

Date: 8/14/2020
To: Dr. Brenda Cassellius, Superintendent, Boston Public Schools
Michael Loconto, Chairperson, Boston School Committee
From: TeeAra Dias, Boston Universal Pre-K Director
Jason Sachs, Executive Director of Early Childhood
Andrea Zayas, Chief Academic Officer
CC: School Committee, Executive Cabinet
Re: Boston Universal Pre-K Community Based K1 to BPS K2 Connector Proposal

The Community Based Organization (CBO) K1/BPS K2 Connector system (“The Connector”) is a proposal to connect students in participating community based K1 classrooms (hereafter called CBOs) with Boston Public Schools K2 classrooms.

Context:

There are two types of K1 seats in Boston, traditional BPS K1 seats (~2800 students) and K1 in CBOs (~500). Students who are enrolled in a BPS K1 program are automatically enrolled into K-5 or K-8 seats. Students who are CBO K1 are not afforded this same assurance. This has resulted in higher student turnover in CBO UPK K1 classrooms and inequity for working families who need 12 months and up to 10 hours a day of services. In addition, CBOs are vital partners as they serve a large number of families in preschool starting at age 2.9 to age 4.11. When BPS opened up K1s this challenged the financial model of the viability of preschool services in CBOs. Finally, BPS schools are at capacity for K1 and space is limited to expand more K1 seats. Hence, the Connector was first piloted in 2017 and today we are proposing its use across the district.

What we are proposing:

The proposed connector system will create two new priorities in the BPS K2 lottery assignment system: 1) for low-income CBO K1 students and 2) for UPK K1 students who are not low income. The new priorities are limited to 450 seats across 33 schools. The 450 seats were selected from schools with 10 or more K2 seats and a maximum of 50% of these extra seats were selected for these new priorities. This is not a guaranteed connector between a UPK program and BPS school, rather it is a priority within the lottery assignment, similar to an early admissions process.

How the connector will work:

Families who attend community based UPK in their K1 year will **register** for K2 at a BPS Welcome Center and **rank** their choices from their home-based list, including choices where there are priority seats. Income and UPK status eligibility for the new priority will be verified by the UPK site and then by BPS. The BPS K2 assignment lottery will run with the two new priorities for UPK students. Only students who attended a CBO UPK program will be eligible for the priority seats. For example: Two students, one who attended UPK in K1 and one who did not, both rank School A, one of the schools with priority seats, as one of their school choices. The student who attended UPK would be more likely to be assigned to School A than the student who did not attend UPK since they are eligible for these priority seats. If the family does not get one of the priority seats, they will still be part of the lottery for the non-priority seats at the schools they ranked. All K2 students will be notified of their school assignments in the summer before K2 starts.

Priority to low income families:

UPK programs in CBOs were designed in part to serve families who have to work 12 months of the year and up to 10 hours a day. As public schools only offer a 180-day school year, low income working families are disproportionately choosing CBO programs that meet their working needs. The majority (~ 75%) of families enrolled in CBO UPK seats are low income. However, a portion of CBOs serve private pay families and since they control enrollment there is a concern that families could purchase a seat for their 3 year old to gain priority into a school, though they would have to do this a year in advance. Prioritizing low income families should resolve this issue, though BPS will monitor in the future to see if this becomes a challenge.

Expected Impact:

For UPK families: An eligible UPK student who ranks one of the 33 schools will be more likely to receive this assignment than before this connector was in place. Low income UPK students will have the greatest priority. UPK students are more likely to experience high-quality and aligned K1 and K2 experiences, setting them up for success in school and beyond.

On the BPS assignment system: UPK students would have priority over students who did not attend UPK in K1. All other priorities and assignment policies remain in effect (including children already enrolled in that BPS school which will have priority over the UPK students).

On BPS enrollment: The proposed change does not take away seats from eligible students because all enrollment into K2, UPK or otherwise, will stay within the home-based model. All UPK priority seats will go to families who were already eligible for that school. Enrollment in BPS K2 may increase because more families from UPK sites will transition to BPS.

Decisions matrix:

The School Committee will decide on three topics:

1. **Yes/No** to prioritize CBO K1 students and hence make available 450 seats across the proposed 33 schools for priority seating.

Feedback on this model:

- Assures less transitions for students
- Provides greater options for families, especially for low income and working families who need a full day;
- BPS is being responsive to community needs and to its new strategic plan around pathways for families and equity.
- Greater alignment opportunities in curriculum.
- Increases enrollment in BPS (longitudinal research indicates that those who chose BPS UPK stay in in BPS longer);

2. **Yes/No** to prioritizing low income students (only)

Feedback on this model is that it assures that low income families (75% of CBO UPK families) will have priority to a school of their choice provided it is one of the 33 schools.

3. **Yes/No** to prioritizing the remainder of seats to non low income CBO K1 students

Feedback on this model is that it incentivizes mixed income classrooms and ensures the connector is available for all students in UPK funded CBO seats.