



## Business, Finance and Planning

---

TO: School Committee

FROM: Liam Hurley, Assistant Superintendent/Chief Financial & Administrative Officer  
Stephanie Gilman, Director of Planning, Project Management and Sustainability  
Sean Mannion, Director of Finance  
Katy Hogue, Director of Data Analysis and Enrollment Planning  
Toby Romer, Assistant Superintendent - Secondary  
Ayesha Farag, Assistant Superintendent - Elementary

DATE: December 5, 2022

RE: Enrollment, Student Assignment, and Feeder Pattern Recommendation

---

### **Background and Timeline**

As previously reported, enrollment is declining district wide; however, Bigelow Middle School is experiencing this decline in a way that will impact the educational experience for its students in future years. The declining enrollment trend at the middle schools overall was noted in the October 2021 and December 2021 Enrollment Reports, and the specific concern about the larger projected enrollment decline at Bigelow was outlined in the June 21, 2022 Enrollment and Facility Planning Memo to the School Committee. This declining enrollment trend was projected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the pandemic accelerated the decline. A small internal working group met throughout the Summer of 2022 to explore multiple options for Bigelow. The timeline is shown below.

October 18, 2021 - Preliminary Enrollment Report  
December 6, 2021 - Enrollment Analysis Report  
June 21, 2022 - Enrollment Memo to School Committee  
Summer 2022 - Internal working group meets to explore options  
October 27, 2022 - Enrollment, Student Assignment and Feeder Pattern Update  
November 7, 2022 - School Committee Public Forum and Enrollment and Feeder Pattern Update  
November 17, 2022 - Enrollment and Feeder Pattern Update (incl. Criteria and Cabot Split Map)  
December 5, 2022 - Enrollment, Student Assignment, and Feeder Pattern Recommendation  
December 19, 2022 - Enrollment, Student Assignment, and Feeder Pattern Discussion and Vote

### **Two Options Identified**

On October 27, 2022, the findings and results from the working group were presented to the School Committee. These findings identified two potential feeder pattern change options to address declining enrollment at Bigelow as well as enrollment pressures at Day Middle School. Both options identified

propose changes to the feeder patterns beginning in the 2023-24 school year to move toward achieving target enrollments at both Bigelow (500-530 students) and Day (810-945 students), while also preserving and supporting high quality academic programs at both schools.

**Option 1: Cabot and Lincoln-Eliot Feeder School Swap (Swap Option)**

In this option, Lincoln-Eliot Elementary School would feed to Day (currently feeds to Bigelow) and Cabot Elementary School would feed to Bigelow (currently feeds to Day.)

**Option 2: Cabot Split Option** (see map below)

In this option, Lincoln-Eliot would continue to feed to Bigelow (no changes); approximately half of Cabot would feed to Bigelow and the other half would feed to Day. Students attending Cabot who do not reside within the Cabot district would feed to Bigelow.

In both options, siblings can follow siblings who will be attending one of these middle schools when the elementary-aged sibling transitions to middle school (i.e., attend a middle school outside of the new feeder pattern). In addition, the School Transfer Request process (previously known as Out of Assigned District) remains an option for all students, on a space-available basis. In both options, student services programming at both schools will continue based on individual student needs.

**Community Outreach and Feedback**

Beginning this fall, community engagement has been conducted to both share information and to gather feedback from all communities potentially impacted by the proposed options. A [Feeder Pattern Option webpage](#) was created on the NPS website that includes all information about the feeder pattern options, as well as answers to Frequently Asked Questions and a one-page summary document translated into several languages.

In addition, the following virtual and in-person meetings were held with staff and families.

- October 25-27 - Meetings with staff at Lincoln-Eliot, Bigelow, Day and Cabot
- October 28-31 - Meetings with Day and Bigelow families
- November 1-3 - Virtual meetings with Lincoln-Eliot and Cabot families
- November 15-21 - In person community meetings at Lincoln-Eliot and Cabot

Community feedback from these meetings and from questions and comments received through the dedicated [npsfeeder@newton.k12.ma.us](mailto:npsfeeder@newton.k12.ma.us) email account have been used to update and add to the Frequently Asked Questions document on the website. As of December 1, 2022, a total of 71 emails have been received through the npsfeeder email address.

The November 7, 2022 School Committee meeting offered another opportunity for community feedback with an extended Public Comment and Public Forum for the proposed feeder pattern change. The meeting also included a discussion with the Day and Bigelow Middle School Principals Jackie Mann and Chassity Coston.

On November 23, 2022, all families of current Cabot and Lincoln-Eliot students received a short feedback form via email that provided an additional opportunity to provide feedback. The form was available in

English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Simplified Chinese. 197 responses were received through this feedback form: 139 responses from families of Cabot students and 58 responses from Lincoln-Eliot families. This was a 31% response rate for Cabot students and a 17% response rate for Lincoln-Eliot students. Families were asked if they were aware that a decision was pending that will determine which middle school Cabot and Lincoln-Eliot students will attend in the future. Almost all responding Cabot families said they were aware (only 1 respondent said no), and the majority (81%) of responding Lincoln-Eliot families said they were aware. When asked if they had attended any of the NPS community meetings held on this topic, about half of responding Cabot families (48%) said that they had, while 33% of responding Lincoln-Eliot families said that they had. When asked if they have provided email feedback to the npsfeeder email address, 23% of responding Cabot families said that they had, while 12% of responding Lincoln-Eliot families said that they had. The feedback form also included an opportunity to provide written feedback, which is incorporated into the analysis below.

Feedback from the community fell into the following overarching areas, or themes. These themes are organized below by the frequency with which they were discussed, with the most frequent appearing first and the least frequent appearing last. Proximity to school and concern for the social-emotional well-being of students in the split option were discussed with much more frequency than any of the other themes. Because of the overwhelming prevalence of these themes, a brief discussion of them precedes the details of each theme.

Proximity to school was the most frequent theme discussed in community feedback. It is important to note that all of the feedback about the importance of proximity to school came from Cabot families who reside in the Day zone of the proposed Cabot split, as well as a few Lincoln-Eliot families who live very close to Bigelow. These families talked about the value of walking/rolling/biking to school both for building independence and new friendships for their students through informal opportunities for socialization that occur during walking/rolling/biking, as well as the importance of that independence for working parents/guardians who are not able to provide transportation in the case of missed buses or no bus availability. None of the families who live in the Bigelow zone of the proposed Cabot split listed proximity to schools as a major concern for their students. Instead, families who live in the Bigelow zone of the proposed Cabot split who provided feedback described the importance of peer connections for their students during the transition to middle school and their strong concern about the social-emotional challenges associated with a split.

#### *Proximity to school:*

- The importance of being able to walk/bike/roll to school for environmental, health, and social reasons, as well as its impact on building independence, especially in middle school, was described frequently.
- The ability to walk/bike/roll home from school was noted as a logistical relief for parents who work, as their children can come home from school and/or afterschool activities on their own. In addition, students who can walk/bike/roll are not tied to bus schedules and can build independence with the flexibility that comes from this option. This is also helpful for students who have an after-school job if they can walk to it.
- Often noted was the opportunity for socialization and more informal meetups that occur while walking/biking/rolling to school rather than more formalized/planned meetups, and that this is a greater opportunity to develop new friendships and build independence than what might occur in the hallways or classrooms at school. These commenters also noted that the more formalized

experience of taking the bus home provides fewer opportunities for this growth and for more casual discussions that happen while walking/biking/rolling.

- The majority of those providing this feedback live in Newtonville and are able to walk to Day; therefore they are in support of the split to preserve walkability.

*Social-emotional well-being concern with the split option:*

- Concern about the social-emotional well-being of students with the Cabot split was described frequently, especially after coming through COVID. Many noted that the current fifth graders at Cabot have had many changes through their elementary school years, with two years in the Carr building during Cabot construction, the move to Cabot, and then the changes associated with COVID.
- Concern about splitting friendships with the Cabot split was described often.
- Concern about the impact of knowing about the Cabot split throughout elementary school and how that might impact student friendships during elementary school was listed.
- Worry that parental concerns about a potential split are being projected onto students and potentially generating anxiety among elementary school students was mentioned.
- Although the majority of this type of feedback came from Cabot families who would attend Bigelow in the split, a few Cabot families who would attend Day also noted this concern.

*Concern with the rapid nature of this decision*

- Families said that they were concerned with what they felt was the rushed nature of this decision. Some families asked that this decision be delayed one year.

*Equity*

- Families who reside in the Bigelow zone of the Cabot district under the proposed split option are concerned about the disproportionate impact of the split on their students, as they will have a change to their feeder pattern while those residing in the Day zone of the Cabot district will not.
- Feedback from families of students residing in Boston and students of faculty/staff was minimal, although some families of faculty/staff students were concerned about how the change under the split would impact their commuting time. Families of students who are out-of-assigned district at Cabot were concerned about the distance to Bigelow for their children under the split option.

*Financial impact:*

- Some families stated their preference to spend funds on teachers and programs rather than on transportation if the swap option is approved.
- Some concern was noted about the bus fee impact on families and the importance of publicizing the fee waiver process.
- There was concern about staffing at Bigelow if no changes are made.

*Programs at each middle school:*

- There were a few comments about concern over whether both middle schools have after school programs.
- A few comments noted the concerns that there was an impression that the two middle schools did not offer comparable programs.

### **Information Gathering and Analysis**

In addition to community outreach, the team also held discussions with NPS district leaders in key departments potentially impacted by either proposal, including the English Language Learners (ELL), METCO, Student Services, and Transportation Services departments, as well as our Social Workers and Psychologists, and the Safe Routes to School representatives. This feedback helped inform the evaluation

criteria that were presented in the November 17th memo and the final evaluation criteria matrix that is included below. The November 17th memo is attached for your reference and also includes information on the potential transportation cost impact of both options.

Potential changes to enrollment for various subgroups at Bigelow and Day were also analyzed to identify the possible impact of each option. The tables below display projected enrollment by race/ethnicity, eligibility for free/reduced price lunch, English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and female/male under each option. Please note that percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding and projections for nonbinary students are not included due to the small number of students in this subgroup.

Bigelow																
	FY24			FY25			FY26			FY27			FY28			
	No change	Swap	Split	No change	Swap	Split	No change	Swap	Split	No change	Swap	Split	No change	Swap	Split	
African American/Black	5%	6%	6%	6%	6%	7%	5%	6%	6%	6%	6%	6%	5%	5%	6%	
Asian	16%	15%	15%	16%	15%	15%	18%	16%	17%	20%	18%	19%	22%	18%	20%	
Hispanic/Latinx	13%	12%	14%	14%	11%	14%	14%	11%	14%	11%	10%	12%	13%	11%	13%	
Two or more races	8%	8%	8%	9%	10%	9%	7%	9%	8%	8%	11%	9%	9%	11%	10%	
White	58%	60%	57%	56%	58%	56%	55%	57%	54%	54%	55%	54%	51%	55%	51%	

  

Day																
	FY24			FY25			FY26			FY27			FY28			
	No change	Swap	Split	No change	Swap	Split	No change	Swap	Split	No change	Swap	Split	No change	Swap	Split	
African American/Black	6%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	4%	4%	5%	4%	4%	4%	4%	
Asian	16%	17%	16%	15%	16%	16%	16%	17%	17%	18%	19%	18%	17%	19%	18%	
Hispanic/Latinx	10%	10%	10%	11%	12%	10%	11%	12%	10%	11%	12%	11%	12%	13%	12%	
Two or more races	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	9%	10%	11%	9%	11%	11%	10%	11%	
White	58%	57%	59%	58%	57%	58%	57%	57%	58%	55%	55%	56%	55%	53%	55%	

Bigelow																
	FY24			FY25			FY26			FY27			FY28			
	No change	Swap	Split	No change	Swap	Split	No change	Swap	Split	No change	Swap	Split	No change	Swap	Split	
Eligible for free/reduced lunch	24%	20%	24%	26%	16%	25%	26%	13%	24%	22%	14%	21%	20%	14%	19%	
English Learner	8%	7%	7%	6%	3%	5%	4%	4%	4%	5%	4%	4%	5%	4%	4%	
Students with disabilities	14%	13%	15%	18%	14%	18%	19%	15%	19%	17%	15%	17%	13%	14%	13%	
Female	53%	53%	53%	47%	50%	47%	46%	49%	46%	47%	50%	48%	52%	52%	52%	
Male	47%	46%	47%	53%	50%	53%	54%	51%	54%	53%	50%	52%	48%	48%	48%	
Day																
	FY24			FY25			FY26			FY27			FY28			
	No change	Swap	Split	No change	Swap	Split	No change	Swap	Split	No change	Swap	Split	No change	Swap	Split	
Eligible for free/reduced lunch	17%	19%	17%	17%	21%	17%	15%	21%	15%	15%	19%	15%	16%	19%	16%	
English Learner	4%	5%	4%	4%	5%	4%	4%	4%	4%	3%	4%	4%	3%	4%	4%	
Students with disabilities	16%	17%	16%	16%	18%	16%	17%	19%	17%	16%	17%	16%	15%	15%	15%	
Female	51%	51%	51%	49%	48%	49%	49%	47%	49%	48%	47%	48%	50%	50%	50%	
Male	49%	49%	49%	51%	52%	50%	51%	52%	51%	51%	53%	52%	49%	49%	50%	

In terms of the impact of each proposal on staffing at Bigelow and preserving crucial team structures at the school, it is important to note that neither of the two proposed options bring the 6th grade enrollment into the target range to ensure two full teams by themselves in the first year of implementation (FY24). The table below shows the projected number of students in next year’s grade 6 class at Bigelow in each scenario and compares them to no change.

	No Change	Swap Option	Cabot Split Option
Bigelow projected grade 6 FY24	110	118	134

This year’s grade 6 at Bigelow has 132 students and 1.5 teams of teachers. The goal is for two full teams in each grade at Bigelow, and even with intervention, this may not be possible in the first year of implementation. However, if no action is taken, the decrease in 6th grade enrollment of 22 students from FY23 risks further reductions to non-team teaching positions, such as world languages, other electives, and counseling and support staff.

To encourage an increase in school transfer request placements at Bigelow next year, the district proposes targeted outreach to all Day-feeding students regardless of which option is voted. The outreach would describe the school transfer request process and provide preference for any of these students to attend Bigelow next fall, with priority assignment happening prior to the budget process. This would increase the likelihood of the Bigelow 6th grade enrollment increasing into the target range to allow a return to 2 full teams in 6th grade in year one of the change.

**Completed Evaluation Criteria Matrix**

An evaluation criteria matrix was developed to evaluate the two options. As described in the November 17th memo, the evaluation criteria were developed based on community feedback and input from community, staff and district leaders. The criteria considered included:

1. Enrollment Impact
2. Educational and Extracurricular Impact
3. Student and Family Impact
4. Impact on Routes to School
5. Financial Impact

The completed evaluation criteria matrix is below. The following rating scale was used with this matrix:

- 1: Favorable
- 0: Neutral
- 1: Not favorable

To score each criterion for each option, the criterion for the option was compared to the current situation, which can also be described as a situation of doing nothing or making no changes. If the option resulted in a more favorable outcome than making no changes, the criterion was scored as a 1. If the option resulted in the same outcome as making no changes, the criterion was scored as a 0. If the option resulted in a less favorable outcome than making no changes, the criterion was scored as a -1. For example, the criterion of “Potential for



existing peer relationship impact on students” was evaluated for the swap option and the split option. In the swap option, students from the feeder elementary schools stay with their elementary school cohort when they feed to the middle schools and so this criterion was rated as a 0 (the same as making no changes) because it remains the same as the current situation (just feeding to a different middle school). In the split option, some students from Cabot would feed to Bigelow and some students would feed to Day, which could impact existing peer relationships for students from Cabot. This criterion was therefore rated as a -1 for the split option, because it is a less favorable outcome than doing nothing.

Please note that following criteria were listed in the November 17th memo as potential evaluation criteria, but were removed or adjusted in the final matrix:

- “Allows for target team sizes at each middle school”: this criterion was adjusted to read “Allows for target number of teams at each middle school once transition is complete” to clarify the time frame and to more accurately capture the purpose.
- “Total # of families/students impacted in both elementary schools by this change”: this criterion was removed, as either option impacts some number of families.
- “Potential for change of schedule or routines for families”: this criterion was removed because even with no change, families and students would experience a change of schedule or routine during the transition from elementary to middle school. Families who have an older child who will be in middle school next year have the option to follow that sibling, so that routine could be maintained in any option.
- “Other costs”: this criterion was removed because no other costs were identified during this process

**CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION OF FEEDER PATTERN OPTIONS**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Options</b>	
	<b>Cabot and Lincoln-Eliot Swap</b>	<b>Cabot Split</b>
<b>Enrollment Impact</b>		
Achieves target enrollment at Bigelow (500-530 students) and Day (810-945 students) (prerequisite)	1	1
Improves proportionate representation of racial and socioeconomic demographics in both schools	1	1
Balances number of feeder elementary schools at each middle school	0	1
Maintains North and South high school feeder balance	1	1
Allows for improved team numbers in grade 6 next year	0	0
<b>Educational and Extracurricular Impact</b>		
Supports students' academic needs (prerequisite)	1	1
Supports students' social-emotional needs (prerequisite)	1	1
Supports student access to extracurricular programs at both schools	1	1
Allows for target number of teams at each middle school once transition is complete	1	1
Supports special education district-wide programs within Bigelow and Day	1	1
Allows continued English Language Learning programs within Bigelow and Day	1	1
<b>Family and Student Impact</b>		
Potential for existing peer relationship impact on students	0	-1
Minimizes transportation fee impact on families	-1	1

<b>Impact on Routes to School</b>		
Maximizes opportunities for walking, biking, rolling to school for students	-1	1
Maintains reasonable distance and length of bus routes	0	0
<b>Financial Impact</b>		
Minimizes district transportation costs during transition	-1	0
Minimizes district transportation costs once transition is complete	-1	0
Teacher costs during implementation	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>

### **Question about a choice district**

Feedback was received that suggested the creation of a choice district for Cabot families, citing the strong opinions voiced in some community meetings about proximity to school being of major importance for middle school. All of the feedback received about the importance of proximity to school, however, came from families who reside on the Day zone of the Cabot district in the proposed split, while the majority of the feedback from families who reside on the Bigelow zone of the Cabot district in the proposed split focused on the need to keep students from the same elementary school together for social-emotional reasons. Therefore, it is unlikely that a choice district would result in the majority of families choosing the middle school that is closest to their home, especially in the Bigelow zone of the proposed Cabot split, and may not result in the increased enrollment at Bigelow and decreased enrollment at Day that is the ultimate goal of this work. In addition, the creation of a choice district would mean that families and students would not know where they would be attending middle school until partially through their fifth grade year. This would likely cause anxiety that would be avoided with the knowledge of the districted middle school beginning in kindergarten or at the point that a student enrolls at Cabot. The creation of a choice district would add an administrative burden for both families and the district as well.

### **Impact on students' social-emotional well-being**

The following statement was written by Jesse Krotick, our Coordinator of Elementary Support and Stabilization/Multi-Tiered System of Support, with input from elementary social workers and psychologists regarding the impact of the Cabot split option on students' social-emotional well-being, given that this concern was discussed frequently in community feedback.

“For elementary school students, the end of Fifth Grade marks a significant milestone. As children enter early adolescence, they build upon the foundation of social and emotional skills they have developed beginning in Kindergarten. In middle school, students will continue to expand their social skills as they forge new relationships with a diverse group of classmates and teachers.

This developmental transition is characterized by children seeking greater independence and autonomy. They are becoming more aware of their identities and exploring their relationships to their families, community, and larger world. Their immersion in a new academic and social environment will present new opportunities, joys and challenges. Students and their families are encouraged to embrace the abundance of new and novel possibilities with a fresh perspective.

Although some students may initially be disappointed to discover that they will not attend the same middle school as some fifth grade classmates, each sixth grader will embrace countless new opportunities. They can expand their peer groups while maintaining old friendships with families in their neighborhoods. In the process, students will continue to develop the invaluable capacity for emotional flexibility, risk taking, gratitude, and resilience. Middle school and elementary staff understand and are prepared to foster the developmental growth and transitional time for this age group. They are also always available to support all students during this transition.”

It is important to note that we received feedback that the concern for students' social-emotional well-being was not limited to the middle school transition period. Families described their concerns about the negative impact that a planned split would have on their children throughout elementary school, noting that younger elementary

children are self-identifying as “Bigelow” or “Day” students now and that is impacting friendships in earlier elementary grades. Based on this concern, care will need to be taken if the Cabot split option is implemented to create strong connections and support for student relationships in all grades at Cabot going forward.

### **Final Recommendation**

Based on the evaluation matrix results, it is our recommendation that the School Committee vote to approve the Cabot Split option, which would commence in the upcoming school year (2023-2024), with the following additional suggestion for implementation:

1. All Day-feeding fifth grade students and families (including students from Burr, the Day zone of Cabot, Franklin, Horace Mann, and Peirce) should receive a targeted communication about the School Transfer Request Process, noting that they will receive preference to attend Bigelow if they apply. In addition, this communication and approval process for transfers into the Bigelow 6th grade will happen earlier than the typical School Transfer Request Process, and will be completed by late February before district staffing and budget is finalized.
2. Additionally, the district will explore routing options to shift or add a bus stop to an existing bus route to Bigelow in the Cabot area zoned to Day during the transition phase, in order to encourage any family interested in attending Bigelow to apply through the School Transfer Request Process. This will support the effort to achieve the target enrollment for Bigelow’s entering 6th grade classes as soon as possible.

If the swap is approved rather than the split, we recommend that any Cabot students living north of the Mass Pike be given preference in the School Transfer Request Process to attend Day, given their proximity to Day. The additional suggestion above for the split option (for a targeted outreach on the School Transfer Request Process) should also be implemented if the swap is voted.

### **Cabot Split Option Map**

The area outlined in blue in the map below is the section of the Cabot district that feeds to Bigelow in this option, with the rest of the Cabot district feeding to Day. The location of Bigelow Middle School is noted with a green star and Day Middle School is noted with a red star.

