduct proactive outreach to families, and especially to those groups who are underrepresented, thereby increasing opportunities for all to exercise informed choices
8. Continuously monitor the progress of implementing the policy, including fidelity to the policy, and continuing to explore new ways to improve upon the policy or consider new methods to achieve the overall goals

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Policy Objective

The objective of the Salem Controlled Choice Student Assignment Policy is to achieve an equitable balance of student enrollment, in terms of socioeconomic status, within each of Salem’s schools. To that end, each school’s enrollment shall reflect a deviation of no more than five (5) percentage points from the average socioeconomic composition of the district’s student enrollment, as measured by the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s most recently published Economically Disadvantaged indicator.

District Procedures for Determining the Number and Type of Seats Available

The following procedures shall be used to determine the number and types of seats available for family choice:

- 1. Calculate enrollment projections and determine each school’s capacity to serve, by grade level.*

Each fall, the Superintendent shall be responsible for reviewing all available enrollment and other demographic data together with the District’s programming needs as well as each school’s enrollment capacity, to make an annual determination as to the number of students who can be assigned at each grade in each school. The annual determination will be based on the projected district-wide enrollment of each grade, the average class size at each grade, and the number of enrollment strands that can be accommodated in each school. This determination shall include any spaces earmarked for programmatic needs such as substantially separate special education, English Language Learners (ELL), including those who are newcomers, or other specialized programs designated by the Superintendent, within each school.

- 2. Set annual enrollment targets for each individual school that move each school closer to the policy objective of within 5% of the district-wide average for students’ socioeconomic status (SES).*

In January of each year, the Superintendent shall set annual enrollment targets for each individual school. The goal of these annual, school-based enrollment targets is to increase the equitable distribution of students of different backgrounds across the district and to ensure that students who face multiple barriers to success in education are not concentrated within one or more schools.

The socioeconomic status (SES) of each student shall be determined by the degree to which the household income of each student meets the federal standards for low-income as published annually by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture and/or the degree to which each student participates in specific state or federal programs that otherwise qualify them as low-income.

These annual enrollment targets shall include two categories for each school:

- Low-Income (LI):** Percentage of seats available for students whose household income qualifies them as low-income, according to the above criteria;

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- b) **Non-Low Income (Non-LI):** Percentage of seats available for students whose household income does not qualify them as low-income, according to the above criteria.

The annual enrollment targets for each category shall be based on an analysis of each school’s current enrollment in terms of its socioeconomic status (SES) -- based on the percentage of Economically Disadvantaged (ED) students enrolled – relative to the district-wide average of ED students. The target set for each school should give higher priority to the category that needs to be increased within that school, in order to move closer to the district-wide average, and a lower priority to the category that needs to be decreased. By prioritizing the targets for each individual school in this way, over time, the school’s enrollment will be within five percentage points of the district average.

For example, to illustrate how this might work, if the district’s average enrollment is 50% low income and 50% non-low income and one school’s current enrollment is 75% non-low income and 25% low income, setting an enrollment target for this school of 75% low-income and 25% non-low income would prioritize the low-income category by allowing more of the available seats to be filled by students who fall into this category. This would mean that 75% of the available seats in the school would be assigned to incoming students who qualify as low-income and 25% of the available seats in the school would be assigned to incoming students who do not qualify as low-income.

Similarly, an enrollment target of 60% low-income and 40% non-low income would also weight enrollment in the direction of the district-wide goal of being within 5% of the district’s average, but this target would be more moderate, in terms of meeting the objective, than the first example.

The Superintendent shall be responsible for setting enrollment targets based on each school’s enrollment data relative to the district-wide average for the previous year. No school’s enrollment target shall be set in a way that moves the balance of enrollment away from the objective, further contributing to inequitable enrollment within a school.

The school’s enrollment targets shall apply to the assignment of students entering Kindergarten as well as to all those applying to enter all other grade levels, at all points throughout the year.

3. Examine and consider additional diversity factors for the future.

While the current policy considers each student’s socioeconomic status as the primary factor for achieving a more equitable distribution of students, the School Committee acknowledges the importance of other factors reflecting the diversity of our student body. Educational research recognizes that additional risk factors are associated with a student’s success in school. The Superintendent is hereby charged with tracking and monitoring additional diversity factors reflected in the student body and reporting annually to the School Committee on the degree to which each school enrolls students based on these factors. Diversity factors may include race/ethnicity, disability status, English language learner status, homelessness (as defined by the McKinney-Vento Act), foster care, parental level of education, and other factors identified by the Superintendent. Over time, the School Committee may consider updating this policy to include a “multi-factor” approach, as many other districts implementing controlled choice

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student assignment have, basing student assignment on multiple factors that are known to affect the educational outcomes of students, and seeking to achieve a balance of those factors across schools.

4. Determine the availability of any in-district charter, innovation, and/or other schools that may require exclusion from this policy and require alternative approaches to student assignment.

In-District Charter Schools: Salem Public Schools currently houses a K-5 Horace Mann Charter School known as the Bentley Academy Charter School (BACS) and procedures for enrolling in a charter school are governed by state law. In accordance with state law, the enrollment of students in the BACS shall be determined by a lottery process wherein all those who “opt-in” or otherwise apply by the established deadline, have an equal chance of selection by lottery. All interested families wishing to have their children attend BACS will be given the opportunity to opt in to the lottery no later than March 1st (for the first lottery) and any other deadlines established by BACS for subsequent lotteries. This option will be available on all of the district’s standard registration forms and tracked by the Parent Information Center (PIC) and shared with BACS prior to the lottery date. Opting into the lottery will not preclude students from being considered for their three school choices through the district.

Innovation Schools: Salem currently has two Innovation Schools (the Carlton Innovation School, a K-5 Innovation School and the New Liberty Innovation School, an alternative, competency-based high school serving Grades 9-12). At this time, enrollment to the NLIS shall follow the district’s student assignment policy. Enrollment to the Carlton Innovation School, however, includes a partial exception to the student assignment policy (which is its Kindergarten assignment process by trimester, based on the timing of a child’s 5th birthday). In this school, children who turn five (5) at different times throughout the year, have the opportunity to enter Kindergarten at the start of three different trimesters -- Fall, Winter, and Spring, based on the timing of the child’s 5th birthday (before September 1 for the Fall Trimester, before December 1 for the Winter Trimester, and before March 1 for the Spring Trimester). This trimester enrollment system gives students the opportunity to start kindergarten early and the flexibility to spend additional time or to be accelerated before moving onto 1st grade.

In the future, should a new Innovation School be developed in the district that may also seek exclusion from the student assignment policy, it shall be the responsibility of the Superintendent, together with the school’s leaders, to ensure that Salem families are made aware of the specific procedures to follow, such that all families have equal opportunity to access these options.

Salem Early Childhood Center (SECC): Although initial student registration for the Salem Early Childhood Center is managed by the district’s Parent Information Center, the assignment criteria outlined in this policy do not apply to the SECC.

High Schools: Although initial student registration procedures for Salem High School and the New Liberty Innovation School are managed by the district’s Parent Information Center, the assignment criteria outlined in this policy do not apply to these schools. The assignment criteria also do not apply to students who attend the Salem Prep High School.

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- 5. Develop materials and outreach plans to ensure the community is aware of all of the district’s enrollment options, the choices available to them, registration procedures and requirements, and deadlines that may apply to them.*

Ensuring that all members of the Salem community who have school-aged children are aware of the educational options and choices available to them and have a clear understanding of what they need to do (and by what dates) in order to access their choices is critical to any choice-based student assignment system. It shall be the responsibility of the Superintendent to ensure that an effective outreach and communication strategy that reaches all members of the community, including those whose home language is not English and other frequently underrepresented groups, is undertaken. Communication and outreach activities may involve creation of a district choices guide (translated into Spanish and Portuguese), information on the district’s website, holding community forums in various neighborhood locations, organizing school open houses, holding a “school options” fair, etc.

Kindergarten Registration Timelines and Procedures

The following procedures shall be used to assign students to the entering Kindergarten class for each year included in the term of this policy:

- 1. Communication and Outreach:** In the fall and early winter of each year (November through January), the Superintendent shall execute a communication and outreach plan to ensure that all families with children who will turn five (5) years of age by September 1st of the upcoming school year are made aware of the Kindergarten schooling options available to them, upcoming opportunities to learn more about their choices (e.g., school expo, school open houses, information on the website, etc.), as well as the registration process and procedures.
- 2. Kindergarten Information Night:** In January of each year, the Superintendent shall schedule at least one Kindergarten Information Night held in a central location, inviting all families known to have a child who will be eligible for Kindergarten in the fall. The purpose of this event is to inform families of the school options and choices available to them as well as the procedures, requirements, and deadlines for Kindergarten registration. The Kindergarten registration period shall begin on the first day after this event.
- 3. School Tours and Open Houses:** The Superintendent shall direct all schools to make time available for families to visit, tour the school, and learn more about the choices available to them. Steps should be taken to ensure that these tours and open houses do not interfere with the instructional time of existing students.
- 4. School Choice Selection Procedures:** All Salem parents/guardians are encouraged to review the information on school choices and procedures and shall be required to indicate on the application, in rank order, their top three (3) choices for each of their children eligible for Kindergarten. Ranking fewer than three schools will significantly increase the student’s chances of remaining unassigned to a school following the initial school assignment results. The availability of seat

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assignments decreases significantly closer to the start of school, and all parents are encouraged to register their student during the designated registration period to take full advantage of the choice program.

In addition to ranking their top three schools, parents/guardians are encouraged to consider “opting in” to the Bentley Academy Charter School lottery as well as any other magnet or other district-wide “opt in” choice opportunities that may apply. Applicants interested in these options must check the “opt in” check box on their application submitted by March 1st in order to participate in the first lottery. In the event that such applicants wish to remain in the district student assignment process, identification of their top three (3) schools, not including BACS should be included in the application.

5. **Student Registration Procedures and Requirements:** In order to qualify for assignment to a school, all parents/guardians must complete and submit all required student registration forms and required documentation, including: a) Proof of birth date; b) Proof of address (to verify residency within the City of Salem); c) Proof of parent/guardian identification; and d) Most recent immunization and physical examination records (students may be registered and receive an assignment without immunization records. However, such records must be submitted prior to starting school).

In addition, the registration forms shall seek information about each child’s demographics, household income, home language, medical history, background, and information pertaining to educational risk factors associated with success in school.

6. **Kindergarten Registration Periods:** There shall be three Kindergarten registration periods between January and September, which is the start of Kindergarten in the following year. The first two registration periods shall be processed in “batches” that have an established window with a clear deadline. Applications received within each batch window are processed according to the selection criteria, regardless of the date that each application was received (so long as it was within each respective batch window).

Those applying after June 30th shall be processed using the same assignment criteria, but on a rolling basis, based on the date when each completed application is received. Families are encouraged to apply as early in the process as possible as the available space and choices become more limited later in the year.

- a. **Batch 1 (January through March 1):** All applications received between January (on the day following the Kindergarten Information Night) and March 1st shall be processed as Batch 1 applicants. Applicants interested in exercising a sibling preference must apply within Batch 1 and must submit their application **no later than February 20th**.
- b. **Batch 2 (March 2 through June 30):** All applications received between March 2nd and June 30th shall be processed as Batch 2 applicants.

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- c. **Rolling Enrollment Period (July 1 through start of school):** All applications received after June 30th through the start of school in the following year, shall not be processed as a batch, but rather, on a rolling basis.

Student Assignment Priorities and Criteria

The following priorities, presented in order of priority to be considered, shall be used when assigning students to a school.

1. **Programmatic Placements:** Students who qualify for one of the district’s specialized programs (e.g., substantially separate special education program or other programs designated by the Superintendent) shall be assigned to schools according to their specific programmatic needs, regardless of other provisions of this policy. Students who no longer require a substantially separate special needs program shall be considered established students with priority status in their current school. They shall, thus, be mainstreamed in the school that houses their former specialized program unless their parents request a transfer under the assignment process.
2. **Sibling Preference:** Siblings of a student already enrolled in a school shall be given the opportunity to attend the same school, provided there is space available. For younger siblings who are entering Kindergarten in the following year, *the deadline to submit a complete registration packet and indicate a sibling preference for Kindergarten registration shall be February 20th of each year.* While every effort will be made to keep siblings of newly registering families together, when this be the family’s choice, Kindergarten applications received after the February 20th deadline will not have the benefit of the sibling preference priority status. Students assigned under the sibling preference priority shall also be counted within their respective socioeconomic status category as described below. Siblings of older children already attending the school shall have priority for assignments, provided there is a space available within their applicable socioeconomic status category.
3. **Choice of School:** Following the deadlines for each of the batches, applications received within each batch (e.g., Batch 1 and Batch 2) shall be sorted based on their first choice of schools. Applications will then be further sorted based on their student socioeconomic status categories as described below.
4. **Student Socioeconomic Status:** Within each batch and first choice of school, applicants shall be sorted into the following two categories:
 - a. **Low-Income (LI).** Low-income families are those whose household income level qualifies them for free and/or reduced-price lunch using the income standards set annually by the US Department of Agriculture and/or the degree to which each student participates in specific state or federal programs that otherwise qualify them as low-income.

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b. **Non-low Income (Non-LI)**. Non-low income families are those whose household income level does not qualify them for free and/or reduced-price lunch using the income standards set annually by the US Department of Agriculture.

5. **Proximity to the School**: Within each of the socioeconomic categories (within each batch), applications shall then be sorted by their proximity to the school, with those who live closest to their first choice of school to be processed first, followed by those who live further away. Those whose first choice of school is within 1 mile (as determined by Google Maps, walking distance), shall be given priority within the category and assigned first.

Student Assignment Procedures (Kindergarten)

1. **School-Level Student Assignment Targets**: Once the sorting of applications is completed according to the criteria described above, students will be assigned to their first choice of school, based on the number of seats available within each of the categories. As described above, the availability of seats within each category shall be determined by the annual enrollment targets that are set for each individual school.
2. **Procedures When the Number of Applicants Exceed Space Available**: If the number of applicants within each category exceed the number of spaces available within the first choice of school, remaining applicants shall be added to the appropriate categories for their second choice school and placed on a waiting list for their first choice through September 30th of each year. If the number of applicants for a second choice school exceed the number of spaces available, remaining applicants shall be added to the appropriate subcategories for their third choice of school. If there is no space available within the appropriate subcategory for any of the three school choices, then the student shall be assigned to the closest school that has space availability within their respective subcategory.
3. **Processing Timelines**: Once the sorting of applications is completed according to the criteria described above, students will be assigned. Depending on the size of the applicant pool within each batch, this process may take several weeks to complete. Applications received within the Batch 1 period shall be assigned on or around May 1st. Applications received within the Batch 2 period shall be assigned on or around July 1st. Applications received after June 30th shall be processed as they arrive.

Applicants who “opt in” to the BACS or other lottery within the district by March 1st will be notified by the school whether or not they were selected and will have up to 18 days to confirm acceptance of the seat. Applicants who participate in the BACS lottery may remain within the district choice process as well.

4. **Notification and Confirmation of Assignment**. For Batch 1 and 2 applicants, families will generally be notified of their student’s assignment in writing. Parents/guardians are asked to return the confirmation form(s) to the Parent Information Center (PIC) within ten (10) calendar days so that any seats that are declined may be offered to others who have chosen that school. Applicants

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who apply during the rolling admission period may be notified of assignments and require confirmation over the phone within a shorter timeframe if the timing is close to the start of the school year.

- 5. Waiting Lists.** Applicants who do not receive their first choice of school shall automatically be placed on a waiting list for that school within their respective socioeconomic and/or risk factor subcategory. The order of priority for Waiting Lists shall be those who did not receive their first choice within Batch 1 applications (sorted by order of proximity to the school), followed by those who did not receive their first choice within Batch 2 (sorted by order of proximity to the school). Should a space become available within the applicant’s respective socioeconomic and/or risk factor subcategory, applicants will be contacted by a representative from the PIC and offered the spot. Applicants shall have 24 hours to confirm acceptance of the spot. If the spot is declined, it will be offered to the next person on the waiting list and so on.

Waiting lists for Kindergarten Registration shall be maintained and processed between March 1st and September 30th of each year. Families interested in changing their school assignments after that date, must submit a transfer application through the in-district transfer process.

- 6. Walk-in Registrations During the Summer and School Year.** Families with school-age children who move to Salem over the summer or during the school year are considered “walk-in” registrations and shall be processed on a rolling basis, following the same procedures described above. Assignments shall be made according to the above criteria, to the extent possible. Should there be no seats available within the applicant’s subcategory for any of their three choices of schools, they will be assigned to the closest school with space available in their category. Should there be no space available within their category at any school in the district, students will be assigned to the school closest to their home that has available space. The Superintendent shall be responsible for keeping a log of each instance where this occurs, reporting this annually to the School Committee, and using this information to inform enrollment targets for the future.

Student Assignment Procedures for Incoming Students in Grades 1 through 12

The school choice, registration, and student assignment procedures, including the establishment of school enrollment targets described above shall also apply to applicants for Grades 1 through Grade 12. The processing timelines and deadlines for “batch” applications do not apply.

It shall be assumed that, unless otherwise requested by a parent/guardian or Superintendent, all students enrolled in an existing school may continue within that school until they reach the highest grade level offered within that school. For students who have completed 5th grade in one of the district’s K-5 elementary schools, it shall be assumed that they will matriculate to 6th grade at the Collins Middle School unless otherwise notified by the family. Parents/guardians of fifth (5th) graders (who did not attend an existing K-8 school) who wish to apply for 6th grade at one of the district’s other schools containing a 6th grade, must submit a transfer application to the Parent Information Center (PIC) no later than June 30th. Applicants for entry into 6th grade at one of the district’s K-8 schools shall be processed according to the above guidelines and criteria.

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In-District Transfers

Families seeking to transfer from one school to another must submit a transfer request application through the Parent Information Center (PIC). Transfer requests for the future school year shall be accepted at any time. Transfer requests pertaining to a current school year must be received prior to September 30th of that school year. Only the Superintendent can authorize a transfer for the existing school year after September 30th. When a student seeks an in-district transfer from one school to another, the guidelines of this policy regarding space availability within each school’s enrollment targets shall be applied.

Withdrawals

If a student is withdrawn from the school for any reason and later returns to the district, the student shall be considered under the same guidelines as a newly entering student (spaces within their former school shall not be held).

If a student is absent from a school for 12 consecutive scheduled school days without acceptable medical or other documentation (constituting an unexcused absence), it shall be the policy to withdraw the student from the school for non-attendance. Should this occur, the student may not be eligible to return to the school he or she previously attended. Absence without acceptable documentation constitutes voluntary withdrawal from the district and the student may be considered under the same guidelines as a student newly entering the district.

Duration of this Policy and Review Period

This policy shall remain in effect for a period of three years, according to the following schedule:

Year	Assignment Period	School Year Begins
Year 1 (SY 2018-19)	January through August 2018	September 2018
Year 2 (SY 2019-20)	January through August 2019	September 2019
Year 3 (SY 2020-21)	January through August 2020	September 2020

The Superintendent shall monitor the annual implementation of this policy and maintain data that can be used to evaluate its effectiveness in achieving the above goals and objective.

In addition, over the course of the next three years, the Superintendent shall be responsible for continuing to research ways to improve upon this policy, for the future, including exploring the possibility of utilizing student assignment software programs and seeking additional input from members of the community.

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Over the next three years, the Superintendent will work together with the School Committee to coordinate a series of community engagement forums that enable members of the community to discuss the benefits and challenges associated with the student assignment policy, provide feedback, and share their views about the future of student assignment in the district.

In December 2020 (in time for the January through August 2021 Assignment Period), the School Committee shall consider the feedback provided to either renew or revise this policy or determine a new policy to govern the assignment of students for the 2021-22 school year.

Allocation of Resources to Support the Successful Implementation of Controlled Choice

The Committee recognizes that in order to have an effective process for assigning students using a controlled choice policy, adequate resources and support are needed to ensure its success, including resources supporting the communication and outreach to parents. The Superintendent shall be responsible for identifying and requesting the resources needed to implement this policy including the coordination and management of student assignment for the district, communication and outreach to families, and other necessary supports to ensure the successful implementation of this policy.