

Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Board of Education
School Choice Special Committee
MINUTES
March 4, 2019
5:00 p.m., Education Building Room 223

Board of Education Members Present:

- Andrea Bramer*, Committee Chair
- Barbara Burke
- Lori Goins Clark*
- Leah Crowley
- Dana Caudill Jones*
- Deanna Kaplan*
- Malishai Woodbury*

*Voting member of the committee

Committee Chair Andrea Bramer called the meeting to order at 5:04 p.m. and asked Board members to introduce themselves.

Mr. Homan Atashbar, Director of Student Assignment, provided copies of requested [data](#) and presented information regarding current choice practices.

His presentation may be found [here](#).

Mr. Atashbar started with the information regarding high school. Sixty-nine percent of high school students attend their residential high school. The 31% of students who do not may have utilized one of the following options:

- Magnet Assignment
- Choice Transfer Assignment
- Special Transfer
- Grandfathering

The district offers 8 high schools with magnet programs.

For a “choice transfer,” students request one other high school, which is not guaranteed and transportation is not provided.

Mr. Atashbar shared that 58% of middle school students attend their residential school. The 42% of students who do not may have utilized one of the following options:

- Magnet Assignment
- Choice – 3 schools per zone
- Out-of-zone Request
- Special Transfer
- Grandfathering

Ms. Leah Crowley asked what would be an example of a “special transfer.” Mr. Atashbar responded that, when granted, it is usually the result of an extreme situation and there is capacity at the requested school.

Mr. Atashbar provided an overview of the middle school zones, which may be viewed on [Slide #6](#). He also explained that a few schools are assigned to dual zones, either by boundary or by geography.

Ms. Bramer expressed that the dual assignments are a big mess.

Mr. Atashbar shared an explanation of the middle school magnet schools.

He also explained that students may choose top two schools in zone, one of which is guaranteed and transportation is provided. For an out-of-zone request, students may pick one school and transportation is not provided.

Mr. Atashbar stated that 37% of elementary students attend their residential schools, while 63% of elementary students do not. Students have the same options as middle school students for opting out of their residential school.

Mr. Atashbar explained the elementary choice zones, which may be viewed on [Slide #9](#). Some zones have blue and green sub-zones.

He also reviewed the elementary magnet school options.

For choice, students may choose up to 3 schools, one of which is guaranteed and transportation is provided. For an out-of-zone request, students may pick one school and transportation is not provided.

There are several preferences for student assignment:

- Sibling Preference: Preference is given to younger siblings of students assigned to a school.
- Employee Preference: Preference is given to students to attend the school closest to an employee’s worksite.
- Magnet Program Continuum Preference: Preference is given to students to allow them to continue in a magnet program.

Mr. Atashbar explained the special transfer request assignment. A request may be made during the school year for the remainder of the school year. The request is made to the instructional superintendent’s office. Parents may request one school based on good and substantial reasons.

Ms. Bramer asked about principal-to-principal transfer. Mr. Atashbar responded that the district did away with that practice a few years ago, mostly due to the class size legislation. Ms. Bramer stressed the importance of involving the principal, who knows the strengths of the students and of the receiving school.

Mr. Atashbar shared about special program assignments, which may include the following:

- EC
- ESL
- HAG
- Alternative Education
- Foreign Exchange Student
- Project Hope

Mr. Atashbar outlined the appeals process for assignment, which is included on [Slide #15](#).

Mr. Atashbar invited Board members to look over the [data](#) he provided. He shared the district attendance by demographics and how the reporting has changed over the years.

He shared the data around the high school residential populations by demographic designation.

Ms. Bramer clarified that there are disparities within residential boundaries by demographic designation.

Ms. Crowley asked if the data reflected students attending public school, and Mr. Atashbar confirmed.

Ms. Bramer pointed out that some schools have much higher percentage of students choosing to attend their residential school. Ms. Malishai Woodbury believes that it is a reflection of the schools' report cards.

Ms. Woodbury asked about the number of students who are residential to Carver but not attending. Mr. Atashbar responded that it could be magnet or choice transfer. Ms. Dana Caudill Jones asked for further clarification, and Mr. Atashbar responded that he would provide the requested information. Ms. Crowley stated that it's one thing if students are leaving to go to a magnet program, it's another thing if they are leaving to go to another traditional program.

Ms. Woodbury stated that the magnet schools, especially at their elementary level, are schools that have had challenges. Mr. Atashbar shared that there has been a philosophy of balancing suburban and urban schools in zones.

Ms. Bramer stated that the Board would like to review magnets as part of this process.

Mr. Atashbar shared additional data for middle and elementary schools in similar format to the high school data.

Ms. Bramer stated that the district's demographics are balanced among the African-American, Hispanic, and White subgroups. Ms. Bramer shared that ethnic data may not be an indicator in student assignment. General Counsel Dionne Jenkins clarified that ethnicity may not be the sole factor to determine student assignment.

Ms. Crowley asked about using socioeconomic data. Ms. Jenkins clarified that socioeconomic data can be used, with permission, but is not generally recommended. The preference is to use neutral data, such as student achievement.

Ms. Bramer asked about school capacity, which Mr. Atashbar agreed to provide.

Ms. Crowley asked if the demographic data is self-reported. She asked for clarification around the residential population at Hanes Magnet School, which has not changed since the school relocated. Ms. Jones provided the rationale behind the intended temporary location for Hanes.

Ms. Bramer asked how many people are actually completing Choice Cards. Mr. Atashbar responded that he will get that data. Ms. Bramer indicated that there are lots of students who do not complete the Choice Cards. Mr. Atashbar explained that most Choice Cards are completed by students transitioning between levels (kindergarten, rising 6th grade).

Ms. Crowley asked if the choice requests are reflected in the data, and what the purpose would be for knowing the data. Ms. Bramer said it's because we are trying to determine if the community likes choice or how they feel about choice. Every student should have an equal opportunity to attend a great school. If students are happy with their residential school, then they're not going to complete a Choice Card.

Ms. Crowley indicated that a choice may not be due to the quality of the residential school, it may be due to pursuing a particular program. There are many students who are opting to attend Speas instead of Sherwood Forest and Whitaker.

Ms. Bramer indicated that parental involvement is an indicator of student success. We need to ask if parents want choice or if parents want to have a school assigned. Ms. Lori Goins Clark indicated that right now parents may choose residential or not. Ms. Bramer explained that it's a whole new ball game. We are starting from scratch.

Ms. Woodbury asked if parents want things to stay what they are but better. Ms. Bramer indicated that we can look at models, but we are limited by transportation needs.

Ms. Jones indicated that there are two different systems. For the last 20-some years, we have had choice instead of assignment. Ms. Crowley indicated that magnet is part of choice.

Ms. Jones asked about Wake's system. Ms. Woodbury indicated that they have magnet programs as choice. Ms. Jones clarified that they don't provide transportation.

Ms. Jones indicated that the previous Board tried to look at choice and provide improved options. Perhaps we need to look at the boundaries of schools, which is easier in some areas than others. If people choose within a zone that reflects the balance of the community, they might feel better about their choices.

Ms. Bramer said that the current system is failing kids. The reading rate is unacceptable. If a school is below 30% in reading, you have destroyed the future for those children. We need to revamp the entire system.

Ms. Jones expressed that she doesn't know how long this is going to take, but we have a middle school coming on line. Ms. Bramer stressed the need to start with kindergarten.

Ms. Crowley stated that there are multiple issues with middle school, including Hanes and Lewisville. Ms. Bramer explained that Hanes is mostly HAG. Ms. Crowley tried to explain that she was referencing the residential students.

Ms. Clark said that parents like the option to choose between a residential school and other schools.

Ms. Bramer explained that there is a need to have a survey available for parents. Ms. Bramer asked Board members to send her questions to be included in a parent survey.

On motion by Ms. Clark and second by Ms. Jones, Ms. Bramer adjourned the meeting at 6:08 p.m.