



COMMUNITY EDUCATION COUNCIL DISTRICT 3

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Series on Middle School Admissions Changes

Notes

The Middle School Committee added a series of four meetings over four weeks to keep the community informed and solicit feedback on potential changes to the middle school admissions process. The agenda topic remained the same over these meetings: Potential Changes to Middle School Admissions Process

- **March 27th** 6:30 pm at PS 76
- **April 10th** 9 am at the Joan of Arc Complex
- **April 19th** 6:30 pm at the Joan of Arc Complex
- **April 24th** 9 am at PS 199

Total Attended: 171 participants, *as per sign in sheets*

Guest Speakers:

- Ilene Altschul, Superintendent CSD 3
- Matt Angell, FSC District 3
- Juliet Kaye, DOE Office of Enrollment
- Matt Broggini, DOE Office of Enrollment
- Elizabeth Park, DOE Office of Enrollment
- Principal M. Lowe (Mott Hall II)
- Principal J. Parker (PS/IS 180)
- Principal E. Elster (MS 54)
- Principal H. Zymeck (The Computer School)

Key Documents: *distributed at Middle School Committee meetings, all are available on CEC3.org*

- D3 Middle Schools Demographic Analysis (2017)
- District 3 Middle School Applicants and Offers by ELA/Math Proficiency- Fall 2017
- District 3 Middle School Applicants and Offers by ELA/Math Proficiency- Fall 2016
- District 3 Middle School Applicants and Offers by ELA/Math Proficiency- Fall 2015
- District 3 Middle School Admissions by ELA/ Math Proficiency- Fall 2017
- District 3 district wide total ELA/ Math Scores- 2016 & 2017

- CSD 3 Middle School Supplement- Middle Schools Principals' Forum- 2017
- D3 Middle School Admissions (blind ranking) Office of Enrollment presentation to CEC 3 December 13, 2017
- Summary Change to blind ranking in District 15- Office of Enrollment
- District 3 Diversity Simulation- Prioritizing 10% of seats for L1 students and 15% of seats for L2 students- Office of Enrollment, April 2017

Introduction and background

The intent of this series of meetings is to increase the awareness and engagement across the district of potential changes to middle school admission. This entailed introducing concepts for increased equity in middle school admissions to the community and soliciting questions and concerns from parents to inform the CSD Superintendent's decision on middle school admissions. Community Education Council 3 does not have statutory authority to vote on any such change. CEC3 intends to engage parents on any changes and hopes to be a valued voice in any decision making.

Chair Berger opened all meetings with a review of the district's current Middle School Choice system and progressively updated the information on the Superintendent and principal's idea to increase equity and academic diversity across all middle schools.

It was noted that The CEC3 Middle School Committee has been working on this issue since the Spring of 2016 when the idea was raised to implement priorities for students with low economic status for our middle schools. The discourse increased with the release of the DOE Diversity Policy (Equity and Excellence for All: Diversity in New York City Public Schools, 2017) requiring the elimination of revealed ranking in middle school applications by the Fall of 2019.

District leadership (The D3 Superintendent and D3 principals) and the CEC 3 Middle School committee shared concerns that the required shift from revealed middle school ranking to a blind ranking system would likely exacerbate segregation in our already segregated middle schools. They called for a district level filter to couple with blind ranking to ensure equity in access to middle school.

Ideas to increase equity

Through a series of principal meetings, the principals and district superintendent focused on a mechanism to increase academic diversity in all middle schools. In previous evaluations (2016) of leavers to increase economic diversity across middle schools it was concluded that priority groups for students with low economic status may hamper district wide academic achievement. There was concern that such priority groups would likely assist high demand schools in becoming more economically diverse but was unlikely to support all schools in the district as lower demand schools were unlikely to attract the kind of academic diversity to allow their schools to thrive.

Principals and the superintendent now looked at ways to foster academic diversity. The decision to look at academic diversity was informed by the knowledge that economic, racial and academic status are currently correlated in District 3 (See: District 3 district wide total ELA/ Math Scores- 2016 & 2017). Eighty-four percent of all students in D3 scoring an average of level 1 & 2 and standardized state tests scores are Black and Hispanic. Despite ongoing work to close the academic achievement gap, for the

current applicants to middle schools the relationship between race, economic and academic status can not be uncoupled.

To achieve greater equity in access to middle schools whilst fostering greater academic, economic and racial diversity district leadership is examining setting “floors” for students with lower academic status at all D3 middle schools. In 2017 middle school applicants with an average proficiency level of one (1) on standardized state tests received an offer to one of their top three choices fifty-five (55) percent of the time, whilst students with a level four (4) received an offer to one of their top three choices eighty-eight (88) percent of the time (See: District 3 Middle School Admissions by ELA/ Math Proficiency- Fall 2017).

The initial idea presented to the middle school committee is to have:

Academic diversity floors:

- 10% of offers will be to applicants with an average ELA and math score of level 1
- 15% of offers will be to applicants with an average ELA and math score of level 2.

Note:

- The average score is based upon the student’s 4th grade ELA and math score. Both scores will be averaged to become one composite score for middle school enrollment consideration.
- All D3 Middle Schools already have a ‘Special Education target’ to match the district average (it is currently 19%). Students who fulfill part of that target may fill two categories. For example, a student with a level 2 and a special education classification will be counted toward both the ‘Special Ed target’ and the ‘level 2 floor’.
- It is possible that schools may not receive sufficient applicants to fulfil the required floors
- Each middle school will develop their own screen (rubric) for admissions. These rubrics may include interviews or tests.
- This will apply to students applying to school for sixth grade matriculation in September 2019 and schools with a fifth-grade matriculation in September 2020
- This applies to all middle schools under the Supervision of the CSD3 Superintendent. This would not apply to any city-wide, or high schools district, schools located within CSD 3.

The percentages for the floors were determined by the district wide average, ten and fifteen percent represent roughly half of the district average. In the principal’s discussion they determined that the district average would be too great a number to match and anything less than half would likely move only a handful of students. This reflects the fact that all D3 middle schools already have some population of students with lower standardized test scores (See: District 3 Middle School Applicants and Offers by ELA/Math Proficiency- Fall 2017, 2016, 2015). This is an iterative process; the superintendent’s office continues to refine methods to increase equity in middle school admissions.

Office of Enrollment (NYC DOE)

The Office of Enrollment attended all of the middle school committee meetings in this series. They initially walked the committee through the processes to increase diversity and/or the shifts to blind ranking that have happened or are ongoing in other districts.

As per committee meeting requests the Office of Enrollment provided a simulation of the above concept (See: District 3 Diversity Simulation- Prioritizing 10% of seats for L1 students and 15% of seats for L2 students- Office of Enrollment, April 2017) at the April 18th CEC 3 Calendar Meeting and subsequently shared it at the April 19th and 24th committee meetings.

With the above data participants were able to scrutinize the potential outcomes of such a change. Student placement in this simulation is based on the actual applicant pool in 2017 and how they ranked schools. There are no “forced matches” in the simulation, students were only matched to schools which they had ranked. In practice it is believed that under the blind ranking system students will rank more schools so there would not be this same number of students without a match. The schools which saw the greatest movement in students in this simulation were: M415, M333, M250, M245 & M054. Other schools would have significantly less movement in students.

Principal testimony

- Principal M. Lowe (Mott Hall II) April 19th and CEC3 Calendar meeting April 18th. Principal Lowe explained how in the past his school was able to use first choice priority in admissions to develop a diverse students body. He elaborated on how floors for diversity can off-set the loss of this priority area. He demonstrated how he has been able to build community in his academically, racially and economically diverse school.
- Principal J. Parker (PS/IS 180) April 24 MS Committee meeting. Principal Parker testified to the need for increased diversity across district 3 and support for academic levers to do so.
- Principal E. Elster (MS 54) April 24 MS Committee meeting. Principal Elster stated her concern that it would be too challenging to meet the needs of such a wide array of academic needs in a single classroom. She noted that when MS54 began the Delta program it was “seeded” by a large cohort of families seeking the same kind of middle school.
- Principal H. Zymeck (The Computer School) Principal Zymeck spoke to the need for the district to do something substantive to support students who are disadvantaged in the current system. He recognized the benefits to all students of learning in a diverse academic environment.

Parents feedback

This is an overview of parent feedback and captures the most common themes raised as parental concerns and questions. It is not meant to be comprehensive of every question

- Process: Parents would like to hear directly from the Superintendent, Parents would like a written summary of all proposals, How will individual school screens (rubrics) be developed, Are the screens (rubrics) that individual schools apply checked to see that they do not conflict with one another? Is the use of state test scores in this model in keeping with state legislation around state test scores for admissions & promotion?
- Timing: Parents want to know what the decision is by the end of this school year, some parents would prefer to give schools time to improve all of their scores first and then parents will be more willing to send their children to a wider range of schools. Others felt to wait may jeopardize the students who are disadvantaged by the current system. Can this approach be

'stepped-in'?, Parents wondered why the district did not do just blind ranking first and then add a district level filter the following year

- Requests for data: Provide a simulation of the initial idea with floors, demonstrate the change that occurred in D15 when they moved to blind ranking, detail data on offers to students of varying state test score grades by race, provide a simulation of straight lottery system (elimination of all screens)
- Alternate scenarios: Base priority groups by report card grades, by economic status or sending elementary school. Can we do community-controlled choice, Can we eliminate all screens and allocate students by lottery, can the floors actually reflect a bell curve proving both floors and ceilings for students of different academic status?
- Supports: What additional supports and structural changes can schools receive to help assist once they have students with a wider range of academic preparedness? If all schools had smaller class sizes they would be better able to meet students' needs, how is social-emotional well-being addressed? How will a more diverse sense of community be fostered in schools?, How are elementary schools supported so that all of their students are scoring well (learning the material), Concern that schools are not prepared to teach students of different academic status from what they are currently teaching,
- Applicant pool: Concern that schools may receive students who did not rank them and thereby do not want to attend that school, What if a school does not have enough applicants to fill each priority group?
- Promotion of schools: What can be done so that families rank enough schools, How can a wider range of schools be promoted to all families (fairs, brochures, tours, etc)? Is there funding for schools to add programming and extra curriculars to attract a wider range of families? There may be a need to move a cohort of students with relatively high academic status to an additional school. Could a "next" high achieving school be identified? Perhaps all students with levels 3&4s who do not get top 3 choices get sent there, Maybe a MS could join the diversity priority schools and designate their student population more aligned with a bell curve
- Potential Impacts:
 - Concerned that their child may not get into the school of their choice
 - Concern that this plan does not support a meritocracy for middle school admissions
 - Concern over academic diversity in the classroom, does this hamper classroom learning?
 - Concern that if their student does not get into the highest performing schools they will be receiving an insufficient education
 - Students need incentive (MS admissions) to excel academically
 - People may move else where because of these changes,
 - Specific algorithm- are all students captured in this algorithm? Concern that students with a state test score of 3 may be disadvantaged by this change.
 - Specific concerns: Concern about the impact on K-8 schools, Questions on how this impacts students with IEPs & 504s,
- Safety: Concern that some schools may not be as safe as others
- Appeals: The DOE should anticipate and increased number of appeals. There is a need for greater clarity on the appeals process. Can families be required to rank a minimum number of schools? Can you appeal even if you match to one of the schools that you ranked, can there be a competitive appeals process that includes a new round of tours and screening?

- Notes on the positive aspects of potential change: Widespread support for the need to “do something’ to achieve greater diversity on D3, happy to see all students ‘get a shoot’ at high demand middle schools, that mixed ability classrooms can enhance learning, recognition that racially and economically diverse classes can enhance the experience for all students,

Next Steps

The Middle School Committee is submitting this summary to CEC 3 and the CSD Superintendent Altschul. The committee continues to work with the CEC and the Superintendents office to inform the superintendents decision making on any middle school admissions changes. The Superintendent should be evaluating how best modify the initial idea using this feedback to achieve greater equity in access to middle schools while fostering greater academic, economic and racial diversity.

CEC3 has added a Special Calendar Meeting on May 22nd to continue to discuss and evaluate options for admissions changes. It is noted that the district will continue to collect feedback via the d3feedback@gmail.com account until May 29th.

It is expected that the Superintendent will be able to announce any middle school admissions changes by the end of this school year.

Summary

D3 meetings regarding Middle School Admissions Changes

CEC 3 Middle School Committee Meetings in last 5 months

- **January 30, 2018**, 9 am, Joan of Arc
- **February 27th** 2018, 6:30 pm, Joan of Arc
- **March 12, 2018**, 9 am, Joan of Arc,
- **March 27th** 2018, 6:30 pm, PS 76
- **April 10th** 2018, 9 am, Joan of Arc
- **April 19th** 2018, 6:30 pm, Joan of Arc
- **April 24th** 2018, 9 am, PS 199

Presentation Table at **Harlem School Summit** April 14, 2018

Discussed at CEC 3 Business & Calendar Meetings:

- CEC 3 Calendar Meeting January 17th
- CEC 3 Calendar Meeting February 13th
- CEC 3 Calendar Meeting March 20th
- CEC 3 Calendar Meeting April 18th,

Meetings with PTAs: CEC 3 members have conducted briefings and updates with PTAs and PTA executive boards in the district

- February 15th Chair presented update to PS 166 PTA
- March 7th CEC Member M. McCarthy presented to PS 199 Executive Board
- March 13th Chair presented to PS 452 PTA Executive Board
- March 13th Chair summarized for PS 9 PTA Executive Board
- March 14th Chair presented to PS 242 PTA
- March 16th Chair presented to PS 87 PTA
- March 26th CEC member M. McCarthy presented to PS 199 PTA
- April 12th Chair present to PS 75 PTA Executive Board
- April 19th CEC member J. Moreland presented to PS75 PTA
- April 19th CEC member J. Moreland presented to PS 163 PTA
- April 26th CEC member J. Moreland presented to PS 163 PTA Special Meeting
- May 15th CEC member J. Moreland & L. Liu presented to PS 165 PTA Special Meeting