

We believe great schools matter, and that they change lives.

The implementation of equitable and efficient enrollment policies, practices, and processes are essential to ensure all students can access great schools.

Background

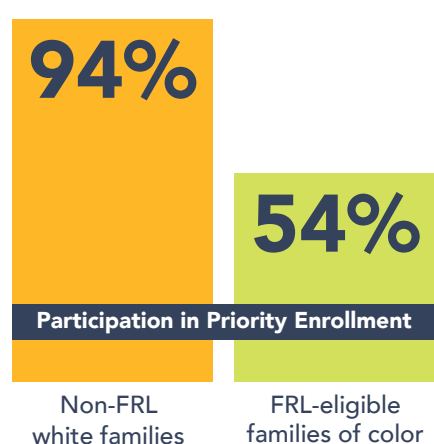
In May 2020, the Minneapolis Board of Education approved the district's Comprehensive District Design plan that—over the course of the school year—will consolidate neighborhood school attendance zones and centralize geographically the location of magnet schools to reduce racially isolated schools and make varied academic programming more accessible to all families.

To effectively implement the CDD and build school communities that are more diverse, the Minneapolis Public Schools will need to redesign its enrollment policies and practices to be more racially equitable—so families of color can have a fair chance at the district's most sought after schools—and build school communities that are more diverse.

The district's EDIA Committee found that the district would need to make significant revisions to its enrollment processes, practices, and policies in order to improve families' experiences with school placement.

By the numbers

The Minneapolis district's strategic planning process unearthed numerous trends¹ that speak to families' experiences; among them are two that we found particularly relevant:



Best practices

These three components exist in cities where families are experiencing fair, meaningful school placement processes:

- 1 Robust parent engagement campaigns** that effectively reach historically underserved communities and neighborhoods, encouraging full participation in the placement process
- 2 Clear, transparent placement processes and practices** that are easily accessible to all families and followed by all placement center staff to ensure a uniform placement experience for all families
- 3 Matching rules** that reduce the manipulable mechanisms in school choice to ensure families with more resources are not able to inequitably benefit from the system

Top 10 solutions

1. Ensure every BIPOC and/or FRL family receives at least one individual touch point from the placement office during enrollment period.
2. Use communication mediums that traditionally underserved families prefer (e.g., phone calls, texting, door-to-door canvassing).
3. Translate everything.
4. Employ sufficient numbers of native-speaking staff in the enrollment center.
5. Allow families to list more than three school preferences when applying, and clearly communicate that listing true preferences is the best way for families to achieve their best outcome
6. Create "well-functioning aftermarkets," such as multiple enrollment windows, not making multiple acceptance offers to the same student, etc.
7. Positively influence market inputs—such as increasing school information (academic and non-academic) available to parents.
8. Clearly and publicly describe placement rules; they should be simple and easy to understand. Make sure all placement staff are trained on the rules and are describing them the same way to all families.
9. Minimize the number of district staff making actual placements to help ensure uniformity.
10. Put in place a periodic external audit of school placements—and make findings available to the public.



Advice from enrollment experts

MPS has already made significant commitments to revising enrollment practices and processes. These include merging the data center and family center to increase staff capacity, as well as launching an innovative mobile enrollment center to target underserved neighborhoods. We applaud these efforts, and wanted to highlight other ways that major U.S. districts have realized and championed equitable enrollment processes.

We spoke with enrollment experts across the country who have or are on a similar journey as the Minneapolis Public Schools, as well as reviewed literature around enrollment systems practices to offer up some key practices that the Minneapolis district could replicate to achieve its goal of delivering a well-rounded education for all students, no matter their race, culture, or zip code.

Examples from around the country

Denver Public Schools²—robust parent engagement campaigns target traditionally underserved communities:



- Each family gets at least three phone calls throughout the enrollment period by placement center staff reminding them to enroll their child during the enrollment period, as well as offering assistance in online application completion.
- Staff identifies communication mediums underserved parents prefer, resulting in increased investments in texting-based communication to complement phone outreach.
- The placement center translates everything into widely spoken languages and employs significant numbers of native-speaking staff.

New Orleans³—clear, transparent placement processes and practices:



- EnrollNOLA clearly and publicly describes enrollment rules in a parent-friendly manner, such as this [well-viewed animated video](#) (24,000 views) produced in commonly spoken languages.
- Placement center clearly states its values of fairness, transparency, and efficiency on this [parent-facing website](#).
- Placement center staff are trained to describe the rules and processes the same way to every family.
- Periodic third-party audits ensure that all student placements follow the rules.

Chicago⁴—lotteries designed to minimize benefits for families with greater access to information:



- Chicago Public Schools is one of many cities that uses an algorithm, called "deferred acceptance," to match students to school. This makes school placements fairer and does not allow more affluent families to strategize to ensure their child's placement in their top choice school.

Outcomes

As a result of these reforms, these cities have seen an increase in the number of families participating in the enrollment period (e.g., Denver saw 78% of the FRL families participate in the first round of its enrollment period).

Footnotes & references

- ¹ Findings presented by Eric Moore to the Minneapolis Board of Education on behalf of the 'Students Placement Equity and Diversity Impact Assessment (EDIA)' on 11/26/2019.
- ² Denver information was obtained through interviews with Liz Mendez, executive director of enrollment and campus planning, and Laurie Premer, director of choice for Denver Public Schools, and through the website: schoolchoice.dpsk12.org.
- ³ New Orleans was obtained through an interview with Gabriela Fighetti, a former assistant superintendent for the Louisiana Recovery School District, and through the website: enrollnola.org/about/about-oneapp.
- ⁴ Chicago's experience with matching algorithms taken from 'What Really Matters in Designing School Choice Mechanisms,' a literature overview by Parag A. Pathak of MIT.

About Great MN Schools

We believe great schools change lives. We see first-hand how some schools in our community demonstrate that children from all races, means, and origins can achieve. We need more of them—district, public charter, and independent—because all children should be able to attend high-performing schools that prepare them to thrive in their lives, careers, and communities.

We're keenly—and uniquely—focused on developing and sustaining schools that work:

- We partner with promising schools guiding their improvement and growth, strengthening students' learning experiences, and advancing educational outcomes
- Working with community-based partners, we support families in making informed decisions on enrollment and advocating for their children within schools
- We engage the community as partners, building support for proven solutions