

Student Placement Policies Focus Group Feedback December 2021

The aim of the policy review is to understand how Alexandria City Public Schools is meeting the needs of students and families. Because the division practices restoration, it is important to hear the voices of our families who are not widely represented. The goal of policy revision is to mitigate the harm that could be caused by vague or neutral policies in support of the vision and mission of the ACPS 2025 Strategic Plan: Equity for All. The Department of Student Services and Equity conducted focus groups with parents to gain families' knowledge and experiences with the ACPS School Board policies.

Below is a synthesis of the feedback parents provided from the conversations with parents on December 7 - 10, 2021. The discussion centered around the Student Placement and Transfer Policies (J policies).

Focus groups were conducted in Amharic, Arabic, English, and Spanish. Approximately 90 parents participated in the 1 hour sessions.

Future focus groups will include students and staff based on the policies selected for revision.

Feedback /Themes

Parents:

- Expressed a wide array of experiences when requesting a transfer. Some talked about negative experiences. Others shared positive experiences. *(JC/JCD: Student Placement)*
- Believed there is a benefit in their students being able to participate in after-school activities and expressed concerns about their children being bullied at some after-school sites . *(JC/JCD: Student Placement)*
- Shared concern about needing improved services for English language learners and students receiving specialized instruction. This is particularly true for families whose first language is not Spanish. *(JC-R/JCD-R: Student Placement Regulation)*
- Asked for more spaces and opportunities to express their concerns. *(JC/JCD: Student Placement)*
- Communicated a need for more inclusive language for students without stable housing. *(JECA: Admission of Children who are Homeless)*
- Shared that current class size limit important interactions between teachers and students. *(IHB Class Size and IBH-R)*

- Agreed with grandfathering siblings, citing that it can be convenient for families. Others felt it contributed to larger classrooms or provided an unfair advantage for some families.

Policies should provide more guidance to mitigate implicit bias.

- ex. Parents whose first language is not English mentioned that staff often assume that their children are in need of English language Services when the children first language is English.
- ex. Parents of language and racial minorities believe that assumptions about a student's first language influence their access to higher-level courses.

Recommendations

Parents asked that the School Board:

- Reconsider the current language around children of ACPS staff that attend our schools because it could limit opportunities for Alexandria City residents to attend schools of choice and their ability to transfer.
- Disaggregate data by race and language surrounding transfers and student placements (Parents expressed a wide array of experiences when requesting placement transfers for their students.)
- Ensure new parents are invited to learn about the policies when they enter the division as a part of the on-boarding process.
- Onboard new hires and vendors who provide programming before, during, and after the school day.
- Inform veteran teachers and administrators of changes in policies.
- Establish a process to inform students of policies and revisions.
- Translate all policies to all languages in the ACPS community.
- Continue to include students, families and staff and as a part of the policymaking process to ensure the policies are equitable.
- Create spaces for the entire Alexandria City community to learn about the district's policies.