BPS Exam School Admission Criteria Working Group
Recommendation Overview

The Boston School Committee is reviewing and will vote on a recommendation for a one-year exception to the current exam schools admissions policy due to the current pandemic and the seven months of interrupted learning that students have experienced across the city. The recommendation under consideration was made by the Exam School Admissions Criteria Working Group, which was commissioned by Superintendent Cassellius.

The Boston School Committee will vote on the recommendation on October 21. The timing of the decision is based on the timing of the school enrollment and assignment process for BPS and schools in the other sectors (charter, private, parochial, and home-schooling). Many secondary schools have started to recruit students and others will start the process in November. Families in Boston generally receive admissions invitations in March with decisions required in April. Some private and parochial schools require a deposit with a limited timeframe for a refund if students opt to attend another school. Students and families should be able to make informed decisions during this time.

The Recommendation:

Duration: The recommendation would apply for the exam school application process for this school year only (2020-2021) for entry in fall 2021. BPS will revert to the existing exam school admissions policy in school year 2021-2022.

Applicants: All Boston residents who are currently in grades 6, 8, or 9 and meet the eligibility requirements, will be considered for admission into an exam school for school year 2021-2022.

Eligibility Requirements: To be considered for admission, students must meet the following:

- Minimum B average in ELA and Math for the fall and winter marking periods of last school year (between September 2019 and January 2020); or received a meet expectation score or higher on the 2019 MCAS in ELA and Math. Students do not need to meet both.
  - A “B” average GPA outlined above was selected based on data reviewed by the Working Group, which demonstrates that (i) exam schools currently admit students with A and B averages, and (ii) students with a “B” GPA during the application process succeed and remain enrolled in an exam school at rates similar to those of students applying with an “A+” or “A” GPA. This is not a change. Accepting students with a “B” GPA will not make the exam schools any less rigorous.
  - The Working Group recommendation did not include administering a test this school year for several reasons:
    - Administering a test during the public health pandemic in a way that meets public health guidance would be difficult, particularly given the uncertainty related to the progression of the COVID-19 virus.
    - Due to the duration and continuation of the pandemic, some students have experienced interrupted learning.
• School district (or equivalent) verification that the student is performing at grade level based on the Massachusetts Curriculum standards.

Invitation Process: All applicants will indicate their school preferences by ranking the three exam schools as their first, second, or third choice. Exam school seats will be filled using the system outlined below, which embeds merit throughout. The use of zip codes and median household income in the process for seat selection will help create greater neighborhood and socioeconomic diversity in each of the exam schools.

• **20% of seats in each exam school will be filled using GPA only.** The order of placement will be based on GPA rank, with the student having the highest GPA placed first. If two or more students rank the same, a random number will be used to determine which student will be placed first. For the first 20% of seats, students will only be considered for the school that they ranked as their top choice. If a student does not secure a seat in this process, they will be a part of the second process. This will give the student another opportunity to be placed in their first-choice school.

• Once students filling the first 20% of seats at each exam school have been identified, the remaining 80% of seats will be filled. Students will be placed into a pool of applicants living in the same zip code. Students in each zip code will be ranked by GPA. Each zip code will be allocated a number of available exam school seats based on the proportion of school-aged students living in that zip code. This is regardless of the type of school (public, private, or home-schooled) that students attend. For example, if there are 100 exam school seats available and 15% of the school aged children in Boston live in zip code A, then zip code A would be allocated 15 seats.
  - Applicants within each zip code will be ranked by GPA. If two or more students rank the same, the students in that rank will each receive a random number to determine the order in which they will have the opportunity to be placed.
  - 10% of seats available within each zip code will be distributed through ten assignment rounds. For example, if a zip code has 20 seats, 2 students will be placed in each round.
  - At the start of each round, students will be placed based on rank within their zip code. For placement purposes, zip codes will be ordered from the lowest median household income to the highest median household income according to the American Community Survey. Students in the lowest median household income will be placed followed by students next in order.
  - If a student’s first choice seat is not available when it is their turn to be assigned, then the student will be assigned to their second-choice seat. If the second-choice seat is not available, the student will be assigned to their third-choice seat, if seats remain available.
  - Applicants do not have to rank all three schools but ranking only one will not give a student greater access to a school.

Potential Impact: The Working Group looked at significant data and analyzed the impact of the recommendation. Based on simulations, the recommendation is likely to result in greater socioeconomic, racial, and geographic diversity across the three exam schools, while maintaining the same level of rigor.
About the Working Group:

On July 22, the Superintendent established an advisory working group to recommend admissions criteria for Boston’s exam schools for the 2021-22 school year in light of the educational disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The working group, comprised of the school leaders, parents, and other stakeholders listed below, met throughout August and September, supported by BPS staff.

- Samuel Acevedo, Opportunity and Achievement Gap Task Force Co-Chair
- Acacia Aguirre, John O’Bryant Parent (Grade 8)
- Michael Contompasis, Former BLS Headmaster and BPS Superintendent
- Matt Cregor, Esq. Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee and BPS parent
- Tanya Freeman-Wisdom, John D. O’Bryant, Head of School
- Katherine Grassa, Curley K-8, Principal
- Zena Lum, Boston Latin Academy Parent (Grade 10)
- Rachel Skerritt, Boston Latin School, Head of School
- Tanisha M. Sullivan, President of the Boston NAACP Branch and former BPS Chief Equity Officer