

POLICY

Students

SUBJECT: INCLUSION AT CRITERIA-BASED SCHOOLS

“Resolved, that the District shall include in its competitive admissions process a method and set of procedures to consciously, fairly, and legally consider a diverse, holistic range of student assets that are beneficial to a robust, representative embodiment of all children who live in our community—for the benefit of the whole matriculating class.”

From Superintendent’s Resolution
Approved by the Board of Education
December 16, 2020

Rationale

Recognized as among the most culturally and linguistically diverse of all school districts in New York State and the United States, the Buffalo City School District is committed to providing a free and accessible public education for all students of every background and social experience. Buffalo’s diversity in student enrollment provides benefits to our City’s youth that include improved academic outcomes, preparation for a profoundly diverse global economy, and increased engagement at school.¹

The District’s compelling interest is for all students to access these benefits of inclusive schools, regardless of where students live, their socio-economic status, their primary language spoken at home, the experience associated with one’s own race, ethnicity, and/or the personal challenges that the applicant with a disability may have overcome.

As the Supreme Court has explained, elementary and secondary schools are “pivotal to sustaining our political and cultural heritage;” . . . Our “nation’s future depends upon leaders trained through wide exposure to the ideas and mores of students as diverse as this Nation of many peoples.”²

The Buffalo City School District embraces the U.S. Supreme Court’s opinion and, in short, we believe that isolation from the “wide exposure” to all students harms all students and greater inclusion creates a better world.

¹ Brandt Myers, Linda. “Why Diversity Matters.” Magazine of the Cornell Law School, no. 1 (2013);

Wells, S., Fox, L., Cordova-Cobo, D. *How Racially Diverse Schools and Classrooms Benefit All Students*. Century Foundation, 2016.

² Guidance on the Voluntary Use of Race to Achieve Diversity and Avoid Racial Isolation in Elementary and Secondary Schools. U.S. Department of Education: Office for Civil Rights. 2015.

Disproportionality in Schools

The District defines *disproportionality* as the over- or under-representation of a student group at a particular school when compared to the composition rates of the same group for the whole school district (i.e., socio-economic, geographic, racial, ethnic, disability or English Language Learner status).³ The Buffalo City School District believes that when such disproportionality in school enrollment or admissions is disregarded, our compelling interest as a public school district—student access to the benefits of inclusive schools—is compromised.

At a minimum, the District defines *severe disproportionality* as student group representation at approximately half or less than half of the prevailing district composition rate for that particular student group. By way of example, if the rate of enrollment or admissions at a school is 8% for students with disabilities, but the prevailing district enrollment rate for such students is 20%, that would be an example of severe disproportionality.

While removing procedural barriers to the admissions process for the purpose of improving access and opportunity for enrollment at all schools is of critical importance, the District recognizes that such steps may be insufficient to reduce pernicious disproportionality in student enrollment rates. The District also acknowledges that particular groups of students may have experienced historic disparity in admissions to a greater extent than other groups.

As such, this policy establishes the following protocol to report disproportionality in student enrollments and correct historic disparity in admissions at the District’s Criteria-Based Schools. It is but one strategic emphasis among many that are needed to “provide incalculable educational and civic benefits” to our students “through wide exposure to the ideas and mores of students as diverse as this Nation of many peoples.”⁴

Requirement to Report Disproportionality in School Enrollment and Admissions

1. The Superintendent of Schools shall annually receive from the Office of Shared Accountability a report of disproportionality rates for multiple demographic factors at all District schools and share this report with the Board of Education.
2. At a minimum, reported disproportionality rates shall be calculated for
 - a. socio-economic status
 - b. zip codes or other geographic designation
 - c. primary language spoken at home
 - d. race
 - e. ethnicity
 - f. disability status

³ See *Achieving Educational Excellence for All: A Guide to Diversity-Related Policy Strategies for School Districts*. National School Boards Association 2011.

⁴ *Guidance on the Voluntary Use of Race to Achieve Diversity and Avoid Racial Isolation in Elementary and Secondary Schools*. U.S. Department of Education: Office for Civil Rights. 2015.

Requirement to Correct Disproportionality in Enrollment and Admissions at Criteria-Based Schools

1. The District shall include in its competitive admissions process a method and set of procedures to consciously, fairly, and legally consider a diverse, holistic range of student assets that are beneficial to a robust, representative embodiment of all children who live in our community—for the benefit of the whole student body.
2. At a minimum, the student assets considered in this method and set of procedures may include the experiences, perspectives, and insights gained by the student as a result of their
 - a. socio-economic status
 - b. zip code or other geographic designation
 - c. primary language spoken at home
 - d. race
 - e. ethnicity
 - f. disability status
3. In an independent analysis⁵, the District determined that had a method and set of procedures been implemented during the 2019-2020 school year in which the District consciously, fairly, and legally considered multiple holistic demographic factors at a sample criteria-based school, the admission rates for underrepresented students would have increased from 26% to 52% of a matriculating class—all without a lower scoring applicant earning an available seat over a higher scoring applicant on the competitive academic criteria.
4. At a minimum, the District shall correct disproportionality in enrollment and admissions rates when rates are severely disproportional, as defined in this policy. Nothing in this policy prohibits the Superintendent of Schools or the Board of Education from correcting disproportionality when reported levels are not yet or no longer severely disproportional for any holistic demographic factor as defined in this policy.

Procedure for Implementing a Binary Propensity Framework to Consider Holistic Demographic Factors in Student Admissions at Criteria-Based Schools

1. Interested student applicants shall complete the established requirements for applying to criteria-based schools.
2. The District shall follow its established procedures for ranking students, where such rankings exist, pursuant to the admissions protocols of the specific Criteria-Based School.
3. Applicants are ranked and awarded seats in order of their total cumulative numeric scores on the established criteria.

⁵ Taggart, C. & Byrne, G., Via Evaluation (Dec, 2020). Taggart, C. & Byrne, G., Via Evaluation (Dec, 2020). Impact of Holistic Scoring on Admissions [PowerPoint presentation]. Presented to Buffalo Public Schools.

4. When there are more students tied in their cumulative score than seats remaining, the awarding of remaining seats is based on **Holistic Demographic Factors** calculated among the equally-qualified and tied students. A total of 0 or 1 point (**binary**) is awarded for each demographic factor that is underrepresented at the school (**propensity**).
5. Tied students are awarded 1 point for each demographic factor underrepresented at the school that the individual student applicant represents. Students are awarded 0 points when they do not represent a demographic factor underrepresented at the school.
6. No specific demographic factor is more valuable in the awarding of a point than another. Only 1 point may be awarded for each demographic factor in which a student is underrepresented at the criteria-based school. The total holistic score is then added to the original tied score determining a final cumulative total admissions score for the ranking.⁶
7. Note: This procedure ensures that no student who scores lower on the original academic criteria may earn a seat over an applicant that has scored higher on the original academic criteria.
8. The following example illustrates the policy:
 - a. 100 seats are available in a grade level and 70 seats have been awarded outright in order of the straight ranking of admissions criteria score totals—regardless of the backgrounds of the student applicants, BPS-enrolled or non-BPS-enrolled status.
 - b. For the remaining available 30 seats in the grade level, 60 applicants are equally qualified with an exact tie in their cumulative score of the admissions criteria.
 - c. Of the 60 tied applicants, 40 are currently enrolled in District schools and therefore, pursuant to current established policy in the District regarding tied students in a ranking, will all receive a holistic score and be offered admission first, prior to non-BPS-enrolled applicants.
 - d. Each of the 40 eligible student applicants is awarded a total holistic score that is added to the existing cumulative score for which they were originally tied (see Table A).
 - e. The 40 students would be offered admissions for the 30 remaining seats in order of their new score total.

⁶ NOTE: The District shall also adhere to currently established procedures such as residency requirements for applicants, preferences for currently enrolled BPS students, etc. when implementing the admissions procedure using Holistic Demographic Factors.

- f. If the 40 current BPS students have been offered admissions in order of their new cumulative score totals and seats still remain (because of declinations, changes in residency, etc.), non-BPS students would receive a holistic score, have the total added to their existing and formerly tied cumulative score and then receive an offer of admission in order of the new totals in the ranking.
- g. Should students be tied in their holistic score when a seat is available, a lottery may be used by the district to award that particular available seat.

Table A: Sample Calculation for Holistic Scores Assigned to Student Applicants

Student Name	DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS (0 OR 1 POINT AWARDED FOR EACH FACTOR UNDERREPRESENTED AT SCHOOL X AND DISPROPORTIONAL TO THE WHOLE DISTRICT)						TOTAL HOLISTIC SCORE	ORIGINAL TIED SCORE IN THE RANKING	FINAL CUMULATIVE SCORE FOR UPDATED RANKING	NEW RANKED ORDER FOR ADMISSIONS OFFER
	Disability Status	Socio-Economic Status	Primary Language Spoken at Home Other Than English	Race	Ethnicity	Zip Code				
Student 536	1	1	0	0	0	1	3	17	20	2nd
Student 775	1	1	1	0	0	1	4	17	21	1st
Student 638	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	17	18	3rd

adopted: