STUDENTS AND INSTRUCTION **5000**

ATTENDANCE 5100

CONTROLLED CHOICE STUDENT ASSIGNMENT 5103

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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 assigning students schools based solely on the geographic location of a student's home address, increases the likelihood of creating socioeconomically inequitable schools. For this reason, since the 1980s, the Salem Public Schools has followed a voluntary 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 system:

- Offers parents and families the opportunity to proactively identify their choice of schools, ranked in order of preference.
- Eliminates the need to continually redraw attendance boundaries due to changes in the housing patterns throughout the District
- 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 socioeconomic backgrounds to learn with and from each other
- 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 socioeconomically 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.

2. Achieve a more equitable distribution of students across the district based on socioeconomic status.

3. Maximize, to the extent possible, families' opportunities to choose schools that best fits their children's needs.

4. Keep siblings together (to the extent that this is the family's choice)

5. Increase operational efficiency with regard to facilities and transportation.

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, especially to underrepresented populations, thereby increasing opportunities for all to exercise informed choices

8. Continuously monitor policy implementation, including fidelity to the policy, and explore new ways to improve upon the policy or consider new methods to achieve the overall goals.

Policy Objective

The objective of the Salem Controlled Choice Student Assignment Policy is to achieve an equitable socio economic balance 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 Low-Income 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 year, 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 including 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, prior to the annual Kindergarten Information Night, the Superintendent shall set annual enrollment targets for each individual school, based on the state's most recently published data regarding each school's percentage of Economically Disadvantaged students. In the event that these data are not published on the state website prior to the Early Childhood Expo, enrollment targets shall be delayed until the data needed are published.

The goal of these annual, school-based enrollment targets is to increase the socioeconomic distribution of students in each of Salem's schools.

The socioeconomic status (SES) of each student in 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:

a) **Low-Income (LI):** Percentage of seats available for students whose household income qualifies them as low-income, according to the above criteria;
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 October 1st enrollment in terms of its socioeconomic status (SES) as published on the state website -- 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.

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.

3. Examine and report on additional enrollment factors.

The Superintendent is hereby charged with tracking and monitoring additional 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. The
School Committee shall review and update on an annual basis.

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.

Innovation Schools: Salem currently has three 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), and Bentley Academy Innovation School, a K-5 Innovation School). The Superintendent shall set enrollment targets for Bentley Academy Innovation School annually in consultation with the School Committee. 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.

Preschool (3-year olds): Although student registration for Preschool is managed by the district's Parent Information Center, the assignment criteria outlined in this policy do not apply.

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 Salem Prep High School.

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 deadline.***

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 effective outreach and communication to all members of the community, including those whose home language is not English as well as other frequently underrepresented groups. Communication and outreach activities may involve creation of a district choices guide, (translated into Spanish and Portuguese), providing information on the district's website, holding community forums in various neighborhood locations, organizing school open houses, holding a "school options" fair, etc.

Early Childhood Registration Timelines and Procedures

The following procedures shall be used to assign students to the entering Preschool, Pre-Kindergarten, and 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 three (3) years of age, four (4) years of age, and five (5) years of age by September 1st of the upcoming school year are made aware of the Preschool, Pre-Kindergarten, and 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. **Early Childhood Information Night**: In January of each year, the Superintendent shall schedule at least one Early Childhood Information Night, inviting all families known to have a child who will be eligible for Preschool, Pre-Kindergarten, or 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 registration. The registration period shall begin 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 for Kindergarten**: 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 different schools will significantly increase the student's chances of remaining unassigned to a school following the initial school assignment period. The availability of seat 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.

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 facing hardships 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. **Early Childhood Registration Periods**: There shall be three registration periods between January and September, which is the start of Preschool, Pre-Kindergarten, and Kindergarten in the following year. The initial (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). Once a "batch" application has been submitted, families shall wait for assignments before making any changes, at which point in-district transfer procedures would apply.

Those applying after Batch 2 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** : All applications received between January (following the Early Childhood Information Night) and the last Monday in February, 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 the last Monday of February**.

b. **Batch 2** : All applications received after the Batch 1 deadline and the last Monday of March, shall be processed as Batch 2 applicants.

c. **Rolling Enrollment Period (End of Batch 2 through start of school)**: All applications received after the end of Batch 2 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 online registration and indicate a sibling preference for Kindergarten registration shall be the last Monday of February of each year.*** While every effort will be made to keep siblings of newly registering families together, Kindergarten applications received after the last Monday of February, 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. Please note sibling preference does not apply to PreK except for the PreK dual language at Bentley Innovation School.

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.

   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 (Pre-Kindergarten and 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 exceeds 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 exceeds 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 the last Monday in March. Applications received within the Batch 2 period shall be assigned on or around the last Monday in April. Applications received after the Batch 2 deadline shall be processed as they arrive**.**

   Applicants who "opt in " to the BAIS or other lottery within the district by the first batch deadline, will be notified by the school whether or not they were selected and will have up to 5 days to confirm acceptance of the seat. Applicants who participate in the BAIS 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 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 Early Childhood Registration shall be maintained and processed between the Batch 1 deadline date 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 in an applicant's preferred school choices , students will be offered placement options at schools with available space

Student Assignment Procedures for Incoming Students in Grades 1 through 5

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 the Superintendent, all students enrolled in an existing school may continue within that school until they reach the highest grade level offered within that school.

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). To be eligible to return to the school, the family must submit a written request to the Superintendent within the school year prior to the family's return. Upon receipt of this request, the Superintendent shall determine whether or not the request to return to the student's previous school can be accommodated based on the availability of seats.

The only exception shall be for an enrolled student whose parent or guardian relocated due to an active military member deployment and later returns to Salem. 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.

Allocation of Resources to Support the Successful Implementation of Controlled Choice

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

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