

Superintendent's Preliminary Recommendation

Questions and Answers

SECTION D: Student Assignment

May 9, 2005 – This Q&A section has been updated with additional information, and clarification, in response to questions received from parents and community members. Updates posted are highlighted in blue.

Overview

The new student assignment plan is designed to:

- Support the five-year academic plan for improved student achievement by establishing feeder patterns that provide for K-12 articulation, collaboration, and accountability.
- Provide geographic-based designated school assignments that offer assignment predictability for all students in grades K-12, along with continuity to support increased family involvement in local schools.
- Continue to provide opportunities for school choice.
- Provide equitable access to specialized programs to meet the needs of English Language Learners, Advanced Learners, and students with special education needs.
- Target transportation services to support school choice, while reducing overall transportation costs.

1. Why are you proposing a new student assignment plan?

The last comprehensive review of Seattle's student assignment plan was done almost a decade ago. In any city, a decade can bring significant demographic changes - both in how many people reside in a city and in where they live. These kinds of demographic changes have occurred in Seattle and are expected to continue, which means that we have more school buildings than are needed to serve our current and anticipated population of school-age children. Changes in housing patterns also mean that we don't always have schools where they're needed.

A streamlined student assignment plan will also save money on transportation and help provide additional resources to enhance student achievement. [Seattle Public Schools spends far more on transportation per student, and has far more excess building capacity, than other districts in the State. State funding for K-12 education in Washington State ranks 42nd in the nation, and we simply can't afford the current plan anymore.](#)

2. How is the current student assignment plan different from this proposed new plan?

[Seattle currently has a generous school choice and transportation program. The proposal maintains some opportunities for school choice and alternative schools as well as providing guaranteed assignment to a neighborhood school for all children – but the amount of choice and extended transportation will be more limited than it is now. In the new plan, every student is assigned to a designated elementary, middle and high school, all based on home address.](#)

3. Where will my child go to school?

Students will be assigned to a designated elementary, middle and high school based on where they live. Every regular elementary, middle and high school will have a defined attendance area. You'll know for sure where your child will be able to attend elementary, middle and high school (unless you make a choice for another option).

3a. How will I know what my attendance area school will be? Is it likely to be the same as my current reference area school?

It is likely that all attendance boundaries will be at least somewhat different than the current boundaries. The attendance area boundaries will be drawn to ensure that there is sufficient capacity in a school to meet the needs of the students living in that school's attendance area. This work will be done, with community input, after the School Board has approved a final recommendation. **(Added 5/9/05)**

3b. Will elementary clusters be the same as under the current assignment plan?

No. Clusters will be configured to include approximately three to four attendance area schools. **(Added 5/9/05)**

3c. When will I know what my attendance area schools will be for elementary, middle and high school?

A detailed process – with input from the community – will be followed to develop attendance area boundaries for elementary, middle and high schools. Attendance areas will be drawn after the Superintendent's final recommendation has been voted on by the School Board in July. **(Added 5/9/05)**

4. Will there continue to be alternative schools in the district?

Yes. [Seattle Public Schools](#) is committed to alternative schools. At the elementary and middle grades, alternative schools have been configured as K-8 schools. [All students will be able to apply to \(and get transportation to\)](#) at least one alternative school, depending on where they live. In this proposal, the K-8 alternative schools [and their associated draw areas are](#):

School	Draw Area**
African American Academy	Central and South
AS #1	Northwest, Northeast, Queen Anne/Magnolia*
AE #2	Northeast
Orca	Central and South
Pathfinder	Southwest
Salmon Bay	Northwest, Queen Anne/Magnolia*
TOPS	Central

****Draw areas** – These draw areas refer to the six planning regions utilized to form the school closure analysis. The exact boundaries of each of the six regions will be drawn after the board has approved a plan (Refer to question #3 above). However, for planning purposes, South region includes the current South and Southeast clusters; Southwest includes the current West Seattle North and West Seattle South Clusters; Northeast includes the current Northeast cluster and part of the North cluster; and Northwest includes the current Northwest and part of the North cluster.

Alternative high schools in this plan include Nova and The Center School. They will be all-city draw schools. **(Updated 5/9/05)**

*This chart as originally included in the Q&A contained two errors: 1) Queen Anne/Magnolia was mistakenly not included in the list as a draw area for AS#1; and 2) Salmon Bay – the original chart stated that Central and Northwest regions would be the draw areas for Salmon Bay. The recommendation is that Northwest and Queen Anne/Magnolia be the draw areas for this school. Seattle Public Schools apologizes for these errors and any resulting confusion. **Updated 5/9/05.**

5. Will I be able to choose schools for my child?

Yes. Seattle Public Schools will still offer a choice plan, although the choices will generally be more limited. Students will be automatically assigned to their attendance area school. Assignments to schools outside of the attendance area will be on a space available basis after attendance area students have been accommodated:

- Elementary students may apply for one or more regular schools in their cluster (a cluster will probably include three to four schools in a contiguous area); or apply to attend a K-8 alternative school designated for their attendance area. Students may apply only for these schools.
- Secondary students may apply to any school. **(Added 5/9/05)**

6. Will my children have to change schools, or can they finish at their current school?

Elementary students in grades 3-5 in 2005-2006, and all middle and high school students, may remain at their 2005-2006 school through the highest grade available. For those who choose to remain, transportation will be continued through June 2008 (if the student remains at the same home address and the same school). Elementary students who will be in kindergarten, first grade or second grade in 2005-2006 will be reassigned to their neighborhood school for 2006-2007. *(Note this information was corrected on 4/25/05)* Information on the rationale and trade-offs related to returning K-2 students to neighborhood schools is provided in 6a below.

6a. What is the rationale for allowing students in grades 3-5 in 2005-2006 to stay at the current school, but reassigning students in grades K-2?

The preliminary recommendation on phasing in of the student assignment plan reflects a compromise or balancing among a variety of factors and goals. Options range from an immediate implementation of the neighborhood assignment plan (return all students to their neighborhood schools in 2006-2007) to allowing all students to remain in the school they attend in 2005-2006 through the highest

grade level, which would mean the plan would not be fully implemented until the fall of 2011. Considerations included:

1. Minimizing disruption to students and families.
2. Transportation costs – When fully implemented, the return to neighborhood schools will save (conservative estimate) \$2 to \$3 million per year in transportation costs. Projected budget gaps will require cuts to programs and services. Any funds that can be redirected from current transportation expenditures or maintaining excess school capacity will mean fewer budget cuts to staff, schools and classrooms.
3. School capacity – One of the four cornerstones of the preliminary recommendation is “predictability.” The goal is to provide a **guaranteed** seat at elementary, middle and high school as well as maintain some choice options. Until the plan is fully implemented, there may not be sufficient capacity in a school to serve all of the grandfathered students plus all students living in the attendance area who wish to attend the school.
4. Feeder patterns – Establishing more predictable feeder patterns will enable more collaboration among staff, families and students across the K-12 continuum.

Taking all of these factors into account, the recommendation was made to grandfather students who will be in grades 3-5 in 2005-2006. The other factors noted above prompted the recommendation to return K-2 students to their neighborhood school. **(Added 5/9/05)**

6b. Siblings – I have a child who will be in grade 3 through 5 in 2005-2006, and they can remain at their current school under this proposal. I also will have a child in grades K, 1, or 2 at the same school during 2005-2006. Will there be an exception to reassignment of students in K-2 if they have an older sibling at the school?

The preliminary proposal does not include an exception for siblings. However, staff is evaluating the appropriateness, feasibility and costs of a sibling exception, and will include a statement on this topic in the final recommendation presented on June 15. **(Added 5/9/05)**

6c. My student currently attends one of the alternative schools listed in question # 4 above and my child will be in grades K, 1, or 2 in 2005-2006. If we live in the new draw area for this school, will my child need to reapply and be subject to the tiebreakers of sibling and lottery, or will they be automatically assigned for 2006-2007?

This information was not specifically addressed in the recommendation. However, the intention is that all students **who live in the attendance areas specified as draw areas for these schools**, including students in grades K–5 in 2005-2006, may remain at these schools and would not need to reapply. Students would also have the option of attending their attendance area school or applying to one of their cluster schools. **(Added 5/9/05)**

7. How will transportation work?

For elementary school students, yellow school bus transportation will be provided to students who live outside of the walk area, who attend 1) their **attendance area**

school, 2) another school in their cluster, or 3) an alternative school associated with their [attendance](#) area.

For middle school students, yellow school bus transportation will be provided to students who live outside of the walk area and attend 1) their attendance area school, or 2) an alternative school associated with their attendance area. All other transportation will be by Metro bus pass.

For high school students, Metro bus passes will be available for all students outside the walk area on request.

8. What determines who gets into a non-neighborhood school if there aren't enough seats for all applicants?

Elementary schools in your cluster:

- Siblings
- Lottery

For the 2006-2007 school year only, special consideration will be given to applications from students already attending one of the schools in their new elementary cluster.

Middle and High schools:

- Siblings
- Family economic status
- Lottery

K-8 schools (grades 6-8)

- Siblings
- Attendance area associated with the school
- Family economic status
- Lottery

9. What about programs like special education, bilingual instruction, and advanced learning?

As a general approach, we try to provide programs and services in schools close to where the children who need them live. We will continue to use this same approach as the new plan is implemented.

Most school-age students needing special education services can be served in whatever school they attend. However, there are students whose needs are more complex and who may need a more specialized program. For those students, programs will continue to be equitably placed at schools throughout the district as needed. There are also some students whose needs are so unique that there may be just a few other students in a similar program. In those cases, there may be just one such program in the district.

Bilingual programs will continue to be offered at many elementary schools - at least one school in each cluster will offer these services. Almost all middle and high schools currently provide these services, and will continue to do so. We are recommending relocating the secondary Bilingual Orientation Center (BOC) from the Old Hay building to the T. T. Minor building.

APP services for elementary students will be located in two elementary schools in the district. Other advanced learning services will be available in the cluster. Middle school APP will continue at Washington. High school students will be able to access AP classes in their neighborhood schools.

9a. What about special elementary programs like Montessori and language immersion? Will different grandfathering or preferences apply?

The recommendation did not specify any different approach for these programs. However this will be discussed further and will be specified in the final recommendation. (Added 5/9/05)

10. What about saving on transportation by charging families for transportation on a sliding-fee basis, or by using schools as "hubs" where parents could bring their children - who would then be picked up by a school bus and transported to alternative schools outside of their area?

We value the suggestions we received through the public engagement process leading up to the development of this plan - and the suggestion to charge fees on a sliding scale for transportation was mentioned frequently in community forums.

A fee-based program is under consideration, and could be implemented if such a program would generate sufficient revenues to offset costs. There are many lower-income families whose children don't qualify for free or reduced meals, but who would have difficulty in paying for transportation. This still needs further study.

Another suggestion we received from the public engagement process was to use schools as hubs where children could congregate at "pickup points." Concerns about the hub idea focus on student safety and supervision. This still needs further study.

11. Will all of these changes go into effect in September 2006?

For elementary students—grades K-5

The plan will take effect for all new assignments in September 2006. Students in grades K-2 in the 2005-2006 school year will be reassigned to their neighborhood school beginning 2006-2007. Students in grades 3-5 in the 2005-2006 school year can choose to continue at their assigned school through the highest grade, with transportation continued through June 2008.

For secondary students—grades 6-12

The plan will take effect for all new assignments in September 2007. Students can choose to remain at their 2005-2006 school assignment through the highest grade, and transportation will be [continued](#) through June 2008.

(Note this information was corrected on 4/25/05)