



**LOWELL SCHOOL COMMITTEE**  
**Henry J. Mroz Administration Office**  
**155 Merrimack Street**  
**Lowell, Massachusetts 01852**

**William J. Samaras**  
**Mayor and Chairperson**

**Jackie Doherty**  
**Vice-Chairperson**

**Andre P. Descoteaux**  
**Robert J. Hoey Jr.**  
**Dominik Hok Lay**  
**Connie A. Martin**  
**Gerard Nutter**

## **Policy Subcommittee Meeting**

**Monday, December 9, 2019**  
**City Hall Council Chambers**  
**5:00 p.m.**

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|--------------------------------------|--|
| Subcommittee Members Present:        | Chairperson Gerry Nutter and Connie Martin<br>Jackie Doherty arrived at 5:36 p.m.  |
| School Committee Members Present:    | Robert Hoey  |
| School Department Personnel Present: | Latifah Phillips, Chief Equity & Engagement Officer<br>Rebecca Duda, Family Resource Center Coordinator<br>Lisa Van Thiel, Early Childhood Coordinator |

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Chairperson Nutter called the meeting to order at 5:10 p.m. The following agenda items were discussed:

- 1. School Assignment Policy**
  - 2. Preschool Enrollment Policy**
- **School Assignment Policy**

Ms. Phillips, Chief Equity & Engagement Officer addressed the Subcommittee and stated that every year the School Committee has the ability to review the school assignment policy and consider changes for the upcoming school year. The following proposed changes for the 2020 - 2021 school year are as follows:

- Kindergarten lottery and Waitlist
- Waitlist for Grades 1 - 8
- Sibling Preference
- Extended rights for McKinney-Vento students, foster care students and students with special needs for placement within schools on a case by case basis.
- Transfer Cutoff Deadline

She stated that this is an important policy for our families and the district wants to make sure they have a good family experience and also receive all the information they need. She added that internally the district wants to make sure all our data is properly entered and that families get their school assignment as soon as possible.

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

1. Space Availability
2. Sibling Preference
3. Ethnicity Balance
4. Place of Residence

In addition to using the placement criteria, 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. At the time of registration, the parent/guardian will be asked to indicate three (3) choices. The placement criteria will be the primary criteria for all placements and transfers for Kindergarten through Grade 8 under this policy. The district plans to showcase all of our kindergartens and it is the districts hope that after our families see all of our schools and what each school offers, it will produce an increased interest in our other schools that offer Kindergarten.

Mr. Nutter asked when the policy was put in place.

Ms. Duda stated that it has been in place since she started.

Ms. Martin stated that she believes the idea of showing all of our Kindergartens is a great idea and wondering how it's going to be done.

Ms. Duda stated that she has had meeting with Ms. Van Thiel and Mr. Pickette, Community Outreach Strategist and they are planning on having two (2) showcases with information about each school and what each school offers.

Ms. Martin stated that it might be great if the showcases could be filmed as well.

Ms. Phillips then spoke about the wait list and wanted to make sure the language is very clear for families so families realize that sometimes a child can be placed outside of the system. Homeless families have rights under the law and also families with safety reasons and she reiterated that the district wants to be clear with families regarding these issues. She also spoke about siblings on the wait list and how they jump the list because they're a sibling.

Mr. Nutter agreed that getting this information out there is very important.

Ms. Martin stated that the Committee can read through this policy and we are used to this language, but it is our responsibility to get the word out and to make the information clear to help our parents and families understand and navigate this process.

Mr. Hoey stated that about four (4) years ago he had heard a lot of complaints about the Family Resource Center and for the last four (4) years he has seen great things happening there.

Ms. Phillips spoke about the policy that reads routine removal from the wait list and she stated that the district is recommending that we continue this process. She stated that this process will be reviewed though and any changes will be communicated in advance. The current wait list is that after the lottery is run, families end up on a wait list based on the date they come in. She stated that in future years the district could have a different expectation. She also spoke about anyone new coming into the district and an open lottery for other grades. She stated that they would like to revisit wait lists and get input from our administrators. The way the wait list is now it is very hard for anyone new to get a spot.

Ms. Martin stated that doing the lottery seems fair and even to all families. She asked if there is a natural drop off or do they keep trying to get into certain schools.

Ms. Duda stated that there is not a lot of movement for grade 8, but does see some movement in grade 4 at times. The present feeder patterns have been in place for quite some time.

Ms. Phillips then spoke about transfers and how it now reads one (1) transfer per year is allowed and can be made before the 36<sup>th</sup> day of school. The district would like the opportunity to speak with our administrators and see what they think is best around transfers. Ms. Phillips stated that they are thinking twenty (20) days or less would be best and believe it's in the best interest of our students to be placed before the first report period.

She concluded by saying that she will bring a policy back to the Committee at the January 15, 2020 School Committee meeting for approval.

➤ **Preschool Enrollment Policy**

Ms. Phillips stated that presently when you're enrolled in preschool, as long as you don't miss fifteen (15) consecutive days, your seat is secured. The district would like to clarify this and let the parent/guardian know that you need to show up to school and if you don't let us know why your child is not there your seat may not be secured. The district currently waits three (3) weeks before pulling another student off the wait list. Ms. Van Thiel and her staff will work on some language and what that process should look like. She also stated that families who voluntarily withdraw sometimes come back within ten (10) days and want their seat back. The district would like to have the parent/guardian sign paperwork that they are withdrawing so the district can offer someone else their seat. These rules would not apply to students on an IEP or students who fall under the McKinney Vento Act.

Mr. Nutter asked how many students we have in PreK.

Ms. Van Thiel responded we have about 682.

Mr. Nutter asked what percentage on IEP's.

Ms. Van Thiel stated she does not have that number, but shared that the Cardinal O'Connell is at fifty-two (52) percent.

Ms. Doherty stated that these steps are important to make the program better. She stated that she has some concerns, because she has heard we offer limited transportation and have empty seats because of that.

Ms. Van Thiel stated that only students on an IEP receive transportation.

Ms. Doherty stated that she'd like to see the Committee move forward with the recommendations and would like to look at the transportation piece so we don't have any empty seats.

Mr. Hoey expressed his concerns with these changes.

Ms. Phillips concluded stating that she will provide updated policies for the January 15, 2020 School Committee meeting.

**Ms. Martin made a motion to adjourn at 6:16 p.m.; seconded by Ms. Doherty. 3 yeas  
APPROVED**

Respectfully submitted,



Latifah Phillips, Chief Equity &  
Engagement Officer for Dr. Joel Boyd,  
Superintendent and Secretary, Lowell  
School Committee

LP/mes