

## School Choice Questions from School Committee

### Programming Queries

1. Applications cannot contain discipline data and detailed IEP information, what can applications include?

**Response:** *Name, date of birth, address, phone number, email address, current grade, grade applying for admission.*

2. What is the difference between full participation and limited participation?

**Response:** *Districts can either participate in School Choice or opt out. Districts may "limit" participation by only accepting a certain number of students in certain grades and schools.*

3. Who will process applications? Who will serve as data and certification admin? Is there any hidden admin cost - new, existing, or participating?

**Response:** *No additional staff is expected to be hired to administer the School Choice program but this will require additional existing staff time. In particular, our Chief of Data and Research will be involved with sending student information to DESE.*

*School choice enrollment information is entered directly into our SIMS submission. In January, the district will review this information in the school choice application. In the spring, we will update the actual dates of attendance for students who are participating and any special education increments.*

4. How did we come to the number of 200 students?

**Response:** *This was merely a hypothetical number that was used. We are currently analyzing and looking at enrollments to determine a recommendation for the School Committee. We are currently estimating approximately 142 open seats K-12 as benchmark. The following is potential recommendation:*

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Current Staff Students</u>	<u>Possible FY25 Recommendation</u>
K	9	10
1	10	10
2	13	10
3	10	13
4	6	10
5	9	6
6	11	10
7	8	12
8	11	9
9	16	12
10	12	16
11	12	12
12	10	12
<b><u>Total</u></b>	<b><u>137</u></b>	<b><u>142</u></b>

5. Who will manage the one-year waitlist and what will the process be for moving students off the wait-list mid-year? Is there a cut-off date for the wait list?

**Response:** *No, the district can establish a policy to only enroll students up to a certain date. Existing staff will manage the wait list. If a school choice student moves out in a year, we will run people on the waitlist into open slots and if there is more than one applicant for the slots, we can run the lottery again at that time. Alternatively, we can not fill slots vacated mid-year. It is the Committee's call.*

6. If you have unfilled school choice slots, do you need to accept students all year?

**Response:** *No, the district can establish a policy to only enroll students up to a certain date.*

7. How many students who apply for school choice receive their first choice/choices? How reliable are we to fill 200 seats year to year – How reliable are those funds? – especially if we were to pay staff out of the revolving accounts?

**Response:** *We would try to accommodate students' first choice, but cannot give an accurate forecast or percentage of students that may receive their first choice at this time. Although nothing is guaranteed, we believe that Newton would be an attractive community for families and we will determine what we believe is an optimal number of seats available. The funding from the state has been very reliable in the past and we do not foresee any changes to that funding at this time. In addition, the number of slots the district opens up can vary from year to year based on seat availability.*

8. Does every school that participates require a lottery because they have more applicants than spots?

**Response:** *No, the lottery is only required if a district has more applicants than spots available. We do not have information on what other districts may receive in applications.*

9. Are receiving districts obligated to provide school choice students with transportation? What are the transportation requirements for school choice students?

**Response:** *Students who participate in the school choice program do not receive transportation services unless those services are included in a student's IEP. When transportation services are required by a student's IEP, the sending district must pay the full cost.*

10. Can we get real students' profiles for the different scenarios (IEPs, OOD, In district, reimbursement, etc.)?

**Response:** *No, we are not able to ask for this information in the application process. Once a student is admitted and accepts that offer of admission, however, the receiving district can request student records from the sending district as a matter of right under the student record regulations at [603 CMR 23.07\(4\)\(g\)](#). Please see response 6 below on Special Education for some specific examples.*

11. Have we thought about how we would randomize the lottery? What are the instances where some students could/would get preferential treatment i.e. siblings or any other category?

**Response:** *We would likely use a random number generator to ensure we have a random lottery process. Please remember, the lottery is only required if there are more applicants than seats available.*

*Under G.L. c. 76 § 12B(j), any sibling of a student currently attending school in the receiving district receives a preference for admission. Siblings are students who have a common parent, either biologically or legally through adoption. Children who live in the same household, such as step-siblings and foster children, and do not share a common parent are not siblings for purposes of receiving a sibling preference for admission. Students entitled to a sibling preference are those who have a sibling currently attending school in the receiving district when an offer of admission is made.*

12. Do any current Newton students participate in school choice in other communities (ie: are we paying for our own students to go elsewhere? If so, what reasons do families cite for participating? Is it less or more likely, or net zero, that families will continue this practice if we become SC participants?)

**Response:** *Yes, this year we have 21 Newton resident students enrolled in other schools through school choice. All are enrolled in the state public virtual schools (TECCA or Greater Commonwealth Virtual District). In recent years, Newton resident students participating in school choice have chosen a public virtual school through school choice; we have not had any choose other*

*traditional public school districts (with the exception of 1 student during COVID who chose to attend a district that was full in person): 26 in FY22, 14 in FY23, 21 in FY24. Although we haven't explicitly asked these families why they have chosen to enroll in these schools, it is likely due to the fact that they are virtual.*

## **Special Education**

1. What should the district do when a school choice student needs to be placed in an out of district placement?

**Response:** *A student who is accepted through school choice is entitled to the same rights and privileges as if the student were a resident of the district. It is important to note that the school choice tuition for a student with disabilities is determined using a cost calculator similar to the one used for the circuit breaker program; this does not include the costs of evaluations for special education. The costs of evaluations are paid by receiving districts.*

*The sending district must be invited to an IEP meeting where the placement decision is made and if the home district wants to offer a different option for the family. The receiving district pays the tuition and is **reimbursed for the full cost by the sending district after filing a special education increment claim**; the sending district can claim circuit breaker reimbursement.*

2. What happens when specialized programming enrollment is full if districts are on the hook for out of district placements and the program is designed to fill empty seats? What happens if you accept a school choice student, and your specialized program is full?

**Response:** *As we mentioned above, if a student is placed out of district, the **receiving district will be reimbursed the full cost** by the sending district after filing a special education increments claim. The receiving district is responsible for the student and will need to accommodate the student's needs in the least restrictive environment.*

3. With OOD placement for school choice students, as the receiving we are responsible for the upfront tuition cost and transportation then remain at the mercy of the circuit breaker for a reimbursement? Would the reimbursement flow through a similar mechanism to chapter 70 – i.e. not come directly to the district but through the city first? As Newton is well known for its quality special education, special ed students would be an incremental cost for the sending district, but if we send those school choice special ed students to an OOD facility, how does that work for us?

**Response:** *As we mentioned above, if a student is placed out of district, the receiving district will be reimbursed the full cost by the sending district after filing a special education increments claim. The receiving district pays the tuition and is reimbursed for the full cost by the sending district after filing a special education increment claim; the sending district can claim circuit breaker reimbursement.*

4. Special Ed students are more costly than regular students even if placed in-district, have we thought about these costs, and how do the reimbursement for this work? *Per pupil expenditure ranges from 15,000 to 20,000 but for school choice it's 5,000 per student, for special education it's much higher probably? How do we account for the additional costs?*

**Response:** *The school choice tuition for students in a regular education program is \$5,000 per student. For students eligible for special education, an additional increment is added to the base regular education amount to cover the cost of these services and fully reimbursed. These amounts are determined using a cost calculator similar to the one used for the circuit breaker program under G.L. c. 71B, § 5B. School choice students are not eligible to receive transportation services unless a student's disability requires transportation and their Individual Education Program (IEP) includes special transportation as a related service. Please note that currently, we receive NO reimbursement for students of staff members who receive these services. School choice status would help the district address those costs.*

*Additionally, we have provided the Special Education Incremental Cost Calculator which is similar to the Circuit Breaker Calculator. Unlike Circuit Breaker, there is **no** threshold to meet, so Newton would receive funding based on the cost calculator. As one potential example, if a current staff member student attends Newton Public Schools and receives special education services but does not meet the Circuit Breaker threshold, we do not get any reimbursement. However, if that same student is accepted through the School*

Choice program, we would be reimbursed the cost based on the Cost Calculator, thus exceeding our current reimbursement of \$0.

5. Of the 17,000 students on school choice statewide, how many are on IEPs?

**Response:** DESE reported that they do not have this information at this time.

6. Can we get representative students on IEPs and the reimbursement rate that DESE uses? Is it the full cost?

**Response:** The below chart represents some sample students that are the students of staff. In the scenarios below, we are not able to receive any Special Education Circuit Breaker reimbursement because their costs are below the threshold (set at \$51,721 in FY24), thus there is \$0 in reimbursement. **If these same students were enrolled through School Choice, we would be able to claim and receive approximately \$173,000 that we are not receiving now.**

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Special Ed Disability</u>	<u>SPED Level</u>	<u>Proj Total-School Choice Calculator</u>
6	Specific Learning-08	03-Moderate	\$13,778
2	Neurological-12	03-Moderate	\$43,979
2	Developmental Delay-13	03-Moderate	\$29,760
2	Emotional-05	03-Moderate	\$41,771
8	Specific Learning-08	02-Low: 2-5 hours per wk	\$6,284
11	Emotional-05	04-High	\$5,321
11	Autism-11	02-Low: 2-5 hours per wk	\$3,824
10	Autism-11	03-Moderate	\$24,657
7	Emotional-05	03-Moderate	\$2,438
3	Emotional-05	02-Low: 2-5 hours	\$1,785
<b><u>Total</u></b>			<b><u>\$173,597</u></b>

*Some Examples of how to use the Calculator:*

1. *School Choice Student placed in a completely sub-separate classroom in Newton and receiving specialized transportation from their home community*
  1. *In the calculator you would click in-district placement and enter the services that the student is receiving.*
  2. *For the transportation, if your district is paying and being reimbursed, you'd add the cost of the transportation in the out-of-district tab of the workbook (even though it's not out of district – that's where we capture transportation costs). If the other district is paying you wouldn't add anything here.*
2. *School Choice Student receiving Additional services like OT and PT*
  1. *In the calculator you would select in-district placement and enter the related services for OT and PT and the service delivery type that the student is receiving (e.g., individual, small group) and the hours per cycle. If the student also has consultation services, you'd add those in as well.*
3. *School Choice Student that has a one-to-one paraprofessional as part of their IEP*
  1. *In the calculator you would include in-district placement and select aide.*
4. *School Choice Student that has been placed out of the district (and agreed to by the sending district)*
  1. *In the calculator you would select out of district placement. Add the school, placement type, annual rates, dates of services, etc. If you will be paying for transportation add the rate that you paid on the Out of District Transportation line.*
  2. *The excel worksheet will calculate the cost for each student's services and we then add the school choice tuition to those rates. Something to note is that if a student is placed out of district, the \$5,000 school choice tuition is not added in addition to the out of district costs.*

*The School Choice Special Education Increment Calculator below (and attached as a separate document) is used to input costs to be reimbursed for special education students. The rates shown in the Cost are hourly rates and would approximate some of our hourly costs.*





2. As space becomes more limited (METCO, School choice, etc.), how do we manage that? How do we weigh this vs. the financial?

**Response:** *As a reminder, Newton Public School enrollment has been declining and is expected to decline from our current enrollment. We will present that information at upcoming School Committee meetings.*

*Both School Choice and METCO students fill seats that would otherwise go unoccupied. Both programs have some similarities. By adopting School Choice, NPS would receive funding (\$5,000 per full time equivalent student) for a seat that would otherwise go unfilled.*

***It is important to understand that the tuition that we receive is intended to cover the marginal cost of filling empty seats in existing classrooms and not funding new classrooms.***

3. What is the impact of participating on existing policies and the teachers contract in allowing children of employees to enroll in NPS?

**Response:** *If School Choice was adopted by the School Committee, we would expect our staff to apply for School Choice, which also guarantees that their student can graduate from Newton regardless of their employment status with Newton.*

*If the child of an employee does not gain acceptance through School Choice, they would still have the opportunity to send their student to NPS on the same terms and space available conditions we have now through the current contract.*

### **School Choice Adoptee Districts**

1. Are there districts in Metro West that participate in school choice?

**Response:** *There are no Metro-West communities participating in School Choice at this time, however, there are 170 school districts or nearly 50% of all school districts in Massachusetts that participate in School Choice. Here is the list of school districts participating in School Choice:*

[DESE MA School Districts School Choice List 23-24](#)

2. What challenges do districts that have adopted school choice face? What are the things that we would need to plan for?

**Response:** *Similar to any new family moving into Newton, there needs to be support and transition for these families to get to know and understand their school and district. We would need to plan for some type of open houses or orientation for these families and be ready to assist with the numerous student information and processing that we require.*

3. What support systems do other school choice districts allocate to support their out of district students i.e. academic liaisons, social workers, etc.?

**Response:** *Similar to all of our students, School Choice students will have the full access to the deep resources that Newton Public Schools offers its students and our Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports.*

## Other

1. Can we do a school training course on school choice for the school committee?

**Response:** *These school committee meetings are designed to be that course.*

2. The April vote is right in the middle of everything? Is that still the right time?

**Response:** *Given the recent contract passed and the financial agreements the school system and city have to fund the next contract, the NPS budget needs to address approximately \$2 Million of risk/efficiencies/savings/or revenue between now and the end of the four year contract with NTA. Enrolling in school choice would help mitigate that risk for us.*

3. What is the impact on Chapter 70 for the City of Newton?

**Response:** *The Chapter 70 program is the major program of state aid to public elementary and secondary schools. In addition to providing state aid to support school operations, it also establishes minimum spending requirements for each school district and minimum requirements for each municipality's share of school costs.*

*The goal of Chapter 70 is to ensure that every district has sufficient resources to meet its foundation budget spending level, through an equitable combination of local property taxes and state aid. (Source - DESE Website)*

*Given Newton's relative wealth, it is considered a Minimum Aid district. 211 districts are considered Minimum Aid Districts in FY25 and their Chapter 70 has been held harmless over the last several years and the state has been applying*

between \$30 and \$60 per student as a baseline increase for Minimum Aid districts.

A district's Foundation Enrollment is a critical part of the formula, but has become less of an integral part of the formula as the state has moved to more of a hold harmless position given the overall state-wide decline in enrollment.

Below is a Chart of the History of Chapter 70 In Newton. As a reminder, Chapter 70 funding goes directly to the City of Newton.

<i>Fiscal Year</i>	<i>Foundation Enrollment</i>	<i>Chapter 70 Funding</i>	<i>% Change</i>
<i>FY08</i>	<i>11,688</i>	<i>12,754,101</i>	<i>16.3%</i>
<i>FY09</i>	<i>11,762</i>	<i>12,939,869</i>	<i>1.5%</i>
<i>FY10</i>	<i>11,745</i>	<i>14,171,395</i>	<i>9.5%</i>
<i>FY11</i>	<i>11,805</i>	<i>13,343,503</i>	<i>-5.8%</i>
<i>FY12</i>	<i>11,991</i>	<i>13,504,221</i>	<i>1.2%</i>
<i>FY13</i>	<i>12,150</i>	<i>16,173,152</i>	<i>19.8%</i>
<i>FY14</i>	<i>12,387</i>	<i>17,403,779</i>	<i>7.6%</i>
<i>FY15</i>	<i>12,650</i>	<i>19,617,930</i>	<i>12.7%</i>
<i>FY16</i>	<i>12,711</i>	<i>20,226,057</i>	<i>3.1%</i>
<i>FY17</i>	<i>12,730</i>	<i>21,180,365</i>	<i>4.7%</i>
<i>FY18</i>	<i>12,857</i>	<i>22,789,852</i>	<i>7.6%</i>
<i>FY19</i>	<i>12,948</i>	<i>24,027,611</i>	<i>5.4%</i>
<i>FY20</i>	<i>12,889</i>	<i>24,814,496</i>	<i>3.3%</i>
<i>FY21</i>	<i>12,831</i>	<i>25,128,716</i>	<i>1.3%</i>
<i>FY22</i>	<i>12,113</i>	<i>25,492,106</i>	<i>1.4%</i>
<i>FY23</i>	<i>12,007</i>	<i>26,212,526</i>	<i>2.8%</i>
<i>FY24*</i>	<i>11,885</i>	<i>27,433,806</i>	<i>4.6%</i>
<i>FY25**</i>	<i>11,757</i>	<i>27,926,713</i>	<i>1.8%</i>

- *\*FY24 saw several factors helping to increase Chapter 70 including a 10% increase in overall Chapter 70 funding, a Minimum \$60 per student for every district, higher foundation budget cost categories, and the phase in of the Student Opportunity Act (SOA)*
- *\*\*FY25 is still Preliminary*

*As you can see, Newton has been experiencing declining enrollment and receiving small increases, with the exception of FY24, in Chapter 70 as compared to when the district was growing.*

***Its important to note that School Choice students would not be included in the foundation enrollment for calculating Chapter 70.*** Currently, staff whose students attend Newton Public Schools are counted in our Chapter 70 enrollment. *However, if the School Committee were to adopt School Choice, none of these staff students, who were accepted, would be counted in the foundation enrollment.* This could have the impact of further minimizing the Chapter 70 funding. However, given the current hold harmless position from the State, it is more likely that Newton could expect to see small (1-2.5%) increases in the near to medium term on Chapter 70 funding and not have a significantly deleterious impact on already weak Chapter 70 increases.

*It is possible that Legislation takes up varying changes to Chapter 70 formula in the coming years. Coupled with any changes to the formula, the annual Massachusetts budget process makes it hard to know for certain what is in store for Chapter 70 for Newton and other communities.*

*In summary, the Chapter 70 formula and the impact of accepting School Choice students would seem not to have a significant impact on Chapter 70 funding that the City of Newton can expect to receive in the future.*

4. How much money would Newton receive with 142 School Choice Students?

***Response:*** *Newton would receive the minimum \$5,000 per full time equivalent student per year. Thus,  $142 \times \$5,000 = \$710,000$*

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*In addition, Newton would receive additional increment funds for the special education services. While this number is not possible to calculate, we used the example from question 6 above, it was an additional \$173,597, for a total of \$883,597 ( $\$710,00 + 173,597$ )*

*We could also extrapolate from State data on School Choice Tuition. In aggregate, for the 17,587 School Choice students, the state is expected to have net sending tuition of \$130,391,993, or \$7,414.11 per student.*

*If we used that per student rate for Newton, we would expect to receive \$1,052,804.*

***Although a precise number is not able to be determined, it seems reasonable to estimate that Newton would receive between \$850,000 to \$1,100,000 in new revenue for approximately 142 students.***

