

Comments on Proposed Revisions to School District 57 Policy 5119, as revised Oct 2010

December 14, 2010

To the Board of Trustees:

Parents have a choice as to where their children go to school.

Some parents choose their neighborhood school, and in some neighborhood schools, parents may choose between instruction in English and instruction in French. In some neighborhoods, there is only one choice – regular English, Montessori, or Traditional.

Some parents choose a school not in their neighborhood. This can be for a variety of reasons: location of childcare, preference of a program, or preference of a school. As an example, at the former Austin Road School, 39% of the total students were neighborhood children who had chosen English, while 15% were neighborhood children choosing French. A further 26% were from other catchments choosing English, and 20% were from other catchments choosing French. This means that of the students going to that school, 61% had made a different choice than the default neighborhood school, regular English program option.

The school district also needs to make choices, when a school or program does not have the capacity for all the children who wish to attend. Unfortunately, this is going to be more of a problem for this school district in the future, given the implementation of full time kindergarten, the recent school closures, growth in different areas of the city, and the increase in elementary school aged children across the district starting in two years, as according to the Ministry of Education's projections. The following 5 elementary schools will be faced with projected enrolments in 2011 of over 95% of their working capacity, which will put particular pressure on them: Glenview, Heritage, Hart Highlands, Vanway, and College Heights. Note: more information can be provided as regards these projections on request.

What does this mean for the revisions to Policy 5119? It means that the policy is going to be used much more than it has been used in the past, as more parents are unfortunately going to find that there is no room for their child in their neighborhood, in their choice of school, or their choice of program. The school district needs good policy to follow in making these difficult decisions, which needs to be **fair** and **transparent**, and should comply with the School Act. The school district administration may have unwritten, customary policies as to how registration and transfers are handled – but it is the written policy that must be followed.

Examples of Issues

Let's send some test cases through the proposed policy as drafted, in the event where there is not enough capacity in the choice of school, and see what happens.

Child tries to register in a neighborhood school, regular program:

*"Students, including those in Kindergarten, are entitled to attend the school serving the geographical catchment area in which they live, **except as limited by available space** or by actions taken in accordance with the provisions of this policy."*

If there is not enough room in their catchment school, there is no explicit provision in policy for this student. Some school districts have a written policy to follow in which support is provided to help the student find an alternate school.

Some school administration staff have stated that if a catchment area child tries to register at to a school the school must accept them, but this is not what is written in the policy, or in the school act. Further, the policy states that “parents of non-catchment students are to assume full responsibility for the transportation of the student to and from school”, which means that the school district is not responsible to transport this child to their school. Note that if in the following year this student wishes to try to transfer from this new school to their catchment school, they do not have any priority in the transfer process as written – the transfer process gives priority to siblings of students already registered in this school, then school district children in general, and then non-school district children.

Child tries to register in a non-catchment school, regular program:

There is no explicit provision in the policy for kindergarten registration in a non-catchment school. There is no provision in policy to govern priority for registration at a school. Catchment children do not receive priority over non-catchment children; children with siblings in the school do not receive priority over children without siblings in the school. It is possible that the policy is meant to state that students must apply to their catchment school and then apply to transfer to a non-catchment school, but the policy does not state this.

Child tries to register in a neighborhood school, dual track choice program:

“Access to choice programs at Kindergarten is gained by registration, on a first-come, first-served basis, regardless of the geographical area in which a student resides. Access to choice programs at all other grades is gained through the transfer process. Acceptance in a choice program is dependent on available space and/or program criteria.”

A child trying to attend the school across the street from them, to attend a dual track choice program, has no more priority than a child trying to attend from across the city. If this child registers in a different school and tries to transfer to their neighborhood school in the future, they do not receive any priority in the transfer process.

Child tries to register in a choice school (Traditional, Montessori, Aboriginal, Single Track French):

Policy 5119 does not make specific provision for registration at choice **schools**, only registration for choice **programs**. However, given that the policy states that choice schools and programs do not have a designated catchment area, presumably the policy above would apply.

A child trying to register in a choice school across the street from them has no more priority for registration at this school than does a child from across the district, and there is no priority given for such a child trying to transfer to this school. As an example, suppose that Spruceland is converted into a Traditional choice school, and there are capacity issues. Should the neighborhood matter for priority of registration?

Child tries to register at a school in which their siblings are registered:

If a child attempts to **register** for kindergarten in a school that their older siblings are registered in, they do **not** receive any priority in the registration process. If a child attempts to **transfer** to a school in which their siblings are registered, they **do** receive priority in the transfer process.

There is no reason given for the importance of siblings for transferring students, and the lack of importance for kindergarten student registration.

Child enrolled in School District tries to transfer to a school:

If a child who is already registered in the school district attempts to transfer to a different school, the policy does not distinguish between a regular program or school, or a choice program or school. The policy also does not distinguish between a catchment area child and a non-catchment area child. Priority is governed in the following order: siblings of a child who attended the school in the previous year, a child in the school district, and then a child who is a non-school

district student. A non-catchment sibling of a child who is already enrolled at the school would have priority over a catchment area child without a sibling in the school. No priority is given to catchment children; they would be categorized with school district children. Priority within the categories is governed by the order in which the application has been received. The policy further states that a principal may transfer a student to any school due to various considerations, such as medical reasons or compassionate grounds, with the permission of both principals.

Child from another district moves to this district and tries to enroll at a school:

A child attempting to register in their catchment school may do so, limited by available space. A child attempting to enroll in a choice program must do so through the transfer process, so would need to enroll at a school and then apply to transfer to another school. Again, there is no provision in policy for a child attempting to enroll in a non-catchment school, or a choice school.

Issues as regards School Act

According to the school act, a person is entitled to enroll at a school in which there is space and facilities in the following descending order of priority: (a) catchment area child attending school in previous year, (b) catchment area child, (c) non-catchment area child, and (d) non-school district child. All students in category (a) should be taken before students in category (b), (c), or (d). If there are two students attempting to enroll at a school in which there is one space open, one student from catchment and one student from out of catchment, then the catchment child is entitled to have priority over the non-catchment child. Policy 5119 as drafted does not give any priority to catchment - just for this reason alone, the policy not be implemented as drafted.

The board does have the **option** of giving priority to other categories of students **as if** they are catchment children who attended the previous year, and must make these priorities public:

- A catchment area child who attended a feeder school in the previous year
- A non-catchment area child who attended the school in the previous year
- A student who attended a school in the previous year (catchment or non-catchment)
- A student who attended a feeder school in the previous year (catchment or non-catchment)
- A sibling of a catchment area child who attended the school in the previous year
- A sibling of a non-catchment area child who attended the school in the previous year

The school board has decided, as an example, to give priority to non-catchment children who were enrolled in the school in the previous year as if they were catchment children previously enrolled. Without this optional policy, new students registering in the catchment could bump students previously registered from out of catchment.

The school act would appear to mean that these rules must be applied consistently - that the rules for enrollment and the rules for transferring should be the same.

A board must establish rules for determining priority between 2 or more persons having the same priority under this section. The board has the option for determining what the rules are - date and time, lottery, personal essay - this is a board policy decision; boards have their choice of how to break ties. These rules must, however, be made public. In policy 5119 as drafted, there is no option given for determining how to break ties among registering for a school, although date and time priority is given for transfers to a school.

A board must establish a catchment for each school, consisting of all or part of the school district. There does not appear to be any provision in the Act for providing an individual program within a school with a separate catchment, although

different interpretations may be made. However, please see the "Board Decisions - Catchment and Neighborhoods" section below for other reasons not to have catchment as being district wide.

Board Decisions - Sibling Priority

The board has the option to give certain students priority within the registration process, such as non-catchment students who attended the school in the previous year, students who attended a feeder school in the previous year, or the siblings of a student who attended a school in the previous year. The board has given priority to all these categories in previous versions of the policy. For kindergarten registration, however, the board has removed any priority given to siblings. If the board decides to give priority to siblings, in order to support families in the school district, then the order of priority would be as follows: (a) catchment area child attending school in previous year, and the siblings of a catchment child who attended the school in the previous year (if the board chooses, they may give priority to non-catchment children who attended the previous year, and to their siblings), and then (b) catchment area child, (c) non-catchment area child, and (d) non-school district child. The majority of school districts in the province do give priority to siblings, due to the importance given to supporting families.

Board Decisions - Catchment and Neighborhoods

Should choice schools or programs give any priority to students living in their neighborhoods, if they not have enough room to hold all applicants? Ideally, all applicants should be able to go to the school of their choice. If there are space considerations, then some plan needs to be made to give priority to different people. If catchment is district wide, this means that neighborhood families living near a choice school or program, economically disadvantaged or not, would be competing with families who have the means to arrange for transportation across a city. Who would have more problems if their application to the school is rejected - the economically disadvantaged applicant living next to the school, or the applicant who was prepared to travel across the city?

Board Decisions - How to Choose between Same Priority Applicants

The board may choose how to break ties between applicants with the same priority. The original legislation only allowed priority to be based on date and time of application, which is what the proposed policy 5119 uses. The board may wish to consider if deciding between applicants based on a method that would currently require access to computer technology and typing speed is in the best interest of parents who don't have access to technology, or who have multiple children. Whichever process is decided on, however, must be clearly communicated and understandable.

Board Decisions - Obligations to Children Denied Access to Catchment School

In the current policy and draft policy, if a student is denied registration at their catchment school due to lack of space, the school district has no written process or obligation to assist this student with transportation or registration elsewhere. While this is an additional cost and obligation for the district, this may help ensure that appropriate capacity is available in each catchment area.

Thank you for your attention to this document. If you have any questions, or would like any of these points further supported with research or data, please email sarah@sbkc.me.

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