

The National Association for Education of Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) 2003, position statement on *Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation* recommends assessing children for the following purposes: 1) Making decisions about teaching and learning, 2) identifying significant concerns that may require interventions, and 3) to improve educational and developmental interventions. Assessment tools used must be valid and reliable as set forth in meeting standards set by the American Psychological Association and the National Center for Measurement in Education. Assessments of young children should be made using multiple sources of information and through the use of norm-referenced tests that are limited to situations in which measures are used to identify potential disabilities.

Exhibit I is a copy of the Lowell Public School's School Assignment Policy. The policy does not include any language around assessing student's school readiness for school entry. Schools should be ready to serve all eligible children. After reviewing research on assessment and preschool/kindergarten entrance, I recommend that the district hold firm to its current policy. Considering assessing student's development for exemption to this policy raises many issues around equity. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and dual language learners are most likely to be excluded from early entry. Additionally, research shows that early entry to kindergarten versus on-time entry to kindergarten has little impact on a student's later reading or mathematic success. However, access to preschool makes a difference on academic success upon entry to kindergarten and in third grade reading achievement. Enrollment in full-day preschool and kindergarten has dramatically risen over the last decade (see **Exhibit 2**).

Lowell Public Schools cut-off age for preschool and kindergarten is consistent with the majority of school districts across the state. Information on the cut-off age for kindergarten entrance can be found on the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's website: <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/> under each district's profile: Grades Offered. In a brief review of districts in our area and large urban school districts (see list below), the majority of districts have moved to an August 31st or September 1st cut-off date for kindergarten entrance.

Boston: K2 Kindergarten, 5 by September 1; K-1 Preschool, 2400 seats, 4 by September 1; & K-O Preschool limited # of 3's by September 1.

Brockton: Preschool X BY X has spent the last two years moving toward a Kindergarten cut-off date of 5 by September 1.

Chelsea: Preschool, 4 by August 31; Kindergarten, 5 by August 31.

Chelmsford: Preschool age 3, and Kindergarten 5 on or before August 31; and first grade 6 on or before August 31.

Dracut: Preschool 3 or 4 by August 31; and Kindergarten 5 by August 31.

Lynn: Preschool 4 by September 1; and Kindergarten 5 by September 1.

Tewksbury: Preschool X by X.

Tyngsborough: Preschool X by X and Kindergarten 5 by August 28.

Nationally, the majority of states hold to a 5 on or before September 1st cut-off date for school entry. According to the US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010–11 (ECLS-K:2011) report, only 1% of all children (nationally) enter kindergarten early, 87 % percent enter on time, 6% delay entry to kindergarten and 6% repeat kindergarten (see **Exhibit 3**). Families with Bachelor or Graduate degrees are more likely to delay kindergarten entry. Families with a high school completion or less are more likely to have children who repeat kindergarten. The same study found few differences among children’s reading and mathematics scores based on date of school entry (see **Exhibit 4 and 5**).

In Lowell, we provide all children, regardless of their ability, with access to education. There are variations and individual differences among all preschool and kindergarten children upon school entrance regardless of the cut-off date for school entry. Development across domains: social-emotional, physical, language, and cognitive is often uneven and may vary due to a young child’s background and experiences. Lowell’s preschool and kindergarten curricula offer children from diverse backgrounds and experiences access to rich content and differentiated support. The district is committed to providing inspiring, engaging, and empowering education to all students through our Pillars of Urban Excellence. We do not assess children’s entrance into school at any age. Our job is to support all learners in achieving their full potential. Regardless of when the cut-off date for school entrance occurs, some children will miss it by only a few days or be developmentally ready prior to school entrance. Making an exception for one child would set a precedent.

The Early Childhood Department is available to assist all families in locating early childhood programming within our community. The district currently offers preschool to children who are age 4 by September 1st. We are aware that the demand for early childhood programs far exceeds our capacity. We are actively looking for ways to expand services to young children and their families in the community. We recognize that many families in Lowell do not have the means or are burdened by the cost of accessing quality early childhood education prior to kindergarten entrance. We will continue to work with our community partners and to look for resources to aid our district in expanding our capacity to provide programming to our youngest learners.

Need for additional resources to meet current requirements before adding additional assessments: The district holds monthly developmental screenings for three and four-year-olds designed to review a child’s development and assist with the identification of children who should be referred for an evaluation to determine eligibility for special education. The district is also responsible for screening kindergarten children prior to school entry. The current practice is to screen only those students who have not previously attended preschool prior to school entry. Screenings for kindergarten occur after students are registered and over the summer. Last year, the district did not have sufficient funds to pay screeners in accordance with Mass General Law 603 CMR Special Education 28.03: School District Administration and Personnel (1) General Responsibilities of the School District. (d) Preschool Screening. Each school district shall conduct screening for three and four-year-olds and for all children who are of age to enter

kindergarten. Grant funding was able to pick up the cost. Developmental screenings are designed to review a child's development and to assist in identification of those children who should be referred for an evaluation to determine eligibility for special education services. Before the district considers adding additional assessment of students requesting exemptions to current enrollment policies, it should ensure that allocation of resources and staff are made to meet required screening/assessment efforts.

Equity issues due to socioeconomic status: Many factors including maternal age, health status, maternal depression, birth weight, shared reading experiences, home computer use, parent interaction, preschool attendance, and primary caregiver arrangements are associated with early cognitive development. Reading and math abilities at kindergarten entry are predictive of later school performance. If the Lowell Public Schools makes changes to its age eligibility policy, will some groups of children be given an advantage over others based on the impact of their family's socioeconomic status or parent's education? The difference between being enrolled in preschool or kindergarten can save a family a substantial amount of money. "Without taxpayer support, Massachusetts families pay between \$12,000 and \$18,000 per child for preschool and early-childhood care per year. And while low-income families receive subsidies through programs, such as Head Start, advocates argue it's not enough. For families that don't qualify, there's little support." (Sherman, 2018).

English language learners: "It would be difficult if not impossible for a one-time assessment of a child's performance to capture the complexity and variability of any young child's development; these challenges of accurate developmental assessment are compounded when a child is still mastering the home or primary language while also acquiring a second language during a period of rapid cognitive, social-emotional and motor development" (Espinosa and Garcia, 2012). Based on Lowell's selected population data for 2018-19, 28.6% of our district's population consists of students who first language is not English and 23.7% English Language Learners. Assessment experts recommend that young dual language learners (DLLs) be assessed in their dominant language as well as English (Barrueco, et al 2012). If we explore providing an option for waiving the age eligibility requirement for entry into preschool and kindergarten by offering readiness assessments for students not meeting the established birthday deadlines we may need to explore funding to hire assessors that speak multiple languages. Abebi, (2010) has shown that a child's achievement on assessments administered in English are influenced by their English proficiency. Scores in mathematics and literacy development may reflect level of English proficiency rather than knowledge of concepts such as numeracy or phonological awareness. The focus of school readiness assessments for young children should be on informing instruction and closing the opportunity gap. Assessing readiness is likely to give some children in our district advantages over others based on their English proficiency.

Making an exception for one child would set a precedent and is not recommended based on practices for assessing young children and issues related to equity. However, if the School

Committee wishes to move forward in exploring readiness assessments for students not meeting the established birthday deadlines the Early Childhood Department would recommend forming a taskforce to explore the issues.

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US Department of Education, National Center Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten Class of 2010-11 (ECLS-K 2011). Preliminary Restricted-Use Data Files. See Digest of Education Statistics 2012. Tables 136, 137,

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 2010-11 (ECLS-K:2011), Preliminary Restricted-Use Data File. see *Digest of Education Statistics 2012*, [table 137](#).

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), October 2000 through 2017. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2006*, [table 41](#); *Digest of Education Statistics 2009*, [table 43](#); *Digest of Education Statistics 2011*, [table 53](#); and *Digest of Education Statistics 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018*, [table 202.10](#).

US Department of Education, National Center Education Statistics – Kindergarten Entry Status: On-time, Delayed-Entry, and Repeating Kindergarten. Chapter 2 Participation in Education Section: Spotlight. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/pdf/coe_tea.pdf

Exhibit 1

Lowell Public Schools School Assignment Policy:

Kindergarten through Grade 8

To ensure equity in the Lowell Public Schools for all students, students will be assigned to a school in Kindergarten through Grade 8 based on the following **placement criteria**:

1. **Space Availability** - space available in a particular school, program or grade is defined according to the policy in effect as to class size.
2. **Sibling Preference** - all students whose parents make timely application to a particular school and already have other children attending that school are given priority of assignment for that school.
3. **Ethnicity Balance** - new assignments and transfers must meet requirements of ethnicity balance. The goal is to achieve an ethnicity balance within each school, program and grade that reflects, within 10% above or below, the ethnicity percentage of the zone as a whole.
4. **Place of Residence** (proximity of residence to school) - all other priorities being equal, the student living within the school neighborhood street directory as defined by the Lowell School Committee, has priority of assignment for that school.

In addition to using **placement criteria** 1 through 4 above, the Family Resource Coordinator will also consider Special Education needs, gender, and English Language Learner status, to ensure students in all schools are being placed equitably. The **placement criteria above** will be the primary criteria for all placements and transfers for Kindergarten through Grade 8 under this policy.

Registering and Selecting Schools

At the time of registration, the parent/guardian will be asked to indicate three (3) school choices in order of preference. Students who are not assigned to their first choice school will be placed on a waitlist based on their three (3) school choices at the time of registration.

Students on the waitlist shall have priority over newly enrolled students to the school system when determining placement. Routine placements from the waitlist will be made beginning on June 1st and continue until August 10th, to be effective the subsequent school year. During peak registration times, from August 10th through September 15th, the Family Resource Center will make every effort to give priority to students on the waitlist. The Family Resource Center will cease making placements from the waitlist for the current school year following the 36th day of school.

To strive to meet the requests of families, calls from the waitlist will be made in the following order:

1. Students for whom there are three (3) schools chosen, and the student did not receive a placement at any of the three choices.
2. Students who were placed in, and are registered for, their third choice school.
3. Students who were placed in, and are registered for, their second choice school.

The order of names on the waitlist will be determined through the use of a randomly and blindly generated five (5) digit number that will be generated annually and stored in the district's Student Information Management System. The district will apply Placement Criteria 1 through 4 (above) based on the random number and the date of request. Students must be pre-registered (before August 15th) or active students in the Lowell Public Schools to remain on the waitlist.

The adult listed as the primary contact in the Student Information Management System will be notified by the Family Resource Center by telephone if their child is eligible for a transfer off of the waitlist. In the event the primary contact cannot be reached, the Family Resource Center shall notify the second contact listed for the student, provided that the second contact is listed as residing with the student and is listed as a custodial parent or legal guardian.

Students who are placed from the waitlist to their second or third choice school may retain their place on the waitlist for a higher choice school, provided that the family makes this request at the time of placement; however, a student may accept a waitlist transfer only once during a school year and will not be eligible for another waitlist transfer until the following school year.

Except during the **peak times** of August 10th through September 15th, families have forty-eight (48) hours to accept the transfer. After forty-eight (48) hours, if the family has not accepted the transfer assignment, the student will be removed from the waitlist for that school. During **peak times**, seats cannot be held. The Family Resource Center will make reasonable attempts to contact families to accept placement from the waitlist. Families will be asked to accept placement at the time they are called from the Family Resource Center. Families may accept placement within forty-eight (48) hours of the call, but during that time seats will continue to be offered to other families until they are filled. Students will not lose their place on the waitlist during peak times if they are not able to respond prior to the seat being filled. If parents anticipate being away during the summer, they must submit via email their contact information to the Family Resource Center Coordinator. Families are responsible for maintaining current mailing addresses and phone numbers on file with the Lowell Public Schools in the Student Information Management System.

Publishing the Waitlist

The district will publish, on the district website, a graph representing the number of students on each school's waitlist. The district will also provide family members with information regarding their child's placement on the waitlist, either through a list of student identification

numbers, or by providing student-specific information in the parent portal of the district's Student Information Management System.

Routine Removal from the Waitlist

To maintain a current and accurate waitlist, the following procedures will be used to routinely remove students from the waitlist:

- On or about January 2nd, the Family Resource Center will remove from the waitlist all requests for schools in which the student is attending the highest- grade level offered by that school.
- Within thirty (30) days of the adoption of this policy, and in subsequent years on or about January 15th, the Family Resource Center will generate, for families occupying a place on the waitlist, a letter requesting families to submit notice in writing if they wish their child to remain on the waitlist. Written requests to remain on the waitlist must be received by the Family Resource Center no later than the Friday before the Presidents' Day Holiday in February, or sixty (60) days after this policy is adopted, whichever is later. Families have an affirmative responsibility to provide this written notice to the Family Resource Center, without regard to their receipt of notification from the district of this deadline.
- Families may request removal from the waitlist at any time.
- A revised waitlist will be published no later than March 30th each year, or sixty (60) days after the adoption of this policy, whichever is later.

Students who move from one geographical zone to the other in the city may request to remain in the school they presently are attending prior to change of address provided that:

- The ethnicity balance of the school is not adversely affected.
- The parent provides transportation to and from school or the child's transportation needs can be accommodated by existing school bus routes.

Parents/legal guardians may request a school of choice outside the zone in which they reside based on their child care needs provided that:

- There is space available at the grade level at the school.
- The ethnicity balance of the school is not adversely affected.
- The parent provides transportation to and from the school.
- The student is not chronically absent or excessively tardy. The Attendance Supervisor shall determine if a student is not eligible for out of zone placement, based on this requirement. Such a finding will result in a student being placed at a school in their geographical zone.

Students who move from one geographical zone to the other will be removed from all waitlists in their previous zone. At the time of registration, families may choose to be placed on waitlists for schools in their new zone.

Note: Private, parochial or charter school students, seeking placement in the Lowell Public schools, must register beginning April 1st if they desire placement in the subsequent school year. Students who register for but fail to attend the Lowell Public Schools will be removed from all waitlists at the time they are discharged from active status in the Student Information Management System.

Transfers

Once a student has attended a school, a parent who is dissatisfied with the assignment may request a voluntary transfer. Only one transfer per year is allowed and must be requested through the Family Resource Center before the 36th day of school, or no later than forty-five (45) calendar days after the initial placement of the student in the school.

Students who no longer require a Special Education or English Language Learners program placement at a school that is outside of their zone of residence are allowed to remain at the same school for one year. After that, the student is considered newly enrolled and is expected to attend a school within his/her zone.

Preschool Programs

Lowell Public Schools offers integrated Preschool programs for three (3) and four (4) year old children who have an Individual Education Plans (IEP) and for children who are four (4) years old by September 1st. To ensure equity in the Lowell Public Schools for all students, students who are not placed pursuant to an IEP will be assigned to a preschool program based on the following **placement criteria**:

1. **Space Availability** - space available in a particular school, program or grade is defined according to the policy in effect as to class size.
2. **Place of Residence** (proximity of residence to school) - all other priorities being equal, the student living within the school neighborhood street directory as defined by the Lowell School Committee, has priority of assignment for that school. No transportation is provided for Preschool.
3. **Ethnicity Balance** - new assignments and transfers must meet requirements of ethnicity balance. The goal is to achieve an ethnicity balance within each school, program and grade that reflects, within 10% above or below, the ethnicity percentage of the zone as a whole.

The Family Resource Coordinator will also consider gender and English Language Learner status to ensure students in all schools are being placed equitably. A student’s Preschool placement is a one-year placement only and has no bearing on a student’s kindergarten placement. All families must register at the Family Resource Center for kindergarten.

Preschool Lottery

The order of names considered for placement in a preschool program will be determined through the use of a randomly and blindly generated five-digit number that will be generated at the conclusion of the registration period, and stored in the district’s Student Information Management System. The Early Childhood Coordinator will maintain the Preschool waitlist.

At the time of registration, the parent/guardian will be asked to indicate three (3) school choices in order of preference. Students who are not assigned to their first-choice school will be placed on a waitlist based on their three school choices at the time of registration.

Preschool placements will be made by August 15th.

Preschool Attendance

It is the parents’ responsibility to ensure regular attendance.

Appeals

Any appeal of a placement decision must be made in writing, addressed to the Deputy Superintendent for Student Support Services.

Exhibit 2

Percentage of 3-5-year-old children in preschool and kindergarten programs attending full-day programs 2000-2017

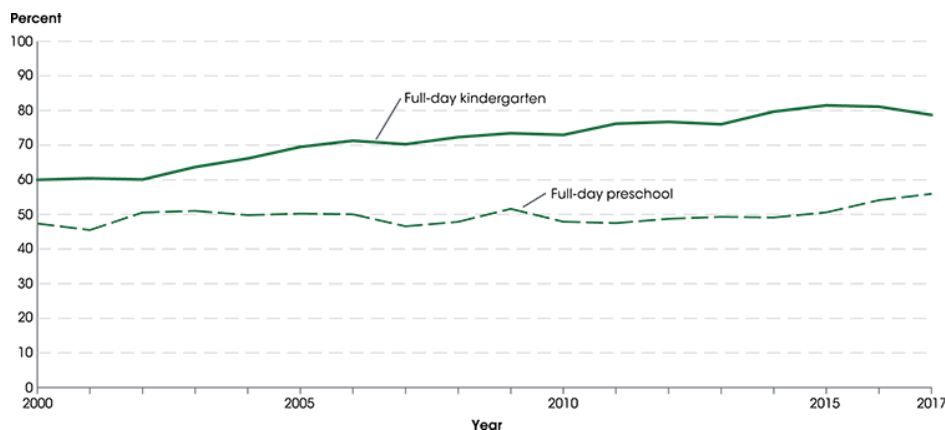


Exhibit 3

Percentage distribution of kindergarten students, by kindergarten entry status: Fall 2010

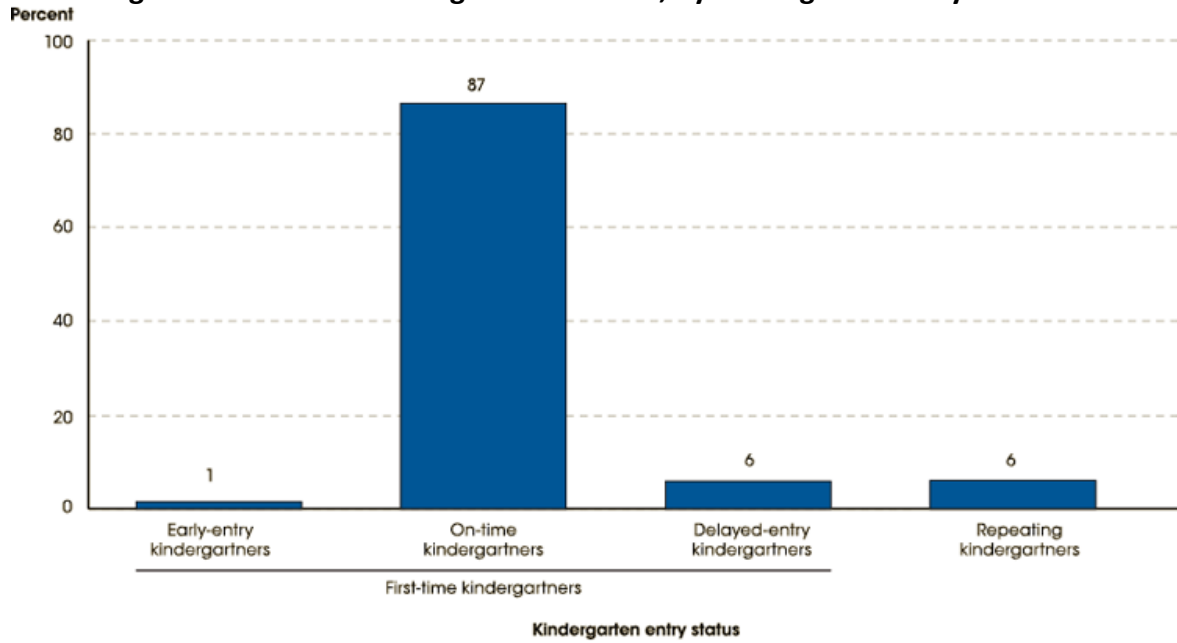


Exhibit 4

Kindergartners' mean reading scale scores, by time of assessment and kindergarten entry status: School year 2010-11

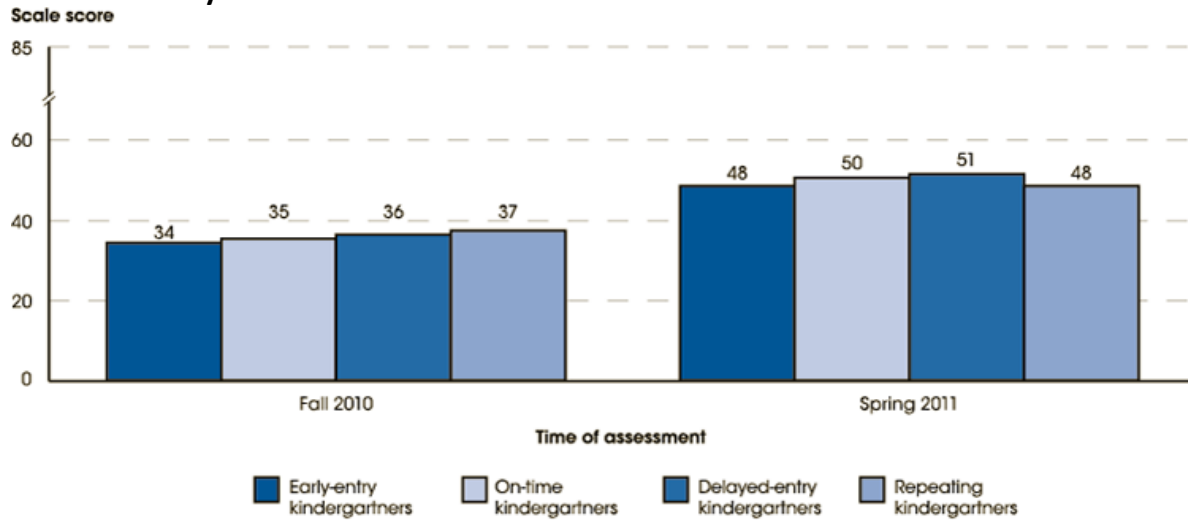


Exhibit 5

Kindergartners' mean mathematic scale scores, by time of assessment and kindergarten entry status: School year 2010-11.

