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## MEMO

**Date:** November 17, 2023

**To:** School Board Policy Committee

**From:** Don Wolff, Chief Technology Officer  
Judy Brennan, Director, Enrollment and Transfer

**Subject:** Requested Revisions to Policy 4.10.051-P

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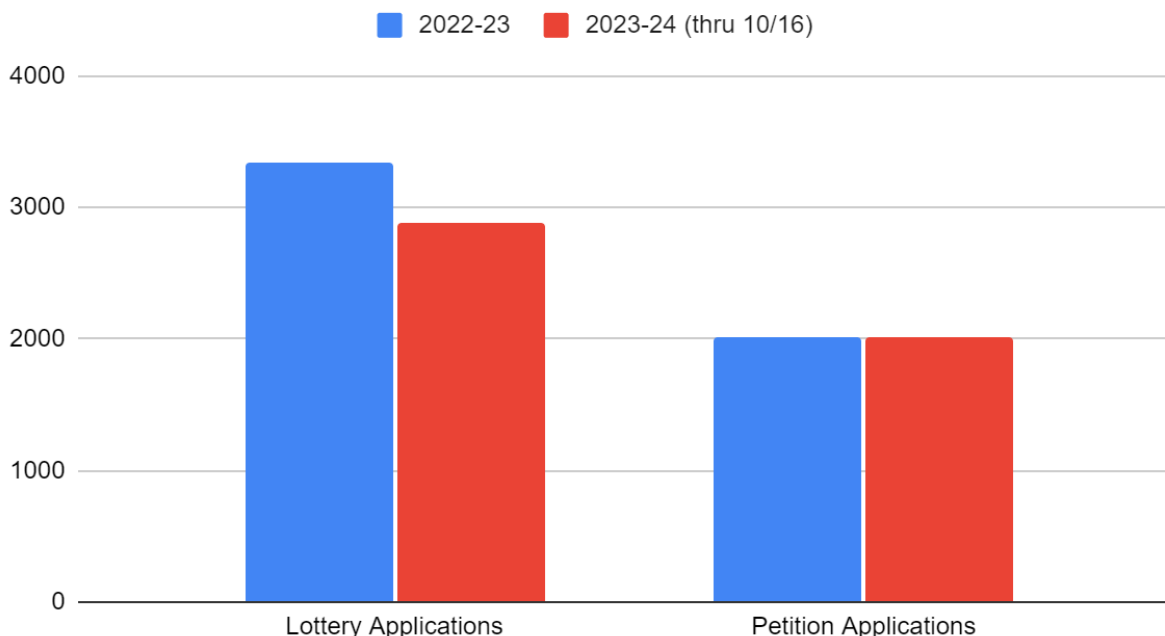
This memo outlines minor policy language changes to the Student Enrollment and Transfers policy, 4.10.051-P. The changes are designed to leverage new technical ability due to a change in software vendors and enable several transfer system improvements aligned with recommendations submitted to the PPS Audit Committee in April 2023. In order to impact the 2024-25 middle and high school transfer process, Board approval is needed by mid-January 2024. The proposed minor adjustments do not limit the Board's ability to propose additional, substantive policy changes for implementation in a later school year.

### **BACKGROUND**

School choice has existed in PPS for more than a century. Approximately 30% of PPS students attend schools other than their assigned neighborhood schools, many enrolled in specialized programs such as Benson Polytechnic High School, DaVinci Arts Middle School or Dual Language Immersion (DLI), which is offered at 27 schools and in five languages. Most students enter such schools and programs through an annual lottery, and PPS uses software to determine the results using factors described in Student Enrollment and Transfers policy.

The district also allows hardship transfers when there is evidence of an extraordinary situation that poses imminent health, safety or serious educational concerns for the student. The chart below shows the volume of hardship petitions and lottery applications received for the past two school years. While lottery requests are lower, hardship petition requests have returned to pre-pandemic levels.

## 2022-23 and 2023-24 Transfer Requests



General transfer procedures are described in policy, 4.10.051-P, while more detailed transfer steps are explained in the Student Transfer Administrative Directive, 4.10.054-AD. The Board Policy Committee has discussed the policy in recent years, but major changes have not been made since 2014, when neighborhood-based schools and programs were moved out of the annual lottery and into a petition-only process, and an income eligibility preference for low-income students was added to most lottery-based schools and programs.

The hardship petition process was the subject of a 2022 internal audit that resulted in five recommendations, including strengthening the “internal control structure to ensure Hardship Petition Transfer requests are approved or denied in alignment with the school district’s policy and administrative directive.” The internal auditor noted that some hardship petition transfers had been approved because space remained in the requested focus option or dual language immersion program, which was not the same as evidence of a hardship.

### **PROPOSED POLICY CHANGES AND RATIONALE**

In July 2023, PPS shifted to a new Synergy transfer software which will allow parents easier access to transfer applications and streamline enrollment changes due to lottery and petition decisions. Testing of new lottery functionality revealed an unexpected opportunity to shift all applications for lottery-based schools and programs to a single application structure, preserving the hardship petition exclusively for transfer to neighborhood-based schools and programs. The change will help fulfill the internal audit implementation plan, ensure consistency in implementation of Board-approved factors such as income eligibility and regional preferences for Benson HS, while also streamlining waitlist management and improving transparency.

After the lottery application period closes, the “open enrollment” application will use the exact same priorities and set-up as the lottery application, with the addition of one field for families to describe any special circumstances that may have prevented them from applying during the lottery cycle or indicate an exceptional need for placement at the requested school. Special circumstances will be reviewed by ETC staff, and input may be gathered from school

administrators to determine whether the student qualifies for the additional priority. The special circumstances priority falls below Board-approved preferences (co-enrolled sibling, income eligibility and regional preference), but can result in a student having a higher placement on a waiting list than applicants without the priority. Lottery and open enrollment applications will be viewable by school staff on a single waitlist, with priority eligibility clearly displayed for improved transparency.

The proposed changes will shift approximately 700 lottery-based school and program applications from the hardship petition into the lottery/open enrollment application. The technical set-up is underway, but policy language needs to be aligned, as well. There are three lines in 4.10.051-P, that link applications to focus options with the petition transfer. If those lines can be revised by mid-January 2024, the new technical system can be used for all 2024-25 transfer results.

There may be other areas of the Student Enrollment and Transfers policy that could be improved, as well. However, due to upcoming transfer cycle, we request that additional modifications be considered at a later date.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no identified fiscal impact associated with this change. The number of transfers into lottery-based schools is not expected to change because of the new policy language and process. The expected impact is improved efficiency and transparency, particularly for school-based staff and families.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The software and workflow changes have been vetted with lottery-based school administrators and counselors. They provided positive feedback about the potential improvements.

### **NEXT STEPS**

2024-25 middle and high school transfer applications are open through December 22, 2023.

The proposed policy language changes are needed by mid-January, in order to use new software functionality to process all transfers into lottery-based schools and programs.

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### **ATTACHMENTS**

- A. [Student Enrollment and Transfers Policy](#)
- B. [Student Enrollment and Transfers Policy - redlined](#)
- C. [List of Lottery-Based Schools and Programs](#)