

# Opportunities for School Choice: Comparable District Research April 23, 2012

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Boston Public Schools  
Office of Strategic Planning  
Draft

Boston is not alone in its effort to develop an improved school choice system. Other large cities have struggled with issues around quality, choice, and complexity and have developed a variety of solutions. Since 2009, BPS staff has been working with school leaders in other cities to explore available options, look at strengths and weaknesses of each, and understand how these cities successfully developed and implemented plans in partnership with the community.

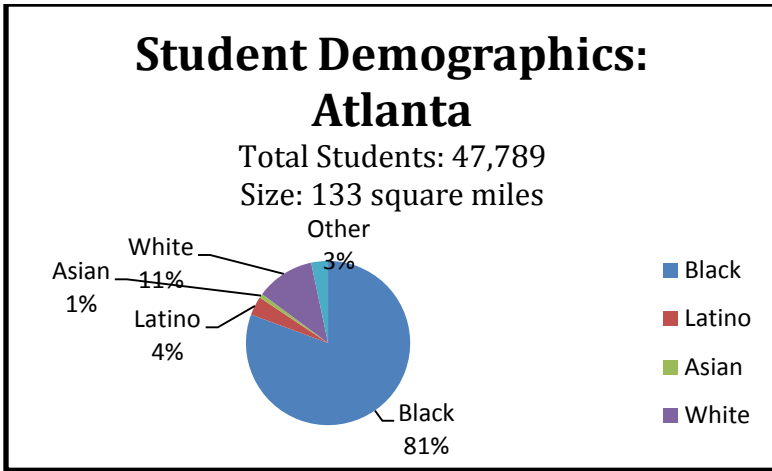
The research began in 2009 when BPS applied and was awarded a federal grant for “Technical Assistance for Student Assignment Plans (TASAP).” The grant went to eleven districts nationwide. BPS staff visited other districts, including Seattle and Hartford to discuss their student assignment plans. These visits provided context into their recent changes and lessons learned. Hartford has a robust magnet school program and Seattle was recently involved in a Supreme Court decision that brought about the need for a new student assignment system. The Seattle meeting helped to provide useful information on how districts might approach student assignment in the new legal context. BPS also met with both Portland, OR and San Francisco to learn about their recent changes.

This research focused on large urban school districts and districts that have recently gone through student assignment changes. BPS also conducted interviews with several districts to better understand the challenges and possibilities for Boston. Districts were analyzed for their student assignment programs and rules governing transportation.

Some common themes are evident among districts:

- Nearly all school districts utilize a form of neighborhood schools but most also provide an opportunity for choice.
- Most districts allow transfers between schools and many still provide transportation to the new school. However, some districts do not provide transportation if a student chooses to make a general administrative transfer.
- Many districts that utilize neighborhood schools guarantee seats at the neighborhood schools but then offer a lottery for some schools. This minimizes the uncertainty for families as they know they will have a seat at their neighborhood school if none of their choice school requests come through.
- Since most districts use a blend of neighborhood schools combined with some choice options, many use feeder schools to provide students with a better idea of their K-12 school path and a higher likelihood that their neighbors will follow the same track.
- Some districts have different zones for each level (elementary, middle, and high) to better assist in providing enough school seats per zone. The number of students per area is different between levels in order to allow the boundaries to respond to school capacity.

# Atlanta GA



Atlanta	
<b>Total Number</b>	99
<b># Elementary</b>	55
<b># K-8</b>	0
<b># Middle School</b>	16
<b># K-12</b>	0
<b># 6 - 12</b>	0
<b># High School</b>	25
<b># Alternative Schools</b>	3
LEP/Special Needs %	
<b>LEP</b>	N/A
<b>Special Needs</b>	N/A

**District Overview:** Neighborhood plus Choice

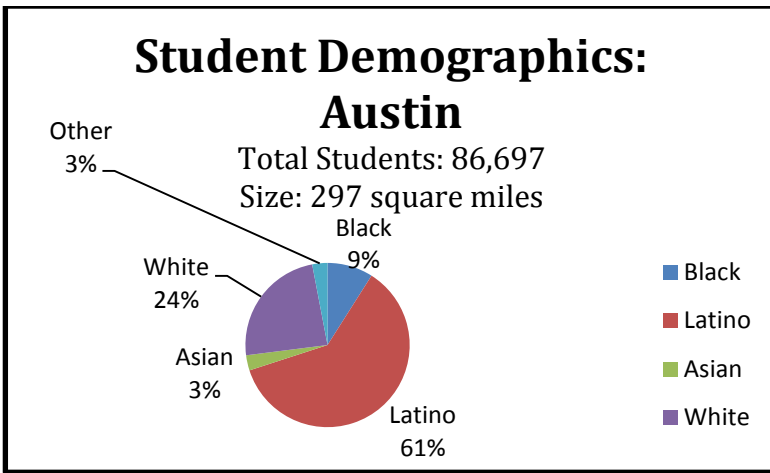
**Student Assignment:**

- Utilize neighborhood schools with different zones for elementary, middle and high schools, and there are feeder patterns for students throughout all levels of school.
- Students are guaranteed seats at their attendance schools.
- Students can transfer out of Title 1 schools to other schools that have available space.
- If there are more students transferring than available seats then a lottery is used to determine placement.
- Charters are open to all students but each charter can set their own geographic enrollment priority zone and any space available after initial registration is filled via lottery.

**Transportation:**

- If transferring from a Title 1 school then the student will receive transportation services to the new school.
- If a student makes a general administrative transfer, then the parent is responsible for all transportation.

# Austin ISD



Austin ISD	
<b>Total Number</b>	124
<b># Elementary</b>	81
<b># K-8</b>	0
<b># Middle School</b>	18
<b># K-12</b>	0
<b># 6 - 12</b>	0
<b># High School</b>	16
<b># Alternative Schools</b>	9
LEP/Special Needs %	
<b>LEP</b>	27
<b>Special Needs</b>	10

## District Overview: Neighborhood plus Choice

### Student Assignment:

- Students are assigned to attendance area schools, and enter feeder patterns through high school. Several elementary schools create feeder pools for middle schools.
- School choice is offered under the transfer program. Priority transfers are granted for: siblings, majority-to-minority (where a school accepts minority students outside the attendance area to create more integrated schools), and tracking (feeder pattern) transfers.
- Non-priority transfers are granted after priority transfers are made. Non-priority transfers are granted for curriculum and general choice requests.
- Students can apply to magnet programs but these have selective admissions criteria.

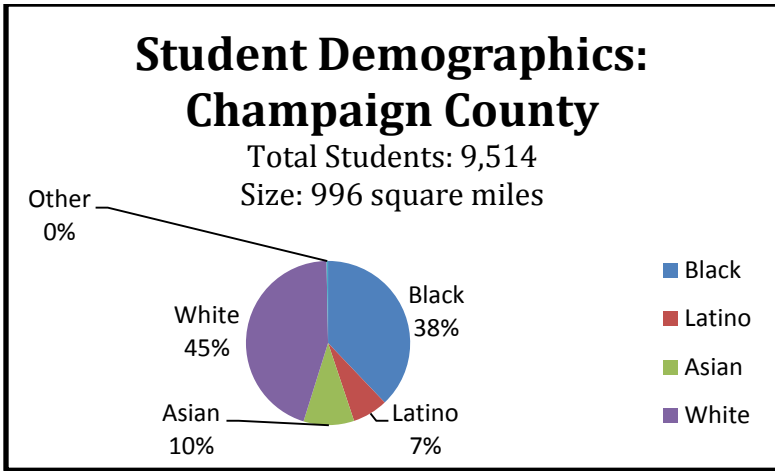
### Transportation:

- Students who live 2 or more miles from their assigned school are provided transportation.
- Use yellow bus service almost exclusively. Some high school students and students in extracurricular activities use public transportation.
- Buses are used for routes with 10 or more students; cars or vans are used for routes with fewer.

### Other Information:

- Allow intra-district transfers; two types: priority/non-priority; selected by lottery.
- Priority transfers include: sibling considerations, ethnic diversity, and tracking (staying within the new feeder pattern after a previous transfer).
- General non-priority transfer requests are accepted and based on lottery and available space/staff.

# Champaign County IL



Champaign County	
<b>Total Number</b>	17
<b># Elementary</b>	11
<b># K-8</b>	0
<b># Middle School</b>	3
<b># K-12</b>	0
<b># 6 - 12</b>	0
<b># High School</b>	2
<b># Alternative Schools</b>	1
LEP/Special Needs %	
<b>LEP</b>	6
<b>Special Needs</b>	N/A

**District Overview:** Choice with local priority

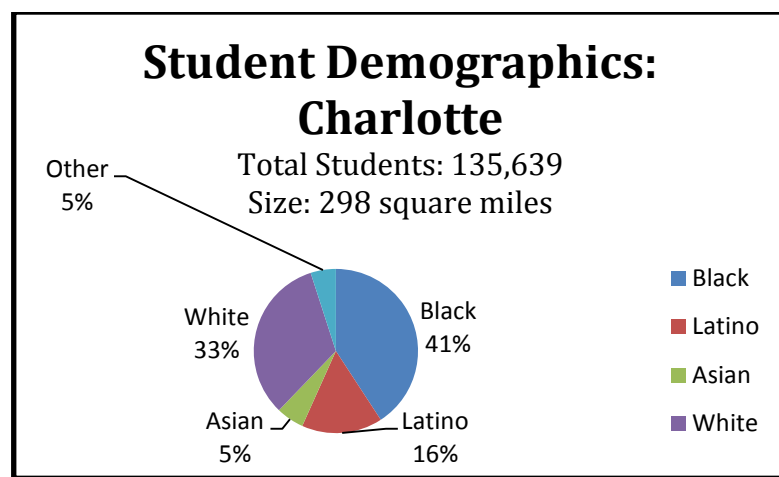
**Student Assignment:**

- Utilize a choice system.
- After sibling priority, 82% of seat priority goes to students within 1.5 miles of school zone.
- Elementary school clusters have priority to assigned middle schools through a feeder pattern.

**Transportation:**

- Provide transportation to all students that need to travel farther than 1.5 miles to get to school.
- Students who live less than 1.5 miles from school but still travel through a dangerous area are able to receive bus transportation.
- Once enrolled in a school, a student is guaranteed that they will not have to switch schools even if they move and they will continue to receive bus transportation.
- Bus transportation for magnets is only available to a magnet that falls within a student's transportation zone.

## Charlotte – Mecklenburg NC



Charlotte	
<b>Total Number</b>	173
<b># Elementary</b>	100
<b># K-8</b>	0
<b># Middle School</b>	36
<b># K-12</b>	0
<b># 6 - 12</b>	0
<b># High School</b>	33
<b># Alternative Schools</b>	4
LEP/Special Needs %	
<b>LEP</b>	10
<b>Special Needs</b>	N/A

**District Overview:** Neighborhood only

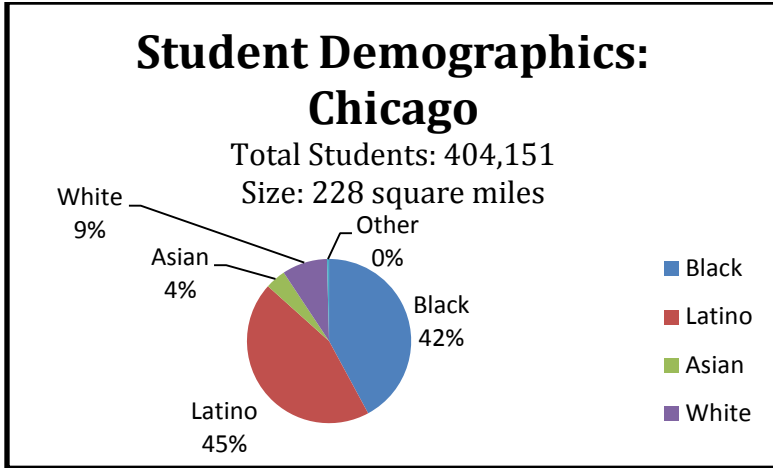
### **Student Assignment:**

- Assignments for each level of school are based on address and students are guaranteed seats at these attendance area schools.
- Feeder patterns exist for students through each level of school.
- Students are eligible to transfer from their school if it is a Title 1 school.
- If making a Title 1 transfer then the student receives transfer priority over other students who are making general transfers.
- Magnet schools are open to all students via lottery.

### **Transportation:**

- Transportation is only provided for students to magnet schools if the magnet falls within the transportation zone.
- If a student chooses to attend a lottery school that is not in their zone then they would not receive transportation services.

# Chicago



Chicago	
<b>Total Number</b>	675
<b># Elementary</b>	0
<b># K-8</b>	474
<b># Middle School</b>	0
<b># K-12</b>	0
<b># 6 - 12</b>	0
<b># High School</b>	106
<b># Alternative Schools</b>	0

LEP/Special Needs %	
<b>LEP</b>	12
<b>Special Needs</b>	11

**District Overview:** Neighborhood plus Choice

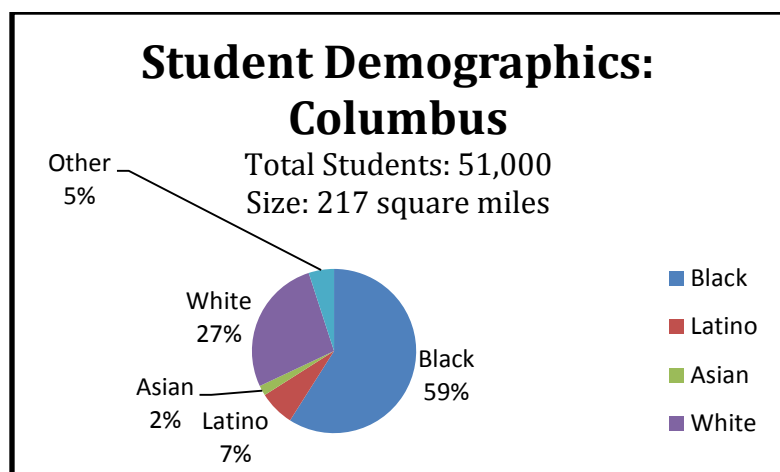
## Student Assignment:

- Every student in Chicago has a CPS neighborhood school corresponding to an attendance boundary.
- Generally, all students who live within the boundaries of their neighborhood schools may attend the school.
- Students living within the attendance boundaries typically do not need to apply to that school, unless the school is on Controlled Enrollment, which means that the school is not enrolling neighborhood children because it is overcrowded.
- The CPS Open Enrollment Policy allows a student to apply to a school outside the neighborhood when space is available.
- The policy only applies to schools that have attendance boundaries and each school determines how many Open Enrollment students it can accept. This policy does not apply to schools on Controlled Enrollment.
- Acceptance into some schools and programs depends on a number of factors, including location, academic achievement, and/or selection by lottery. The criteria, with which students are accepted into non-neighborhood schools, vary across schools. The most commonly used are
  - Random Lottery
  - Academic Achievement, Test Scores, & other factors

## Transportation:

- Assist parents with transportation once their student has been accepted into an academic enhancement program outside of their neighborhood.
- Ensure students with disabilities are able to attend programs that meet their needs.
- School bus service is provided to selected programs and when the student lives between 1.5 and 6 miles from their attending school.

# Columbus, OH



Columbus	
<b>Total Number</b>	115
<b># Elementary</b>	66
<b># K-8</b>	5
<b># Middle School</b>	20
<b># K-12</b>	1
<b># 6 - 12</b>	1
<b># High School</b>	19
<b># Alternative Schools</b>	3
<b>LEP/Special Needs %</b>	
<b>LEP</b>	10
<b>Special Needs</b>	17

**District Overview:** Neighborhood plus Choice

### **Student Assignment:**

- Students are assigned to schools by neighborhood attendance zones; enter feeder patterns into middle and high schools.
- Students can apply to other schools where space is available. Selection is made through a lottery process.
- Students have additional choices between: neighborhood, magnet, IB, arts schools.

### **Transportation:**

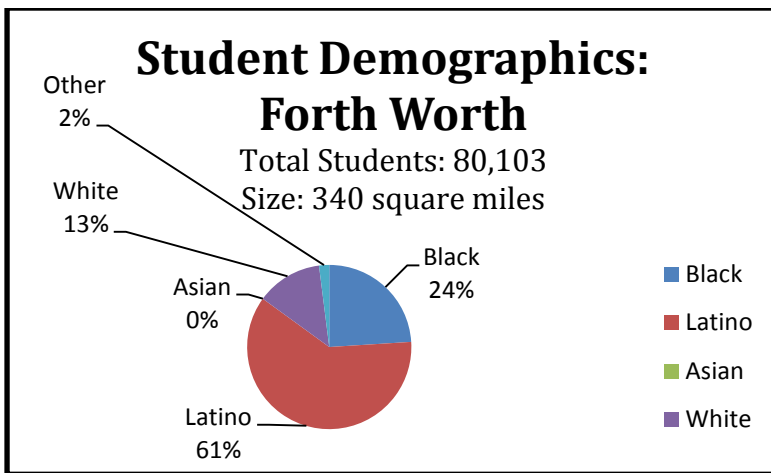
- Students who live 2 or more miles from their assigned school are provided transportation. Transportation is provided to students who choose schools outside of attendance zones.
- Yellow buses are almost exclusively used; public transportation is used for some high school students and off-campus programs.

### **Other Information:**

- One school is devoted to accelerating ESL students (6-12)
- Magnets have open enrollment, citywide draw.
- District has IB/AP High School available exclusively through lottery.



# Fort Worth ISD



Fort Worth	
<b>Total Number</b>	140
<b># Elementary</b>	81
<b># K-8</b>	0
<b># Middle School</b>	25
<b># K-12</b>	0
<b># 6 - 12</b>	0
<b># High School</b>	13
<b># Alternative Schools</b>	21
LEP/Special Needs %	
<b>LEP</b>	27
<b>Special Needs</b>	7

**District Overview:** Neighborhood plus Choice

## Student Assignment:

- Students are assigned to neighborhood attendance area schools and enter feeder patterns through middle and high schools.
- Families opt-in to school/program of choice (magnet programs); these students receive priority placement. A lottery is used to determine choice placements.
- Students who transfer under choice do not enter a new feeder pattern; they must reapply to schools at every level if they wish to remain in the new school's feeder pattern.

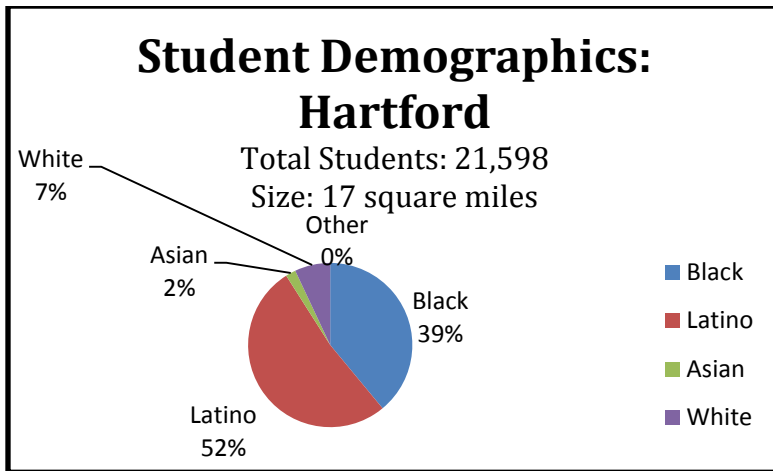
## Transportation:

- Students who live 2 or more miles from their assigned school are provided transportation.
- Transportation is provided to students accepted into programs outside of their attendance zone.
- Out of district students are accepted into district schools, but they must provide their own transportation.

## Other Information:

- Students not selected by lottery are assigned to attendance area schools.
- Students may not apply to more than three programs; must rank choices.
- Choice programs within attendance zones must be applied for. Students are given sibling priority and priority if the choice program is located at a student's attendance area school.

# Hartford, CT



Hartford	
<b>Total Number</b>	64
<b># Elementary</b>	29
<b># K-8</b>	0
<b># Middle School</b>	25
<b># K-12</b>	0
<b># 6 - 12</b>	0
<b># High School</b>	10
<b># Alternative Schools</b>	0
LEP/Special Needs %	
<b>LEP</b>	15
<b>Special Needs</b>	14

**District Overview:** Neighborhood plus Choice

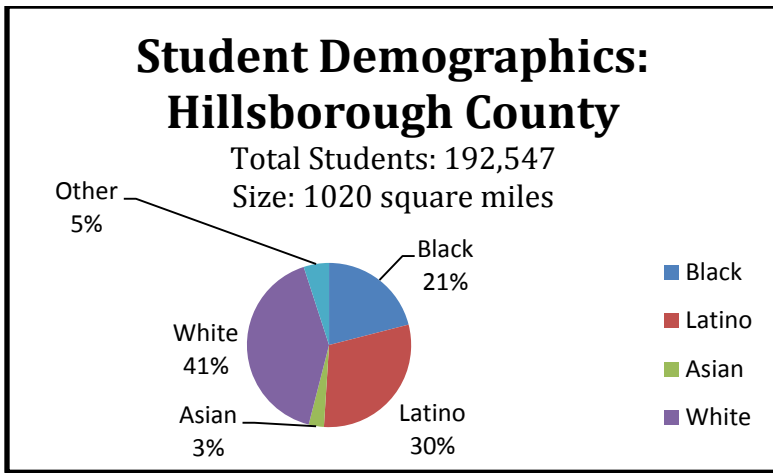
## **Student Assignment:**

- Students are reserved a space within their neighborhood school.
- Students entering the district or attending a new school after elementary or middle school are required to fill out an application. The application information is used to assign students to appropriate schools.
- Students can enroll in the Hartford Choice Program, which allows students to apply to schools outside of their assigned neighborhood school. This process requires an application.
- Students who have graduated from a K-5 school or 6-8 school are labeled “transition students” and have to fill out an application and request their top 4 schools.
- Students are guaranteed one of their top 4 schools.

## **Transportation:**

- Transportation will be provided when a child in:
  - Kindergarten and grade 1 lives 0.5 miles or more from the school.
  - Grades 2, 3, 4, or 5 live 1 mile or more from the school.
  - Grades 6, 7, or 8 live 1.5 miles or more from the school.
  - Grades 9, 10, 11, or 12 live 2 miles or more from the school.
- Transportation will not be provided for elementary students placed in a school where the parent has chosen and accepted placement to a school outside of their home zone.

# Hillsborough County FL



Hillsborough County	
<b>Total Number</b>	224
<b># Elementary</b>	142
<b># K-8</b>	2
<b># Middle School</b>	44
<b># K-12</b>	0
<b># 6 - 12</b>	0
<b># High School</b>	27
<b># Alternative Schools</b>	9
LEP/Special Needs %	
<b>LEP</b>	N/A
<b>Special Needs</b>	N/A

**District Overview:** Neighborhood plus Choice

**Student Assignment:**

- Utilize neighborhood schools but also provide families with choice options through choice, magnet, and charter schools.
- Students are guaranteed seats at their attendance school.

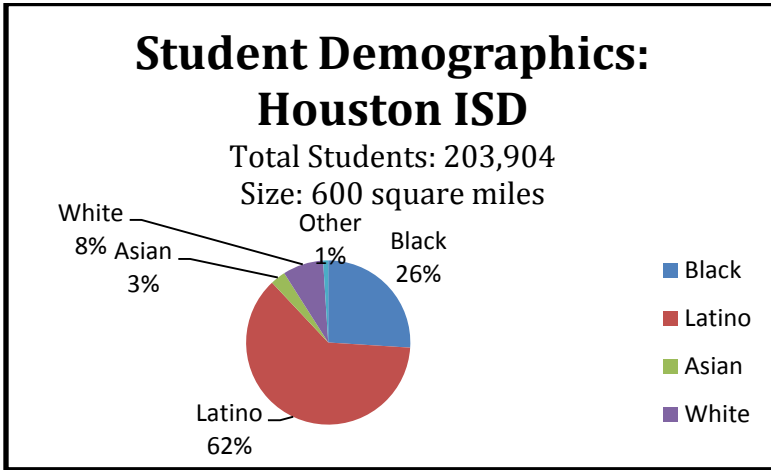
**Transportation:**

- Students receive transportation if they live farther than 2 miles from school.
- All magnets and some choice schools guarantee transportation for students.

**Other Information:**

- Prior to switching over to this system, the district identified areas that needed relief due to increased student population and either a new school would be added or zone boundaries would change.

# Houston ISD



Houston ISD	
<b>Total Number</b>	303
<b># Elementary</b>	170
<b># K-8</b>	5
<b># Middle School</b>	42
<b># K-12</b>	1
<b># 6 - 12</b>	1
<b># High School</b>	55
<b># Alternative Schools</b>	29
LEP/Special Needs %	
<b>LEP</b>	30
<b>Special Needs</b>	8

**District Overview:** Neighborhood plus Choice

## **Student Assignment:**

- Students are assigned to home/zoned schools and enter feeder patterns from elementary to middle to high school, but may apply for a variety of transfer options depending on certain circumstances: majority-to-minority (where a school only accepts minority students outside the attendance area to create more integrated schools), space-available, out-of-district, violent-crime victim, unsafe school, adequate yearly progress.
- When parents exercise choice and move a student outside their attendance zone, schools require that students remain at the new school for the rest of the year.
- Students may apply to magnet programs and in-district charters via special transfers, majority-to-minority ethnicity transfers, and space available transfers.

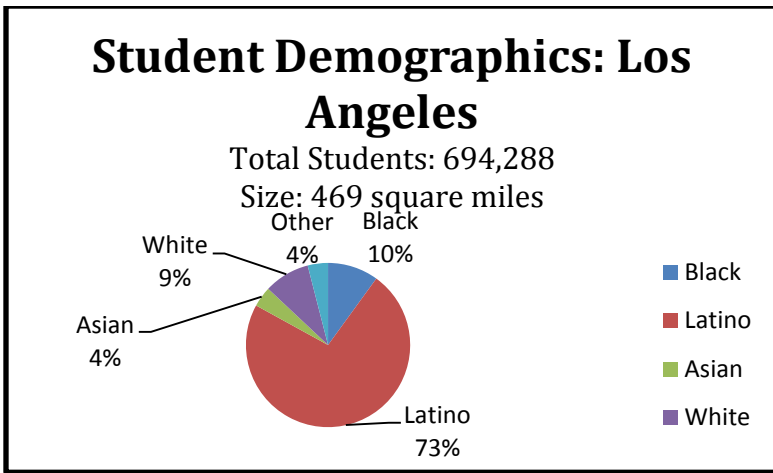
## **Transportation:**

- Students who live 2 or more miles from their assigned school are provided transportation.
- Middle and high schools rely partially on public buses (where public routes are available).
- Students who exercise choice (except for special transfers, SPED, majority-to-minority, AYP) must provide their own transportation. The district provides discounted public transportation (50% off) for students age 6 and up.

## **Other Information:**

- Special Transfers granted for: Honors, IB, JROTC, unsafe schools, AYP, certain hardships.
- Special Transfer Criteria: programs not available, available space, meet admissions criteria, one-year commitment.

# Los Angeles Unified



Los Angeles	
<b>Total Number</b>	743
<b># Elementary</b>	448
<b># K-8</b>	-
<b># Middle School</b>	85
<b># K-12</b>	-
<b># 6 - 12</b>	-
<b># High School</b>	94
<b># Alternative Schools</b>	116

Special Needs/LEP %	
<b>LEP</b>	26
<b>Special Needs</b>	10

**District Overview:** Neighborhood plus Choice

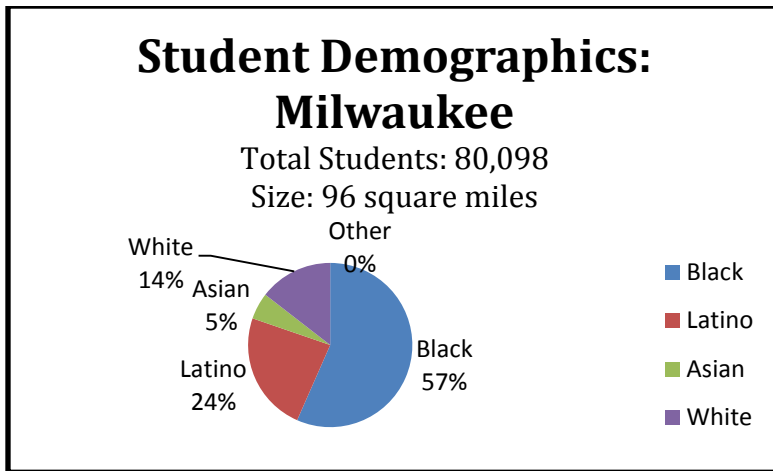
## Student Assignment:

- Utilize neighborhood schools with different zones for elementary, middle and high schools.
- Students are assigned seats at their attendance schools.
- Students can transfer out of Title 1 schools to other schools that have available space.
- District has 172 open-enrollment Magnet Programs; students must apply and meet eligibility criteria.
- If there are more students transferring than available seats then a lottery is used to determine placement.
- Charters are open to all students but each charter can set their own geographic enrollment priority zone and any space available after initial registration is filled via lottery.

## Transportation:

- If a student transfers from a Title 1 general school then the student will be receive transportation.
- If a student makes an administrative transfer then the parent provides transportation.
- Transportation is provided to students accepted into citywide magnets.

# Milwaukee, Wisconsin



Milwaukee	
<b>Total Number</b>	175
<b># Elementary</b>	116
<b># K-8</b>	-
<b># Middle School</b>	7
<b># K-12</b>	-
<b># 6 - 12</b>	-
<b># High School</b>	29
<b># Alternative Schools</b>	19

LEP/Special Needs %	
<b>LEP</b>	10
<b>Special Needs</b>	20

**District Overview:** Neighborhood plus Choice

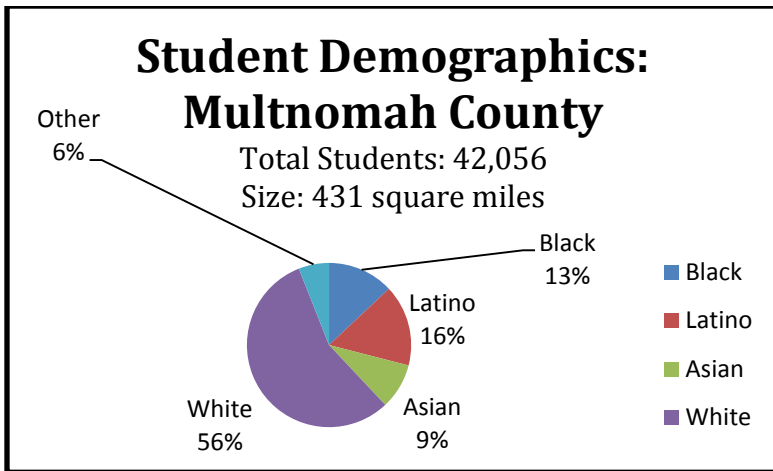
**Student Assignment:**

- In K-8 school settings students are allowed to request their top three schools. If they choose a school in their neighborhood there is a high likelihood they will be placed in their top school.
- High school enrollment is the same as K-8 enrollment, with the exception being some specialty schools have separate applications and entrance requirements. Students with a higher rate of attendance in middle school are given higher preference to high schools.
- Open Enrollment is the process of applying to schools statewide, or schools outside of your district. Acceptance is dependent upon available seats.

**Transportation:**

- In grades K-8, students enrolled in a school more than 2 miles from their home qualify for bus transportation.
- In grades 9-12, students enrolled in a school more than 2 miles from their home and 1 mile from public transportation qualify for bus transportation.
- Students enrolled in schools outside of the district through Open Enrollment do not qualify for bus transportation.

# Multnomah County, OR



Multnomah County	
<b>Total Number</b>	80
<b># Elementary</b>	27
<b># K-8</b>	31
<b># Middle School</b>	10
<b># K-12</b>	1
<b># 6 - 12</b>	1
<b># High School</b>	10
<b># Alternative Schools</b>	0
LEP/Special Needs %	
<b>LEP</b>	N/A
<b>Special Needs</b>	N/A

**District Overview:** Neighborhood with Choice

**Student Assignment:**

- Students have guaranteed seats at their neighborhood schools.
- A transfer lottery is held for students that wish to attend a school different from their neighborhood school.

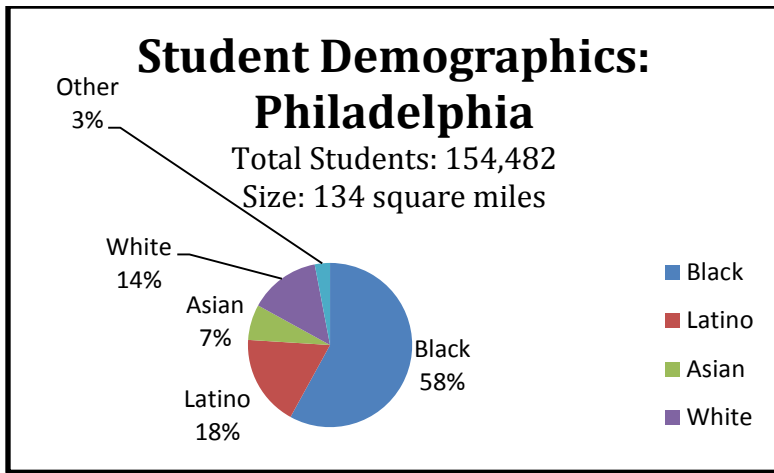
**Transportation:**

- Transportation is provided for the following students who live farther than: 1 mile for elementary, 1.5 miles for middle and high schools.
- Transfer students receive transportation if they were transferred due to district initiative or for an opportunity to an educational program that was not available at their neighborhood school.

**Other Information:**

- Have had issues with managing capacity because students are able to transfer out of underperforming schools.

# Philadelphia PA



Philadelphia	
<b>Total Number</b>	257
<b># Elementary</b>	171
<b># K-8</b>	0
<b># Middle School</b>	25
<b># K-12</b>	0
<b># 6 - 12</b>	0
<b># High School</b>	61
<b># Alternative Schools</b>	0
LEP/Special Needs %	
<b>LEP</b>	8
<b>Special Needs</b>	14

**District Overview:** Neighborhood plus Choice

**Student Assignment:**

- Students are guaranteed seats at schools within attendance zones and have feeder pattern options throughout each level of school.
- A select number of high schools have admissions criteria and are available city-wide.
- Students may apply to any school that has availability regardless of boundary lines and acceptance is determined by lottery.
- Students are eligible to transfer if their school does not make annual yearly progress and priority is given to students with the lowest incomes and lowest test scores.
- The district website lists all of the schools that have room to receive students as well as the school's students are allowed to apply out of.

**Transportation:**

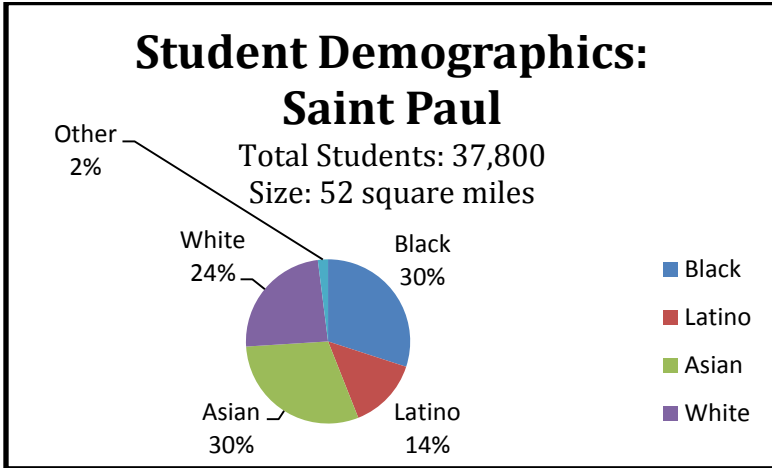
- Transportation is provided to elementary students that live farther than 1.5 miles from their assigned school. Middle and high school students are eligible to receive free Trans passes.
- Students that do not attend a neighborhood school are responsible for their own transportation.

**Other Information:**

- Two thirds of charters are citywide and the rest are neighborhood based.
- Charters have their own assignment policies and provide transportation to students.



## Saint Paul, MN



Saint Paul	
<b>Total Number</b>	57
<b># Elementary</b>	37
<b># K-8</b>	2
<b># Middle School</b>	4
<b># K-12</b>	1
<b># 6 - 12</b>	3
<b># High School</b>	5
<b># Alternative Schools</b>	5
<b>LEP/Special Needs %</b>	
<b>LEP</b>	N/A
<b>Special Needs</b>	18

**District Overview:** Neighborhood plus Choice

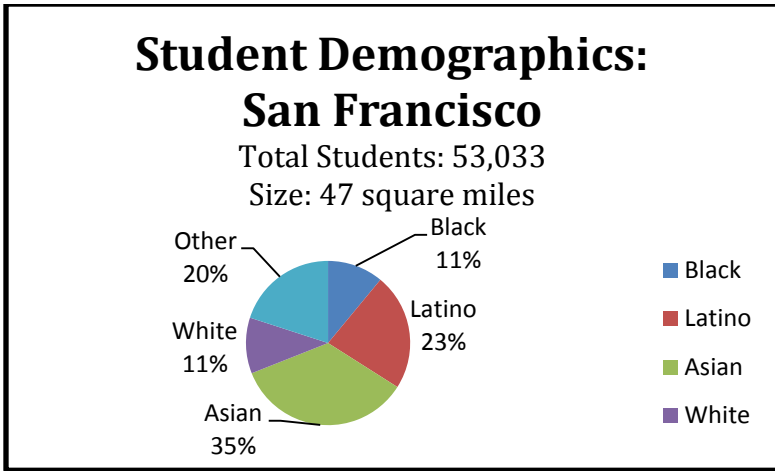
### **Student Assignment:**

- Each student is assigned to a school based on address.
- Students are able to select different schools during the application process.
- Students are allowed to transfer if there is availability at the desired school.
- Day care transfers (where families want their child to attend a school closer to their day care provider rather than home) are permitted as long as the new school is within the attendance area.

### **Transportation:**

- Students need to live farther than 1 mile from their attendance area school or attend a city-wide magnet school to be eligible for transportation.
- Transportation is not usually provided for elementary transfers outside of an attendance area.

# San Francisco, CA



San Francisco	
<b>Total Number</b>	124
<b># Elementary</b>	81
<b># K-8</b>	-
<b># Middle School</b>	18
<b># K-12</b>	-
<b># 6 - 12</b>	-
<b># High School</b>	16
<b># Alternative Schools</b>	3

Special Needs/LEP %	
<b>LEP</b>	28
<b>Special Needs</b>	10

**District Overview:** Complete Choice

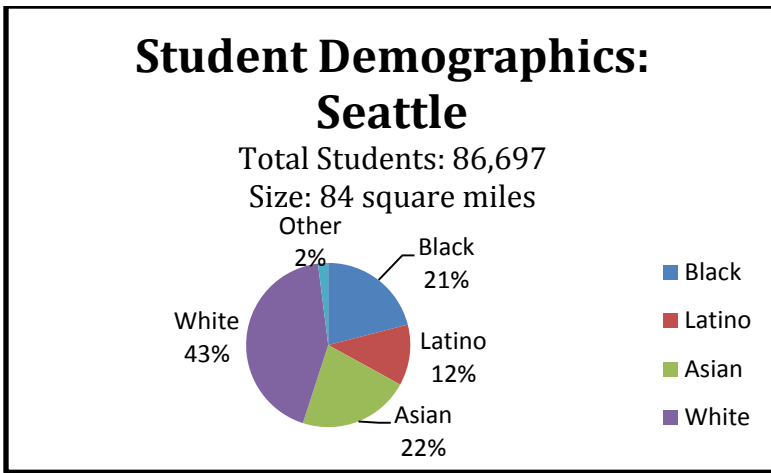
## Student Assignment:

- There are no guaranteed seats at any school, even within an attendance zone.
- Parents submit ranked choices; students are given highest choice if there are open seats.
- If there are more requests than openings, a set of ranked tiebreakers is triggered.
- Tiebreakers include: Pre-k attendance, attendance area, language program attendees, siblings, and combinations of these factors.
- Additional tiebreaker preference given to students who live in areas with the lowest quintile of test scores, students in densely populated areas, and students attending a Program Improvement (Title I) school.

## Transportation:

- Bus transportation is provided to elementary students outside walk zones (in most cases).
- Some schools provide no transportation due to low ridership. These schools suggest alternate methods (walking, biking, carpooling, and public transit) as alternatives.
- Limited transportation is provided for students who must take hazardous routes.
- Limited transportation exists for middle school students, where reasonable public transportation is not available.
- General education high school students are responsible for their own transportation.
- SFUSD provides limited free MUNI passes for low-income families (up to 12,000 passes).

# Seattle Public Schools



Seattle	
<b>Total Number</b>	91
<b># Elementary</b>	54
<b># K-8</b>	10
<b># Middle School</b>	9
<b># K-12</b>	0
<b># 6 - 12</b>	0
<b># High School</b>	12
<b># Alternative Schools</b>	6
<b>LEP/Special Needs %</b>	
<b>LEP</b>	24
<b>Special Needs</b>	14

**District Overview:** Neighborhood plus Choice

**Student Assignment:**

- 3 different types of schools are utilized: Attendance – applies to all grade levels and each student has a feeder middle school. Option – citywide schools that require application for entrance. Geographic priority still applies to Option schools. Service – SPED schools.
- Guarantee seats in attendance area but still offer school choice via option schools.
- High schools have different boundary lines than elementary/middle schools.
- Sibling priority is the highest weighted factor in determining school.

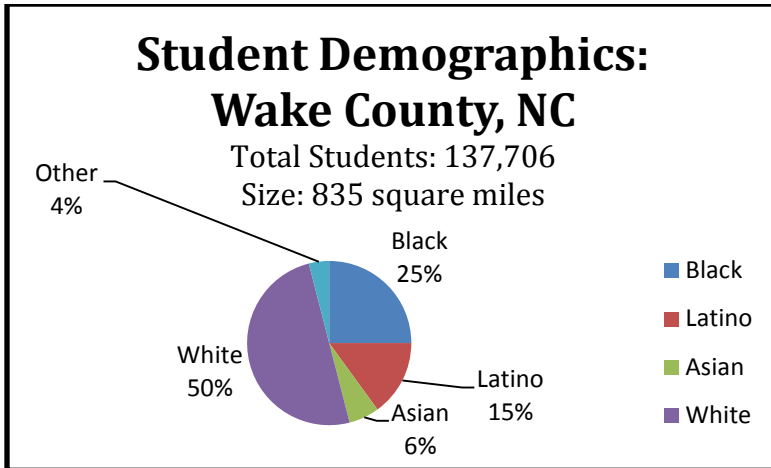
**Transportation:**

- Students living outside of walk zones receive bus transportation. The walk zones are 1.25 miles for elementary, 2 miles for middle and 2.5 miles for high school.
- In the last revision to plan, the walk zone was extended for elementary from 1 to 1.25 miles to reduce transportation costs, reduce transit time, and eliminate some buses.
- High school and middle school students who live near metro bus lines receive bus passes.

**Other Information:**

- The focus of the new student assignment system was to provide more equity, predictability, and minimize transportation costs.
- Geographic priority zones exist for Option schools but they are not a guarantee of seats.
- In addition to many community engagement events, the district offered drop-in meetings where anyone could come in to speak to staff to allow single issue stakeholders adequate time to present concerns/questions.

# Wake County, NC Schools



Wake County	
<b>Total Number</b>	165
<b># Elementary</b>	104
<b># K-8</b>	-
<b># Middle School</b>	32
<b># K-12</b>	-
<b># 6 - 12</b>	-
<b># High School</b>	25
<b># Alternative Schools</b>	4

LEP/Special Needs %	
<b>LEP</b>	8
<b>Special Needs</b>	13

**District Overview:** Hybrid Circle plan/ Neighborhood plus Choice

## Student Assignment:

- Different types of schools are utilized: Choice – applies to all grade levels and each school has a feeder middle school. Magnet Schools – citywide schools that require application for entrance. Year-round schools are also available.
- District divided into more than 700 zones, called “nodes.” A student’s node determines their list of choice schools; the list is based on proximity.
- Students may apply to any of the proximity elementary schools available (at least 5 per node), as well as magnet and city-wide exam schools.
- Elementary schools follow feeder patterns into middle and high schools.
- If oversubscribed, siblings, proximity, diversity, transportation patterns, and choice round become factors in assignments. Siblings and proximity are the highest-ranked priorities.

## Transportation:

- High school and middle school students who live near metro bus lines receive bus passes.

## Other Information:

- Focus was to provide more equity, predictability, and minimize transportation costs.
- Geographic priority zones exist for Option schools but they are not a guarantee of seats.