

*A Proposed Elementary School Parent Preference/Managed Choice  
Student Assignment Plan for the Rochester City School District*

Submitted by

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## **Introduction**

Our study and plan for enhancing the education of all students and advancing the quality of education in all schools in Rochester, New York draws on our past experiences and well as on educational research. This plan provides ways of granting elementary choice in an orderly, equitable, and fair way to all students enrolled in public schools, including those affiliated with low-income and affluent families. Our proposed plan is limited to elementary school grades K-6, although it has implications for middle schools.

Equity in school assignments is a major goal of this project. Equity will be achieved by using enrollment fairness guidelines based on socioeconomic status derived from data on record regarding the eligibility or ineligibility of students to participate in the free lunch program. To be fair to students in all socioeconomic and racial groups, the plan also proposes new assignment procedures that are tamper-proof, and prescribes ways of upgrading low-achieving schools annually.

*We propose an elementary student assignment and school improvement plan that permits parents and their children to choose a public school of enrollment that promotes socioeconomic diversity in all student bodies, and that provides for school improvement by way of an annual monitoring process.*

## **Background**

Research and planning in community education is concerned with individual enhancements as well as group advancement, not one or the other but both. As stated by Martin Buber, a philosophical anthropologist of the twentieth century, “The individual is a fact of existence insofar as [one] steps into a living relation with other individuals. The aggregate is a fact of existence insofar as it is built up on living units of relation” (Buber 1947/1955, p 203). Thus, community educational planning should focus on both group needs and individual concerns. All of this is to say that teaching and learning is a reciprocal relationship between young and adult people that occurs within schools in local communities.

Social scientist Janet Schofield discovered that the racial mix of a student body, the school’s physical plant, teachers, and academic programs are contextual effects that have a great deal to do with the attractiveness of learning communities (Schofield 1982, p 216). Moreover, Michael Alves, George Hagerty, and Charles Willie discovered that attractive city schools in Boston tend to be diversified in the kinds of students who attend them; they also tend to have higher average achievement scores in reading and mathematics than other schools, and lower suspension and dropout rates.

A majority of students (64 to 85 percent) in the most attractive schools in this Boston study were transported to and from school. We conclude that, the convenience of attending school near one’s home was, for these students, less important than the school’s reputation for offering a quality education. These attractive schools also were the first choice of eight-to-nine out of every ten students attending them.

Because Boston implemented in 1989 a *Controlled Choice* student assignment plan, all students pursuing a general education were free to choose their schools. Choices were made by students and their parents at all grade levels, including those in elementary schools. Seven-out-of every ten young students in grade 1 -- the official entering grade -- chose to be transported to and from these attractive city schools.

In a Charleston County (South Carolina) school district study, Michael Alves, Jose Alicea, Craig Mitchel, and Charles Willie found socioeconomic characteristics of a school to have a contextual effect that influences achievement and other educational adaptations of children.

The smallest proportion of students in all racial groups with achievement scores below the national norm on the *Metropolitan Achievement Test* were found in those schools with high concentrations of poverty: 80 percent or more of the students were affiliated with low-income families eligible to participate in the free lunch program. In contrast, the largest proportion of students in all racial groups with academic achievement scores above the national norm were enrolled in affluent-concentrated schools, with 80 percent or more of the students as members of non-low income or affluent families and were ineligible for free lunch.

## Rochester Focus

Our study and planning project for the Rochester City School District recognizes public education as a community affair.

In our February 15, 2001 *Proposed Work Plan*, we promised the Rochester Board of Education and the Superintendent that, by December 2001, we would:

- Provide support and assistance for the development and implementation of a *Parent Preference/Managed Choice Student Assignment and School Improvement Plan*.
- Conduct a demographic analysis of the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic characteristics of residential neighborhoods.
- Assess the feasibility of reorganizing home-school attendance areas into one, two, or three student attendance zones to overcome the annual problem of modifying several home-school zones because of demographic changes in the community.
- Review the existing grade structure of the school district to determine if a pattern is needed that is more compatible with enlarged student attendance zones of several schools that serve several neighborhoods within a zone.
- Analyze existing facilities, specifically discovering ways of dealing with overcrowding and underutilization of facilities, and structural displacement found in home-school zones that have more student residents than the home school could accommodate.
- Review current operational procedures of the District's Parent Action Center and propose ways of enhancing service delivery to parents and their children regarding school choices.
- Consult with the District's transportation experts to determine if the length of bus trips for some students could be reduced.

In the process of preparing this report, we met with parents, teachers, principals, administrators, school and city policy makers, elected and appointed governmental officers, and several community groups. We have collected and analyzed data pertaining to the location of schools; the socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and other characteristics of school student bodies; instructional space available in schools; and existing student assignment practices. We have familiarized ourselves with the City of Rochester's *Neighborhood Revitalization Plan* and analyzed the geographic distribution of various kinds of personal and social pathology rates within the city.

Moreover, we have examined the strengths and weaknesses of several schools and visited a goodly number of schools while in session and interviewed members of these schools' administrative staff.

Our plan and recommendations in this report, when they are implemented, will achieve all of the outcomes mentioned above in a simultaneous way. Our proposal is based on our analysis of administrative data, our numerous conversations with professional educators, parents, and community members, and our observations.

## **Rochester Demographics**

The City of Rochester and the Rochester City School District have the same boundaries but each serves total population groups with different needs and interests. According to Census 2000, the City of Rochester is home to 219,773 people (see Table 1A), of whom 19 percent are school-age youngsters from five-to-seventeen years old. Another 17 percent of the population are 55 years of age and older, most of whom are unlikely to have direct contact with elementary and secondary public schools. The city, therefore, has younger and older population groups with different needs.

Additionally, Rochester is now a city of minorities with no single group exceeding 50 percent of residents who identify with a single race. Racially, 48 percent of the city's population are White people, and 39 percent are Black or African American people, the second largest group. Hispanic people, the third largest group, represent 13 percent. While a majority of the City of Rochester population (61 percent) are classified as people of color, according to Census 2000, 83 percent of Rochester City School District students are people of color, according to a 1999-2000 school year census (NY State Education Department, March 1, 2001).

The total city population and the total public school student body are different in age and racial composition. Within the District, Black or African American students are now the majority, slightly less than two-thirds (63 percent) of all public school students. The second largest group in the public schools is Hispanic students (18 percent), with White students representing the third largest group (17 percent), according to Census 1999-2000 for the school system (NY State Education Department, March 1, 2001).

The District has 19,494 elementary school students, of whom 2,343 (or 12 percent) are enrolled in kindergarten; 873 (or 4 percent) are special education students; and 1,565 (or 8 percent) are enrolled in bilingual classes.

According to the New York State Public School Report Card, the per-pupil expenditure in Rochester is more than \$11,000 a year. Rochester has slightly more than 3,000 teachers for a total student enrollment of slightly more than 36,000 which results in a system-wide average of about twelve students per teacher. In kindergarten, the average class size is about 18 and in what is called the “common branch,” class size is 22, according to 1999-2000 data included in the New York State Public School Report Card (NY State Department of Education, March 1, 2001).

## **II. Data Analysis of Academic Achievement Trends & Influences**

Here we present information on the academic achievement of Rochester students and share our observation on the meaning of these data.

Despite a well-staffed school system, the Rochester School District students tend to lag behind statewide averages in achievement scores on standardized tests. On the Grade 4 English Language Arts Test and other performance indicators, just 22 percent of general education students perform at Level 3 and 4 on the February 2000 test.

Level 3 students understand written and oral text. Their writing is focused and organized with only minor errors that do not interfere with readability. These students exhibit knowledge and skill that each elementary student should have, and are proficient in skills at some intermediate-levels. Level 4 students show thorough understandings of written and oral text. Their writing is well organized. These students exceed the standards and have superior knowledge and skill.

Levels 3 and 4 represent the highest levels of achievement. Statewide, 48 percent of the general education students performed at Levels 3 and 4 compared with only 22 percent of Rochester students (NY State Department of Education, March 1, 2001).

*We believe that part of the lower achievement problem is due to the life circumstances of many of the students enrolled in Rochester public schools and, also, may be due to student assignment practices that result in high concentrations of students with limited opportunities in several general education schools. Moreover, the incentive system of providing funds to schools that reached benchmarks should be supplemented with funds for least performing schools to better challenge them.*

We use Levels 3 and 4 in this analysis because these levels clearly establish a standard for excellence. When the proportion of students in elementary schools scoring at Levels 3 and 4 on the Fourth Grade English Language Arts Test for the year 2001 is correlated with the proportion of minority students (or people of color) enrolled in these schools, a coefficient of  $-.67$  is obtained (see Table 2Ai). *This means that: 45 percent of the variance in average achievement scores by these schools may be attributed to circumstances and experiences of the students enrolled, probably associated with their racial or ethnic group; and that, as the proportion of minorities / people of color increases, the scores representing excellent achievement in schools will tend to decrease* (note that the correlation coefficient has a negative sign).

A similar finding is revealed for distributions of students affiliated with low-income families when correlated with indicators of excellence in achievement by schools. A coefficient of  $-.64$  was obtained when these two variables were correlated (see Table 2Aii). *This means that 41 percent of the variance in the average achievement score in Rochester schools may be attributed to the socioeconomic status of their students. Again the correlation coefficient has a negative sign indicating that as the proportion of low-income students in a school increases the proportion of students with high achieving scores will tend to decrease.*

We also found a multiple correlation coefficient between the proportion of students eligible for free lunch, the proportion of minority students, and the proportion of students performing at Levels 3 and 4 on the English Language Arts Achievement Test.

This multiple correlation coefficient implies that, when level 3 and level 4 student performance functions as a dependent variable, the proportion of variance in achievement explained by independent and joint interaction of low-income status and minority status among students increased to 51 percent (see Table 3A). Minority students, alone, account for 18.1 percent of the variance in a distribution of achievement scores, while low-income students, alone, account for 12.2 percent of the variance. Taken together these two factors account for 20.3 percent of the variance.

### **Achievement, Race and Socioeconomic Status**

To demonstrate that racial and socioeconomic isolation in school student bodies tend to contribute to lower performance on achievement tests, we rank-ordered the 33 general education elementary schools in Rochester, New York that enrolled students from kindergarten to the fifth or sixth grade and organized this distribution by quintiles. While each quintile group should contain seven schools, the middle range or third quintile group contained five schools only, because school # 25 (a pre-kindergarten to grade 2 school) did not have a fourth grade, the grade level used in this study for analyzing achievement, and because the total number of general education elementary schools was 34, not 35 schools – the required number for each quintile to have seven schools. Despite this adulteration of the third quintile, the first and second quintiles and the fourth and fifth quintiles retain their full compliment of seven schools each.

Within the distribution of 33 elementary schools used in this analysis, the proportion of minorities (or students of color) enrolled in each school ranged from 51 percent in school # 42 to 99 percent in school # 3. Also, the proportion of students eligible for free lunch varied from 27 percent in school # 46 to 99 percent in school # 29.

For all of these schools as a collectivity, 71 percent of their students were eligible to receive free lunches and 85 percent were people of color. When the proportions for race and socioeconomic status are as large as these, a school system should accept system-wide responsibility for, and exercise extraordinary diligence to, protecting against ghettoization and the concentration of students with certain characteristics in specific buildings.

*The data and our experience reveal that the average in student achievement scores tends to be negatively impacted by schools that are racially and/or socioeconomically isolated – that is, schools in which 80 percent or more of the student body consists of low income students or students of color.*

The analysis of student achievement by quintiles, as seen in Table 4A, indicates that *in the top two quintiles consisting of 14 schools, only three (21 percent) are racially isolated, two of which also are socioeconomically isolated. But in the bottom two quintiles of this distribution of elementary schools, all 14 (100 percent) are racially isolated and more than half of these racially isolated schools (57 percent) are poverty-concentrated.* Schools are identified as isolated when eight out of every ten students are racial minorities or are affiliated with families of low-income status.

These findings do not suggest that all schools should be racially and socioeconomically balanced. But they do suggest that we should avoid letting schools become racially or socioeconomically isolated and centers of concentration for low-income students and students of color.

*All of this is to say that our student assignment policy should be designed to attract white students as well as students of color into all schools in the district. The same policy is applicable to affluent and low-income students. Programs to attract students should be designed to attract all sorts and conditions of students to all schools, not just to some schools.*

Many plans designed to attract affluent and white students to a school system are flawed because they attempt to attract such persons to magnet programs and other special programs. These “attractor” programs tend to forget about schools that provide a general education for all students and leave them racially and/or socioeconomically isolated and segregated. *Fairness is the principle that governs the design of this student assignment plan.*

Our studies of Controlled Choice in Cambridge and Brockton, Massachusetts reveal that these two cities were successful in attracting White students back to all schools. Because of its Controlled Choice plan, none of the schools in Cambridge are racially isolated. As a result, the association between race and achievement was reduced to a correlation coefficient of  $-.57$ , indicating that only one-third of the variance in the distribution of achievement scores by elementary schools in Cambridge could be attributed to race, because all schools in its Controlled Choice plan are racially diversified. This correlation coefficient is less than the coefficient obtained for these two factors in Rochester (as seen in Table 2Ai) that does not yet have a formal and equitable choice plan that governs the enrollment of all students in elementary schools.

## **Enrollment Fairness Guidelines**

Here, we mention one final conceptual matter to which attention should be given. *To prevent the presence of racially and socioeconomically isolated schools that tend to contribute to low achievement among students, enrollment fairness guidelines are necessary and essential.* Several school planning experts have concluded that freedom of choice without enrollment fairness guidelines will result in more rather than less school segregation.

As mentioned earlier, race or socioeconomic status factors together account for approximately 50 percent of the variance in the distribution of achievement scores by schools in Rochester, New York (see Table 3A). *While the race factor accounts for slightly more variance in average achievement scores by schools than the socioeconomic factor, the difference is not great. Because courts in recent years have become increasingly reluctant to sanction the use of race in enrollment fairness guidelines for student assignments, we find that schools can attain a substantial amount of diversity in their student bodies by using socioeconomic enrollment fairness guidelines.* The correlation coefficient of  $-.64$  between the percent of students who receive free lunches and the percent of high achievers on the English Language Arts Test by schools indicated that the socioeconomic status variable (without holding race constant) explained 40 percent of the variance in the school-by-school distribution of achievement average scores (see Table 2Aii).

The use of socioeconomic status as a major factor in an enrollment fairness guideline for student assignment is a simple and easy procedure. Such an enrollment fairness guideline can be found by determining the number of students in the total school district or in a relatively large student attendance zone who are eligible and who are ineligible to receive free lunch. This is the proportion that would be assigned to each school if assignment were randomly done; thus, no socioeconomic group receives preferential treatments.

*Whatever the proportions of low-income and non-low-income or affluent students are for the total school district or for the total student attendance zone are the proportions used in the enrollment fairness guidelines. After the first round of assignments have been made, if all seats in one socioeconomic category are not chosen, these remaining seats may be turned over to any person who wishes to attend that school disregarding socioeconomic status. Enrollment fairness guidelines are not designed to prevent students in any socioeconomic status group from attending a specific school. They merely guarantee that a fair number of seats are reserved for students in all socioeconomic groups if they wish to attend a particular school. Socioeconomic fairness guidelines are strongly recommended to overcome the harmful effects of the concentration and isolation of low-income students in some public schools.*

Racial minority status and low-income socioeconomic status are not duplicate variables, but they are strongly related to each other. A correlation coefficient of .69 indicates that slightly less than one-half of the variance (47 percent) in the distribution pattern of one of these factors may be attributed to the distribution pattern of the other factor.

*If socioeconomic fairness guidelines are used, both economic and racial concerns may be taken into consideration without risking a challenge in court for using racial fairness guidelines alone.*

*Our data clearly indicate that racially and socioeconomically isolated schools (schools in which 80 percent or more of enrollees are students of color or low-income students) are not good for little children. In nineteen of the twenty-one racially isolated general education elementary schools in Rochester (90 percent of all such schools), achievement scores at Levels 3 and 4 in the New York State fourth grade English Language Arts Test are at or below the citywide proportion of 41.9. Only two (or 10 percent) of the racially isolated schools have average achievement scores above the citywide median (see Table 4A).*

*A similar finding is seen among schools in which 80 percent or more of their students are affiliated with low-income families. Only two of these twelve schools (17 percent of all such schools) have students whose average achievement score is above the citywide median achievement score for Levels 3 and 4 on the test mentioned above. In ten schools (83 percent) of the twenty-one low-income concentrated schools, the student average score for Levels 3 and 4 is below the citywide median (see Table 4A).*

People of color and White people are enrolled in both racially isolated and racially diverse schools. However, the enrollment experience of the two racial groups in these kinds of schools is disproportionate. While about 15 percent of all students enrolled in the 34 general education elementary schools in Rochester are White students, they represent only 7 percent of all students in the racially isolated schools.

Similarly, while about 71 percent of all students in the 34 general education elementary schools in Rochester are affiliated with low-income families, 87 percent of the families in the poverty-concentrated schools are affiliated with low-income families (see Table 5A).

The data show that *some* affluent and White students enroll in schools that serve substantial numbers of low-income students and students of color. *Thus the task confronting us as planners and the school system is to discover ways of increasing the number of diversified schools that serve all sorts and conditions of children. These diversified schools have higher achievement scores than other schools.*

As stated earlier, both race and socioeconomic status together correlate with achievement scores resulting in a multiple correlation coefficient of .71. This figure indicates that 51 percent of variance by schools in the indicator of achievement used in this study may be attributed to the independent and joint effects of these two factors. Race and socioeconomic status correlate with each other at .69 and, therefore, account for nearly half of the variance (47 percent) in the pattern of distribution manifested by each of these factors. *Thus, we recommend that enrollment fairness guidelines designed to make all general education elementary schools available to all students regardless of their socioeconomic status should be implemented immediately.*

## **Educational Benefits of Diversified Learning Environments**

Much of our attention in the past has focused on the achievement of individuals without paying sufficient attention to characteristics of the learning environment. We now know that the learning environment has a contextual effect on individuals and their performance.

Diversity is one characteristic of the learning environment that seems to be related to the achievement of individuals. There are many ways of describing diversity. We approach diversity in education foremost by considering gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Our visits to several schools in Rochester have taught us that other components of diversity include the curriculum of a school, the multiple neighborhoods from which students are recruited, the leadership style manifested by the principal and, in general, the school culture.

School # 14 is a classic example of the kind of diversity mentioned above. In terms of race and socioeconomic status, School # 14 is an isolated, a segregated, or an identifiable school: 93 percent of students enrolled are people of color, and 88 percent participate in the free lunch program. Nevertheless, a majority of its fourth grade students (53 percent) scored at Levels 3 and 4, the highest levels in the New York State English Language Arts Test. This score placed School # 14 in Rochester's top quintile of the distribution of achievement scores, exceeded only by five other elementary schools (# 46, # 23, # 7, # 52, and # 43).

Most Rochester schools with racial and socioeconomic characteristics similar to those exhibited by School # 14 are below the median achievement score, in the bottom half of the distribution of average student scores on the test mentioned above. Clearly, the stellar leadership and the supportive school culture of School # 14 contribute to the high achievement of its students; and credit must also be given to its curriculum. The pedagogy and instructional strategies are those outlined by the “America’s Choice” Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Model. This approach is designed to achieve “whole-school change.”

Among other interesting features of School # 14 are the following: extended day activities including before- and after-school programs for all grade levels, vacation and summer programs for both acceleration and enrichment, an after school day-care program in cooperation with the Lewis Street Center, inclusion opportunities for students with special needs, and language enrichment programs for students whose native language is not English. Moreover, School # 14 has outstanding programs in music and art, including primary and intermediate choirs, instrumental music lessons in a variety of instruments, and exhibitions of student art.

Although School # 14 is an inner-city school, only 45 percent of its students reside in the home school attendance areas surrounding the school; 55 percent come from other home school attendance areas throughout the city. School # 14 receives students from 27 of the 34 home school attendance areas for general education elementary schools in Rochester. Although not classified as a magnet school, School #14 is an educational magnet with widespread influence that draws students to it from distant locations.

The presence of students from 80 percent of all home school attendance areas in a single school contributes to diversity. In this respect, School # 14 is similar to School #12, which draws 53 percent of its students from distant home school attendance areas. School # 12 has an average achievement score in the top quintile that is similar to the average achievement score in School # 14. However, School # 12 is not an inner-city school; only 39 percent of its students participate in the free lunch program; and its proportion of students of color (78 percent) is less than the District-wide average of 85 percent for all elementary schools in Rochester.

Among the elementary schools with high average scores on the achievement test referred to earlier, about half of these schools receive more students from other home school attendance areas than from their own home school attendance area. School # 14 is situated among these schools that draw most of their students from distant home school attendance areas such as Schools # 46, # 23, and # 12. However, School # 14 draws students from a wider range of students than the other schools mentioned.

School # 14 is unlike schools with low average scores in the bottom quintile of the distribution of scores. Six of the seven lowest achieving schools draw fewer students from distant home school attendance areas than they draw from the home school attendance area surrounding the school. Thus, the widespread draw of School # 14 must be classified as a diversity component that may be associated with this school's high average achievement scores. School # 14, also, is a small school (see Table 6A). It has fewer than 400 students, while other low achieving, racially and socioeconomically isolated schools have 500 or more students, with two having greater than 700 students.

We briefly reviewed the success story of School # 14 for several reasons. It illustrates the many different kinds of characteristics that should be considered in achieving diversity within a school's student body; and it indicates that people in search of excellence in education will choose schools located in the inner city as well as schools near city limits. School # 14 also demonstrates that there are multiple routes to excellence and that any school, regardless of its geographic location, can become an attractive learning environment. By permitting students within each zone to choose a school according to the choice program that we recommend, other schools similar and different from # 14 may be encouraged to make themselves attractive. Finally, this analysis suggests that the nearness of a school to its patrons is not as important as the quality of education that the school offers.

### **Zone School Improvement and Visiting Committees**

Effective community progress in education and other activities must come from above as well as from below. Some planners and school reformers tend to demonize the bureaucracy and central administration of public school education as the reason for failure and low achievement of some students. We believe that such accusations are one-sided, misguided and, therefore, wrong. People who bash institutions fail to recognize the stabilizing effects of their rules and regulations that enable some people to do what they are supposed to do because they can predict that other people will do what they are supposed to do. Thus, institutional efforts help when they support and sustain each member of a society and facilitate cooperation among all because all members who subscribe to a common set of goals and agreed upon methods for their attainment can predict how they and others ought to interact to achieve their common goals. Patterns of interaction codified into rules and regulations emerge from bureaucratic efforts and institutionalized action.

Bureaucratic efforts alone are usually insufficient because stability, a property of institutional action, often needs continuous injections of change. And change seems to be a property of “grass roots” action that emerges from the bottom by individuals and groups of individuals. However, change from below alone is as insufficient in effective education as stability that is promoted only from above. Both are necessary in school reform.

*We believe that some form of social organization designed to harmonize bureaucratic and “grass roots” action from above and below, can be a social organization of the middle range. Thus, we propose such an organization in this plan to continuously contribute to school improvement. Such an organization should gather up the energy and observations of parents, professional educators and concerned citizens. What follows is a discussion of who should participate in such an organization and how such an organization should function.*

*Because each of the three student attendance zones proposed for the Rochester School District should have a similar range of quality educational services, we propose that an advisory committee called a Zone School Improvement and Visiting Committee should be established in each of the three zones to monitor educational institutions.*

*The Superintendent of Schools would appoint zone members, because the outcome of their work is advisory to the Superintendent and through the Superintendent to the School Board. The Committee should have the responsibility of visiting and filing a report on one-half of all schools in a zone each year. Thus, every school in the zone would be visited once every one, two or three years. Among the one-half of zone schools visited each year (four to six schools), two to three of these schools should be either those that have the lowest average achievement scores on statewide achievement tests, or those that have the lowest percent of students in their entering grades who chose a school as a first-choice or second-choice school. The remaining schools visited each year may be chosen by the Committee itself or by the Superintendent. *This Committee may serve, also, as an advocate for new and different kinds of educational services and for programs and services that should be terminated.**

*We recommend that the Committee should consist of twenty-four members with a co-chair arrangement of a professional educator and a parent or concerned citizen. The twenty-four members should be recruited from the following categories: six principals or assistant principals, six teachers, counselors or school social workers, six parents and six concerned citizens. All committee members, with the exception of professional educators, should reside or work in the zone for which the Committee is responsible. Each school visiting team should consist of four persons: two professional educators, one a principal or assistant principal, the other a teacher, counselor or school social worker, one parent with a school-age child, and one concerned citizen who lives or works in the zone.*

Staff service for the three Zone School Improvement and Visiting Committees should be provided by a Manager or Administrator or Director or Coordinator who has sufficient support staff to do the following: help arrange on-site visitations, help the Committee develop a schedule of questions and issues that should be investigated, assist the site visitors in preparing a formal report for the Committee's approval, forward the report on schools visited to the Superintendent annually, and assist the Committee in finding and nominating Committee replacements after a three-year term has been completed by each member.

While Committee reports to the Superintendent are advisory, they are not confidential. Thus, the Superintendent may share the reports with whomever he desires. By staffing and appointing to the Zone School Improvement and Visiting Committee local community representatives and school-based and central office personnel, this proposal gives high priority to school improvement and provides a mechanism for bringing bureaucratic and "grass roots" initiatives together.

### **III. Analysis of the District's Current Elementary Student Assignment Policy**

Here we provide explicit procedures for using Controlled Choice as a way of fulfilling the goals of Rochester's Parent Preference/Managed Choice Student Assignment and School Improvement Plan.

Because the Rochester City School District is obligated to educate all the students who are legally enrolled in the school district, the District must do so in a way that is fair for all students. To do this, all school buildings should have sufficient capacity to accommodate the educational needs of students assigned to them. Also, an equitable school system must provide all students with equal access to high quality educational opportunities. An equitable school system also ensures that the student assignment policy is designed and managed in a way that accommodates the needs of a range of students so that no one is disproportionately burdened in the pursuit of a quality education because of one's race, ethnicity, family income, or residence.

These requirements for operating an equitable student assignment plan and an effective school system are especially important when the student body of a school district is diversified, and housing patterns in a local community are racially and socioeconomically identifiable.

Like most school districts in the United States, the Rochester City School District currently has a residential-based assignment policy that affects thirty-four elementary schools. Under this policy, which is known as a “neighborhood school” or “home school attendance area policy,” the location of a child’s home address is supposed to determine where a child attends school. However, we found that only about 59% of the District's elementary students are actually enrolled in their home school (see Table 8A).

This finding is based on our analysis of the home school and assigned school student enrollment data provided for 19,682 students who were enrolled in District’s elementary schools in the 2000-01 school year (source: District’s Management Information Services). These data indicate that only 11,567 or 58.8% of the District’s elementary students were enrolled in their home school and that 8,115 or 41.2% were not enrolled in their home school in 2000-01 school year (see Table 8A).

The proportion of students who were actually enrolled in their home school varies from school to school and ranges from a high of 86% in school # 46 to a low of 49.8% in school # 23. The actual number of students not enrolled in their home school also varies significantly from school to school from a high of 541 students in school # 33 to low of only 15 students in school # 1. In addition only 13 of the District’s 34 home schools enrolled 58.8% or more of the students who resided in their attendance area, and 21 home schools had home-school resident enrollment rates that were below the districtwide average for home school enrollment (again, see Table 8A).

We analyzed the home school and non-home school enrollment patterns of the District's elementary students by their socioeconomic status. We found that, 59% of the students who received a school free lunch attend their home school, 41% do not attend their home school. In addition, 58% of the students who receive reduced-price-lunch or pay for their lunch attend their home school and 42% do not attend their home school. *These proportions from different socioeconomic groups are nearly identical and strongly suggest that a student's family income is having little or no effect on whether students currently attend or do not attend their home school.*

We also analyzed the home school and non-home school student enrollment data by race and ethnic group and found that 60% of the African American students attend their home school and 40% attend schools outside of their home school area and that 68% of the white students attend their home school and 38% attend schools outside of their home school area. *These findings suggest that there is no significant difference in the home school and non-home school enrollment patterns of the District's African American and white students.*

On the other hand, we found that 51% of the Hispanic students and only 48% of the Asian students attended their home schools in the 2000-01 school year and that only 27% of the students in Bilingual Education Programs and only 16% of the students in English as Second Language classes attend their home schools. We also found that only one-third of the District's students receiving special education services were enrolled in their home schools. *These findings indicate that the District's current home school attendance policy is not particularly effective for students who need bilingual and special education services.*

## **Home School Attendance Area Boundaries**

To effectively implement an equitable home school assignment policy, each home school should have sufficient instructional space to accommodate the educational needs of all the elementary students who reside within its attendance area. School boards must also alter the attendance boundaries of its home schools when necessary to alleviate overcrowding and underutilization of school facilities.

Our analysis of the geographic attendance boundaries of the District's 34 home schools indicates that each home school has its own attendance area and that the attendance areas encompass the entire geographic jurisdiction of the RSCD: every elementary student who resides in the District has a home school to which he or she is entitled to attend under the District's current home school assignment policy. Although every elementary student resides within a home school attendance area, *our analysis of where these schools are located within each attendance area indicates that a student's home school is not always the school that is closest to one's home.*

We also found that the home school attendance area boundaries that have been drawn for many of the schools located in most densely populated and low income areas of the City – in Neighborhood Sectors 3, 4, 9, and 10 – have peculiar and irregularly shapes. These are in contrast to the more symmetrically shaped home school attendance boundaries that have been drawn for schools # 1, # 46, # 28, # 52, # 42, and # 4, which are located in the more suburban and less populated areas of the City. These discrepancies suggest that the boundaries in the impacted areas have been changed more often than the boundaries in the more affluent and less populated areas.

According to District administrators, the home school attendance area boundaries of many of the schools in the impacted areas have been altered on numerous occasions over the years in order to address overcrowding and to reassign students because of school closings and new school construction. They also confirmed that the attendance boundaries in several of home schools outside of the impacted areas have remained relatively stable for many years. Having to change elementary school attendance boundaries and mandatorily reassign students for any reason is disruptive and often generates intense community conflict in the affected areas.

Our analysis also shows that the number of elementary students who reside within each home school attendance area varies from school to school and ranged from a low of only 62 resident students in home school # 1 to a high of 1,199 resident students in school # 33 in the 2000-01 school year.

We also find that the number of residents in each home school varies significantly from neighborhood to neighborhood:

- four home schools (# 1, # 46, # 3, and # 25) had less than 200 resident students;
- five home schools (# 5, # 4, # 14, # 23, and # 52) had only 211 to 260 resident students;
- two home schools (# 35 and # 42) had 315 to 374 resident students;
- five home schools (# 29, # 44, # 12, # 19, and # 50) had from 518 to 596 resident students;
- six home schools (# 28, # 6, # 2, # 37, # 8, and # 17) had 605 to 694 resident students;
- five home schools (# 36, # 16, # 39, # 7, and # 41) had 714 to 793 resident students;
- four home schools (# 30, # 9, # 43, and # 34) had 830 to 924 resident students; and
- three schools (# 45, # 22, and # 33) had 1,070 to 1,199 resident students.

These data indicate that 16 home schools had resident student populations that were below the district average of 578 resident students and that 18 home schools had resident student populations that were above the district average. *Analysis of the geographic distribution of these resident student populations indicates the vast majority of the home schools with the largest resident students are disproportionately located in City Sectors 3, 4, 9 and 10. We also find that the home schools with the largest resident student populations are located in the most densely populated and poverty impacted areas of the City. These findings in combination with our observations and findings concerning the stability of the home school attendance boundaries in the City's impacted areas discussed above, strongly call into question the educational viability and stability of the District's home school attendance policy.*

## Structural Displacement

*Although every elementary student in the Rochester City School District is entitled to attend his or her home school under the District's current assignment policy, we found that not all District students can attend their home school. Our analysis of the resident utilization rates of the District's 34 home schools indicated that about one half of the District's home schools do not currently have enough seats to accommodate at least 1,500 of the students who reside in their attendance area.*

When a home school attendance area is drawn in a way so that the school does not have enough operating capacity to enroll all the students who reside in its attendance area, the school can enroll all of its attendance area students and become overcrowded. Or, the school can displace some of its students into schools that have available space. *The problem of **structural displacement** – when a school does not have sufficient capacity to enroll all the students that are entitled to attend the school – is inherently unfair when it disproportionately affects only certain areas of the school district.*

For purposes of this analysis, a home school's resident utilization rate was obtained by dividing the number of elementary students who reside within a home school's attendance area by the school's enrollment or operating capacity. While elementary school capacity utilization standards may vary from district to district, *school facilities experts generally agree that each elementary school should have a student enrollment that utilizes about 85% of the school's operating capacity. If this standard cannot be met, then each home school should at least have a resident utilization rate that is similar to the districtwide-home school resident utilization rate.*

In order to determine a districtwide-home school resident utilization, one must divide the total number of elementary students who reside in the school district by the sum total of all the home schools' operating capacities. If all the home schools met this standard, then no students would be structurally displaced.

*Rochester's 34 home schools currently have a districtwide-home school resident utilization rate of 91.4% and 15 home schools currently have resident utilization rates that are above 100% (see Table 7A). The home schools without enough operating capacity to accommodate all the students who reside in their attendance areas are schools # 33, 22, 45, 34, 43, 30, 41, 7, 39, 16, 36, 37, 2, 6, and 50.*

Table 7A also shows that the home-school resident utilization rates in these impacted home schools range from 100.8% in school # 33 to 151.5% in school # 34 as compared to the resident utilization rates in the 19 other home schools that range from only 14.5% in school # 1 to 94.6% in school # 9. *Overall, exactly one half of the District's home schools have resident utilization rates that are above the districtwide home school utilization rate of 91.4% and one half of the home schools have resident utilization rates below the districtwide average. The greatest disparity exists between the three schools with the **lowest** resident utilization rate – which are schools #1 at 14.5%, #5 at 27.4% and #46 at 42.6% – and the three schools with the **highest** resident utilization rates – which are schools #34 at 151.5%, #30 at 150.9%, and #43 at 125.2%.*

There is also a significant geographic disparity in the home-school resident utilization rates when the schools are grouped together within their respective City Sectors: six City Sectors have resident utilization rates that are below the district average utilization rate and four City Sectors have resident utilization rates above the districtwide average (see Table 9A). These data indicate that if the District allowed parents to choose a school in their City Sector, at least 545 students would be structurally displaced out of their Sector.

We also find that allowing parents to choose the City Sector schools they want their children to attend is not viable because Sector # 1 has only one elementary school and City Sectors # 2, # 5, # 6, and # 7 have only two elementary schools located within their current City Sector boundaries. However, we find that managing a parent-choice student assignment plan within a broader geographic area that still is relatively close to where families reside can eliminate structural displacement at the elementary level in the Rochester City School District.

## Student Transportation

Analysis of the District's student transportation data indicates that about 38% of the District's elementary students are currently being transported to their school of enrollment. This figure is similar to the proportion of students who are not enrolled in their home schools cited above. According to the School Board's transportation policy, students are eligible to be transported if they reside more than a mile and one half from their assigned school. This suggests that many of the students who are being transported are attending schools that are relatively far from their homes.

This observation was confirmed by the District's Director of Transportation, who informed us that many of the bus routes are disproportionately long and time consuming because of where students live and where they attend school. This finding is also supported by our analysis of the District's home school and assigned school enrollment data which indicates that nearly every home school is enrolling students who reside in nearly every other home school attendance area.

These data also show the students who are attending a home school – not citywide draw school – that is located at the opposite side of the school district. The Director of Transportation also informed us that the issue of students transferring into and out of schools throughout the school year has caused a myriad of routing problems that have an adverse impact on transportation costs and student travel times. *These findings seriously call into question the cost effectiveness of the District's home school attendance policy and strongly suggest that the proposed parent choice student assignment plan should be designed so as to minimize unnecessary student transportation costs.*

## **Criteria for Constructing Student Attendance Zones**

*We recommend that student attendance zones should consist of several contiguous City Sectors that, together and have a diversified student population similar to the student population of the total school district.* Because the three proposed zones unite contiguous City Sectors, the schools within each zone may serve as centers for educational as well as other community activities and services. This concept is congruent with urban planning principles that identify schools as agencies that can serve multiple purposes.

The City Sectors consolidated into larger student attendance zones should be contiguous and adjacent to eliminate any concern that gerrymandering could have influenced the formation of a zone.

Each zone should have eight or more elementary schools. A minimum of eight to thirteen elementary schools in each zone is necessary in the Rochester City School District so that parents and their children feel that a sufficient number of alternative educational experiences are available from which to choose.

All general or regular education elementary schools within a zone are available to all students. All new students may choose up to three schools in a zone and may rank-order their preferences. This method of school choice empowers parents and students, because parents and students are authorized to choose schools whereas schools cannot reject students. The parents rank-ordered choices for their children are honored if they meet the requirements of enrollment fairness guidelines, which are designed to achieve both proximity and socioeconomic diversity in all schools and to make the school choice process equitable.

The enrollment fairness guidelines facilitate diversity within the student bodies of each school because we have found – as have other educators – that such learning environments enhance the education of all students and harm none.

The choice process also is a stimulus to all schools within a zone to become more attractive, because schools must compete for students. We refer to the annual choice process as “*a referendum on school attractiveness.*”

Finally, the assignment of students to schools by zones should simplify the transportation of students to and from school. Because students are limited to selecting schools within the zone in which they reside, long rides for some students from one end of the school district to another are no longer necessary. It is easier to plan bus routes that are limited to schools within a single enlarged Student Attendance Zone. It is not necessary to choose a school outside one’s zone, because each zone should have the same range and quality of educational services as any other zone. And School Improvement and Visiting Committees (discussed elsewhere in this report) will be formed to guarantee that each zone is treated in an equitable way. In the proposed Student Attendance Zones for Rochester, there are high achieving and low achieving schools in all zones, bilingual educational programs in all zones, and special education programs in all zones.

In the future, we recommend that, when possible, new magnet schools should be zone magnet schools, in large part because the choice process is designed to encourage all schools to become attractive as if they were magnets. In addition, the schools that are attractive and over-subscribed during the choice process may be schools that the district wishes to replicate.

## **IV. Recommendations for a Parent Preference/Managed Choice Elementary Student Assignment Plan**

### **School Choice Student Attendance Zones**

- 1) We recommend that the Rochester City School District should be subdivided into **three** Student Attendance Zones consisting of a similar range of elementary schools that are available by choice to all students who reside in each zone.*

These three Student Attendance Zones provide a manageable geographic framework for implementing an educationally sound and fair Parent Preference/Managed Choice student assignment plan. Each zone has a sufficient seating capacity to accommodate all students who live in the zone. Each zone also has a socioeconomically diverse resident-student population and each zone has a similar range of high and low achieving schools. The fact that the three zones are more or less equivalent means that no student will be educationally disadvantaged because of where he or she happens to reside in the City.

We considered the possibility four-zones but discovered that the most densely populated zones did not have sufficient seating capacities for all resident students. We also considered a two-zone plan but abandoned this option because it required too many long distance bus routes and because it had the unintended consequence of creating the perception of a dual school system, since one of the zones had a disproportionate number of low-income students. We also examined the feasibility of a creating single citywide school choice zone but concluded that it would require long bus routes and would be difficult to effectively implement in a school system as large as the Rochester City School District.

### ***Student Attendance Zone A***

- *We recommend that a Student Attendance Zone should be located in the northwestern area of the City and encompasses City Sectors 1, 2, and 3 and is identified as Zone A for purposes of this plan.*
  - Zone A has eight elementary schools of choice: # 42, # 41, # 7, # 34, # 43, # 30, # 17, and # 15.
  - Six of the elementary schools in Zone A currently enroll students in grades K-6 and two schools enroll students in grades K-5.
  - There were 5,459 elementary students residing in Zone A in the 2000-01 school year.
  - The eight elementary schools in Zone A have total K-6 operating capacity for 5,495 students and a projected zone student-resident utilization rate of 99.3%.
  - There were 673 kindergarten students residing in Zone A in the 2000-01 school year.
  - Approximately 26% of all the District's elementary students reside in Zone A.
  - Approximately 27% of all the District's special education students reside in Zone A.
  - Zone A had 278 students enrolled in Bilingual and ESL classes in the 2000-01 school year.
  - Zone A had seventy-one students in the Major Achievement Program.
  - At least 75% of the elementary students who reside in Zone A currently attend a school in Zone A; 16% attend a school in Zone B; and approximately 9% attend a school in Zone C.
  - Approximately 70% of the students in Zone A are eligible for free lunch and 30% are eligible for reduced-price lunch or they pay for their school lunches.
  - The eight Zone A schools had a total School Performance Index of 125.1 in the NY State Grade 4 English Language Arts Test.
  - Five schools have a School Performance Index that is above the district average and three schools have a School Performance Index that is below the district average.

- Zone A has two schools that are scoring at the highest level of the NY State ELA test and one school that is scoring at the lowest level.
- Zone A also has two middle schools, Charlotte and Jefferson, that enroll students on the basis of geographic attendance areas and it has a total K-8 public school resident student population of 6,765.
- Zone A also has 1,096 elementary and middle school students who do not attend the RCSD.
- These data suggest that approximately 86% of the K-8 schoolage children who reside in Zone A are attending the RCSD.

### ***Student Attendance Zone B***

- We recommend that a Student Attendance Zone should be located in the southwestern and southeastern areas of the City and encompass City Sectors 4, 5, 6, and 7 and is identified as Zone B for purposes of this plan.
  - Zone B has thirteen elementary schools: # 44, # 37, # 16, # 19, # 29, # 4, # 12, # 35, # 23, # 1, # 3, # 2, and # 14.
  - Four of the elementary schools in Zone B currently enroll students in grades K-6 and nine schools enroll students in grades K-5.
  - There were 5,465 elementary students residing in Zone B in 2000-01.
  - The thirteen elementary schools in Zone B have a total K-6 operating capacity for 7,172 students and a projected zone student-resident utilization rate of 76.2%.
  - There were 599 kindergarten students in Zone B in the 2000-01 school year.
  - Approximately 27% of the District's elementary school students reside in Zone B.
  - Approximately 24% of the District's special education students reside in Zone B.
  - Zone B had 198 students enrolled in Bilingual and ESL classes in the 2000-01 school year.

- Zone B had 121 students in the Major Achievement Program.
- Approximately 84% of the elementary students who reside in Zone B currently attend a school in Zone B; 7.6% attend a school in Zone A; and 8.4% attend a school in Zone C.
- Approximately 68% of the students who reside in Zone B are eligible for free lunch and 32% are eligible for reduced-price lunch or pay for their lunch.
- The thirteen Zone B schools had a total School Performance Index of 123.5 on the NY State Grade 4 English Language Arts Test.
- Eight schools have a School Performance Index that is above the district average and five schools have a School Performance Index that is below the district average.
- Zone B has two schools that are scoring at the highest level of the State ELA test and two schools that are scoring at the lowest level.
- Zone B also has two middle schools, Madison and Monroe, that enroll students on the basis of geographic attendance areas and it has a total K-8 public school resident student population of 7,205.
- Zone B also has 904 students who do not attend the Rochester City School District's elementary and middle schools.
- These data suggest that approximately 89% of the K-8 schoolage children who reside in Zone B are enrolled in the RSCD.

### *Student Attendance Zone C*

- We recommend that a Student Attendance Zone should be located in the northeast area of the City and encompass City Sectors 8, 9, and 10 and is identified as Zone Z for purposes of this plan.
- Zone C has 13 elementary schools of choice: # 50, # 22, # 8, # 9, # 6, # 36, # 39, # 45, # 33, # 52, # 28, # 46, and # 25.

- Nine of the elementary schools in Zone C currently enroll students in grades K-6, three schools enroll students in grades K-5, and one school enrolls elementary students in grades K-2.
- There were 8,758 students in Zone C in the 2000-01 school year.
- The 13 elementary schools in Zone C have a total operating capacity for 8,857 students and a projected zone student-resident utilization rate of 98.9%.
- There were 1,112 kindergarten students in Zone C in the 2000-01 school year.
- Approximately 47% of the District's elementary students reside in Zone C.
- Approximately 50% of special education students reside in Zone C.
- Zone C had 859 students enrolled in Bilingual and ESL classes in the 2000-01 school year.
- Zone C had 122 students in the Major Achievement Program.
- Approximately 77% of the elementary students who reside in Zone C currently attend a Zone C school; 6% attend a school in Zone A; and 17% attend a school in Zone B.
- Approximately 75% of the students in Zone C are eligible for free lunch and 25% are eligible for reduced-price or pay for their school lunch.
- The twelve Zone C schools that have fourth-grade students had a total School Performance Index of 114.5 in the NY State Grade 4 English Arts Test.
- Four schools have a School Performance Index that is above the district average and eight schools have a School Performance Index that is below the district average.
- Zone C has two schools that are scoring at the highest level of the NY State ELA test and two schools that are scoring at the lowest level.
- Zone C also has two middle schools, Freddie Thomas Learning Center and Douglas, that enroll students on the basis of geographic attendance areas, and is has a total K-8 public school resident student population of 12,143.
- Zone C also has 1,074 students who do not attend the Rochester City School District's elementary and middle schools.
- These data suggest that approximately 92% of the K-8 schoolage children who reside in Zone C are enrolled in the RCSD.

### **Zone School Improvement and Visiting Committee**

- 2) *We recommend that an advisory committee called a Zone School Improvement and Visiting Committee should be established in each of the three zones to monitor educational institutions, because each of the three Student Attendance Zones proposed for Rochester should have a similar range of quality educational services.*
- This group should prepare a report that is approved by the Committee and forwarded to the Superintendent annually on at least half of the schools in a zone and especially on the low-performing schools and the schools that are least chosen.
    - The Committee should consist of twenty-four members with a co-chair arrangement of a professional educator and a parent or concerned citizen.
    - The twenty-four members should be recruited from the following categories: six principals or assistant principals, six teachers, counselors or school social workers, six parents and six concerned citizens.
    - Each school visiting team should consist of four persons: two professional educators, one parent, and one concerned citizen.
    - The Committee should receive staff support from the Office of Strategic Planning or through some other similar central administration officer with responsibility for school improvement.

### **School Development Fund**

- 3) *We recommend that a School Development Fund should be created that can help finance innovative strategies that will be necessary to enhance schools with concentrated populations of low achievers, because systemic pressure to improve schools with low achievement scores is necessary.*

On the advice and recommendation of Zone School Improvement and Visiting Committees, central administrators and site-based professional educators, this Fund would be used to enhance least chosen schools each year. The School Choice Program provides information on the kinds of schools preferred by most parents and their children and the kinds of schools that school patrons do not like. The choice process, therefore, by publicizing the least and most attractive schools, can identify models that the least attractive schools, with systemic help, may be required to adopt.

### **Parent Action Centers**

- 4) *We recommend that one Parent Action Center should be established in each of the three Student Attendance Zones.*
- We recommend that the existing Parent Action Center should be utilized as the District's main school choice information center.
    - The Parent Action Centers will be supervised by a director who will report to the Director of the Office of Communications and Public Engagement.
    - The director of the Parent Action Centers will be responsible for ensuring that all student registration and assignment transactions are made in accordance with this plan's enrollment fairness guidelines.

- The District should explore the feasibility of locating the Parent Action Centers in one of the middle schools that are located in each zone. This recommendation would expedite the creation of the Centers and would be a cost-effective way of ensuring that the Parent Action Centers would be accessible to all parents and students in each zone.
  - The Parent Action Centers should be established and fully functioning by October 1, 2002.
  - Students who need to be assigned to an elementary school will be required to register at their Zone Parent Action Center before they are enrolled in the school district. This will ensure that all new students will have an equal opportunity to participate in the school choice application and assignment process. In addition, such a step has been supported by District elementary principals with whom we have periodically consulted.
  - The Parent Action Centers will have student registration specialists who will be responsible for registering all newly enrolling students in accordance with the District's established procedures and documentary requirements.
  - The parent Action center registration specialists will record the school lunch status of all new students.
  - The Parent Action Centers should have school choice specialists who will be responsible for assisting parents in making informed choices about the schools they believe are best suited for their children within their respective zone.
  - The Parent Action Centers will be responsible for coordinating the "early" registration and school choice application process for all newly enrolling kindergarten students who reside in their zone.
  - The Parent Action Centers will be responsible for processing all school transfers for students who reside in their zone.
  - The Parent Action Centers should have a data management unit that will be responsible for processing school choice applications and maintaining accurate student records in coordination with the District's Management Information Services Department.

- The Parent Action Centers should have a transportation specialist who will process student transportation assignments under the oversight and direction of the District's Student Transportation Department.
- The Parent Action Centers should have a special education specialist who will process all special education students with Individual Education Plans in coordination with the District's Department of Special Education.
- The Parent Information Center should have staff who are proficient in Spanish and other major languages and who will coordinate the school registration and assignment process of process of all Limited English Proficient students in conjunction with the District's Language Assessment and Placement Center.
- The Parent Action Centers will have computer software that will be programmed to register and assign all students who enroll in the school district during the school year in accordance with this plan's enrollment fairness guidelines.
- The computer software will be programmed to identify all available seats in each zone school and the software will be interfaced with the District's mainframe computer system and student database.
- All staff in the Parent Action Centers will be trained to operate the "walk-in" student registration software.
- The "walk-in" computer software may be installed in all of the zone schools to facilitate the student registration process.
- The computer software should be installed in all of the District's elementary schools to ensure that all student withdrawals from the school district and student home-address changes are recorded in a timely manner. This recommendation will ensure that the Parent Action Centers are able to identify available seats.
- Computer software will be programmed to provide school choice lottery assignments in the event that a school has more applicants than available seats.

**Recommendations for Establishing Elementary School Operating Capacities  
and Identifying Available Seats**

5) *The District should establish a districtwide standard determining the most educationally efficient and effective use of all its elementary school facilities.*

- While elementary school capacity utilization standards may vary from district to district, school facilities experts generally agree that each elementary school should have a student enrollment that utilizes no more than about 85% of the school's maximum instructional capacity. If this districtwide standard cannot be met, then each zone school should have a capacity utilization standard that is equivalent to all other schools in its Student Attendance Zone.
  
- After the District has established a Zone-wide capacity utilization standard, it should then establish a fixed *instructional* capacity for each zone school of choice that takes into account the following factors: the number of classrooms that are in the facility; the school's grade-structure; how these school's classrooms will be utilized; and the District's policy on class size at various grade-levels.
  - Each zone should have sufficient capacity to accommodate all of its regular, bilingual, and special education students at each grade.

- The District must also ensure that each school has sufficient instructional space to accommodate students with special education needs and students enrolled in bilingual and ESL classes, and that the school has sufficient space for art and music classes and other instructional programs.
  - Once a school’s overall *instructional* capacity has been established, it will become the school’s maximum enrollment or operating capacity for a particular school year.
  - The Superintendent or his designee must approve any changes in a school's operating capacity.
  - If a school’s actual student enrollment is based on the school’s *instructional* capacity, then all students who are assigned to school should have equitable access to all appropriate learning opportunities in that school.
  - The approach described above for determining individual elementary school enrollment capacities is consistent with the approach for determining each school’s annual “operating capacity.” Under this plan, a school's operating capacity will represent the optimum number of students that should be assigned to a school in each school year.
  
- The District will maintain an accurate account of each school's actual enrollment and its unassigned or available seats.
  - All available seats will be identified by school, grade, and instructional purpose.
  - All available seats in all elementary schools will be identified on a daily basis.
  - All parents will be informed about the available seats in all the schools their children are eligible to attend prior to submitting school selections for their child.
  - The information concerning available seats will be maintained in the school choice assignment software's student database and will be regularly monitored by the District's Department of Management Information Services.

**Enrollment Fairness Guidelines for  
Lottery Assignments to Zone Schools of Choice**

6) *We recommend that all parents of students who need or desire a school assignment be allowed to choose the schools they want their children to attend by their own rank order of preference within their respective Student Attendance Zone.*

***Rank-Ordered Schools of Choice***

- Parents should be allowed to select at least three schools of choice.
  - All parents should be allowed to choose citywide schools at the same time that they select their zone schools of choice.
  - The District's school choice application form should clearly delineate a parent's rank ordered school preferences as first choice, second choice and third choice.
  - No application should be accepted for a school choice lottery unless it has been signed by the student's parent or legal guardian.
  - No applications should be accepted for a school choice lottery unless the parent has indicated at least two rank-ordered schools of choice.
  - All school choice lottery assignments should be processed in accordance with the following enrollment fairness guidelines.

- 7) *We recommend that, when the District assigns elementary students to Zone schools of choice by a computerized lottery, the computer should be programmed to assign students to their first-choice school in accordance with the following priorities: (1) Siblings, (2) Proximity, and (3) Socioeconomic Fairness Guidelines.*

This recommendation is necessary for the assignment of all students fairly and efficiently when the number of first-choice applicants to a particular school is greater than the number of available seats. These enrollment fairness guidelines for lottery assignments will be used by each Parent Action Center when students apply for early kindergarten assignments and when a school has more transfer applicants than available seats.

***Assignments to First-Choice Schools: Sibling Assignments***

- A student who has a brother or sister already enrolled in his or her first-choice school has a sibling-priority to attend that school over other applicants. The sibling priority is granted for first-choice school assignments only.
  - A sibling-priority assignment is granted only if two or more siblings will be concurrently enrolled in a school.
  - Sibling-priority is guaranteed only if the sibling-relationship can be officially verified and the applicants' parents submit a school choice application requesting this priority, and the application is submitted within the designated time-period established for processing the school-choice assignments.

### *Assignments to First-Choice Schools: Proximity Assignments*

- *Sixty percent* of a zone-school's available seats will be allocated initially to sibling and non-sibling applicants who reside not more .50 or one-half of a mile from their first-choice school.
  - This recommendation for allocating sixty percent of the available seats to students who live near a school is consistent with the proportion of elementary students who are attending their home school under the District's current home-school attendance policy.
  - Students who are eligible for proximity-priority assignments will be assigned to schools before other non-sibling applicants in the Zone are assigned to their first-choice schools.
  - The proximity-priority of assignment should be limited to students who reside within one-half of a mile of their first choice because it is unlikely that these students will require transportation.
  - In the event that the number of first-choice proximity applicants is greater than the number of seats allocated to this group, the seats will be assigned to the proximity students with the highest computer generated random numbers.
  - If the available seats allocated to first-choice proximity applicants are not filled after the first computer-run, the unused seats will be made available to proximity applicants who have selected the school as their second-choice school.
  - If the unused seats made available to second-choice proximity applicants are not filled after the second computer run, the unused seats will be made available to proximity applicants who have selected the school as their third choice.
  - In the unlikely event that there are still unused proximity seats after the first, second, and third computer runs, the unused seats will be made available to all other applicants in accordance with the following socioeconomic fairness guideline.

### ***Assignments to First-Choice Schools: Socioeconomic Diversity Guideline***

- The seats not assigned to sibling and proximity students should be assigned to non-proximity applicants in accordance with the proportion of students eligible for free school lunch and the proportion of students not eligible for free lunch in the Zone.
  - If the seats initially allocated in a school for students in one socioeconomic group are not filled after the first computer-run, the unused seats will be made available to first-choice applicants from the other socioeconomic group.
  - If the number of first-choice applicants in one socioeconomic group is greater than the number of seats that have been proportionately allocated to that group, the seats will be assigned to the applicants with the highest random number in that group.

### ***Assignments to First-Choice Schools: Waiting Lists***

- If a student is not assigned to his or her first choice school, the student will be placed on a waiting list for that school.
  - Students may be placed on waiting lists only for a school that is their first-choice.
  - A student's position on a first-choice school waiting list is determined by a computer generated random number.
  - When a seat becomes available, it will be filled by the student with the highest random number.
  - A student who has been assigned to his or her second- or third-choice school and who declines the invitation to be re-assigned to one's first choice school will be dropped from the waiting list.
  - When an assignment from the waiting list is declined the available seat is awarded to the student with the next highest random number.
  - Waiting lists will be maintained only until September 30.

8) *We recommend that students not assigned to a first-choice school be assigned first to his or her second-choice school and next to his or her third-choice school, and that the student assignment computer software be programmed to assign students in this way.*

***Lottery Assignments to Second and Third Choice Schools***

- If a student is not assigned to a second choice school, the computer will be programmed to assign the student to his or her third-choice school.
- All non-sibling and non-proximity assignments to second- and third-choice schools will be made in accordance with the socioeconomic fairness guidelines of this plan.

***Mandatory Assignments***

- In the unlikely event that a student is not assigned to a rank-ordered school of choice, the student will be assigned to the school closest to one's home that has available seats.
- All mandatory assignments will be made in accordance with the socioeconomic fairness guidelines of this plan.

**Enrollment Fairness Guidelines for  
Walk-In Assignments to Zone Schools of Choice**

9) *We recommend that all walk-in assignments processed by a Parent Action Center will be subject to available seats and socioeconomic fairness guidelines.*

- This recommendation will apply to the following elementary students:
  - Newly enrolling Kindergarten students who do not apply for a kindergarten assignment during the early application and assignment period.
  - Students who enroll in the District during the school year.
  - Students who request a voluntary transfer during the school year.
  - Students who are applying for a voluntary transfers for the following school year.
  - Students who have moved into another Student Attendance Zone and must be assigned to a new school for the following school year.
  - Students who enroll in the District before the start of a new school year.
  
- There is no need to give them sibling or proximity preferences to these students, because they will be assigned to a school of choice on a first-come first-served basis at their Parent Action Center.
  - When parents of these students apply for a so-called "walk-in" assignment, the computer will identify all the schools have available seats and the student will be immediately assigned to a school of preference in which seats are available.

## **Recommendations for Ensuring Stability of Assignment**

- 10) *We recommend that all elementary students enrolled in a Rochester public school when this plan is approved will be allowed to remain in their current school of enrollment until they complete its top grade, even if a "grandfathered" student's residence is in another Student Attendance Zone.*

### ***Ensuring Stability of Assignment: "Grandfathered" Students***

- Approximately 78% of the students who would be grandfathered under this plan are currently attending a school within their respective Student Attendance Zone, and 22% are currently attending a school that is out-side of their new Student Attendance Zone.
  - A student's Student Attendance Zone is determined by their home-address.
  - The number of students attending a school outside of their new Student Attendance Zone will naturally decrease over the next five to six years as these "grandfathered" students matriculate into middle school.
  - The numbers of students attending a school outside of their new Student Attendance Zone will also be significantly reduced by this plan as newly enrolled students are assigned to a school of choice within their respective Zone. These informed projections should have a major impact in facilitating the delivery of more cost effective and equitable student transportation services.
  - There will be no legacy for “new-to-the-system” sibling assignments if the school is out of zone.

***Ensuring Stability of Assignment: New Students***

- All elementary students who are assigned to a school within their Student Attendance Zone under this student assignment plan may attend that school until they complete its top grade.

***Ensuring Stability of Assignment: Change of Residence within a Student Attendance Zone***

- A student who changes his or her home residence but still resides in the same Student Attendance Zone may remain in the school in which one was enrolled before one moved.

***Ensuring Stability of Assignment: Changing Student Attendance Zones***

- The stability-of-assignment provision is revoked if the student moves into another Attendance Zone.
- These regulations concerning changing one's zone of residence are not applicable to either students attending citywide schools or to special education students with IEP's that cannot be provided for in their new Student Attendance Zone.
- If a student moves into another Zone during the school year, the student should be allowed to remain in his or her assigned school until the end of that school year.
  - There will be no legacy for “new-to-the-system” sibling assignments if the school is out of zone.

## **Recommendations for Next Schol-Year Kindergarten Assignments**

11) *We recommend that all children who are age-eligible to enter kindergarten in the following school year will be given the opportunity to be "early" assigned to a rank-ordered school of choice.*

### ***Next-School Year Kindergarten Early Assignments***

- The "early" kindergarten application period should begin on October 1 and end on January 31. This will give parents four months to visit schools and make informed rank-order school choices about the schools they want their children to attend in following school year.
- All students who apply during the early kindergarten application period should be assigned to a school they will attend in the following school year on a certain date by March 1. This ensures that all the early kindergarten school choice applications will be processed at the same time and parents will know the school their children will attend six months before the start of the new school year.
- All early kindergarten assignments will be made in accordance with the enrollment fairness guidelines established by this plan for "lottery" school choice assignments.

### ***Next-School Year Kindergarten Late Assignments***

- No new kindergarten applications should be processed until all the early applicants have been assigned.
  - All newly enrolling kindergarten students who apply after the early kindergarten applicants have been assigned will be assigned to a school of choice on a first come first served basis in accordance with the enrollment fairness guidelines established by this plan for "walk-in" student assignments.

## Recommendations for School Transfers

12) *We recommend that the District allow students only one school transfer during the school year, and grant no voluntary transfers granted after September 30.*

Implementation of specific procedures and enrollment fairness guidelines for processing school transfers will help facilitate the effective implementation of the U.S. Department of Education's Title I "school choice" mandate that students attending low-performing schools be given the opportunity to transfer into higher-performing schools.

- All students assigned under this school choice plan should be given the opportunity to transfer into another school that is more compatible with their learning needs during the school year.
  - Students who apply for a voluntary transfer after September 30 should not be processed until the end of the current school year; none should be granted after September 30.
  - The next-school year transfer period will be open to all elementary school-age children who reside in the City of Rochester.
  - All school transfers will be subject to available seats in the receiving schools.
  - All transfers will be honored in accordance with the proximity-preference and socioeconomic fairness guidelines of this plan.

- We recommend that school transfers be implemented in accordance with the following operating procedures:
  - All parents should be required to complete and sign a school transfer application at their Zone Parent Action Center.
  - All parents should be allowed to select three schools of choice by their rank-order of preference.
  - All parents should be given sufficient information to determine whether the schools they select are best suited for their children.
  - If the number of transfer applications are greater than the number of seats that are projected to be available in a particular school, the seats will be filled by a school choice transfer lottery.
  - If a Parent Action Center conducts a school-transfer lottery it must be done on a certain date and it must include all transfer applications that have been submitted for the available seats.

## Recommendations for Out of Zone Assignments

### *Citywide Schools*

13) *We recommend that citywide schools recruit students from each zone and that no student is denied access to a citywide school because of where he or she resides or because of one's socioeconomic status. Toward this end, all available seats in each elementary citywide school should be proportionately allocated to students who reside within each Student Attendance Zone: approximately 26% of the District's elementary students currently reside in Zone A, 27% reside in Zone B, and 47% reside in Zone C.*

- This plan assumes that approximately 6% of the District's newly enrolling elementary students will be assigned to the six existing citywide elementary schools that may or may not be located within their respective Zone.
  - Existing magnet schools should remain citywide, but any new magnet schools should be introduced as a zone-magnet.
  - Any existing citywide school that is substantially over-chosen should be replicated as zone-school of choice.
  - If the seats in a citywide school initially allocated to one Zone are not filled, these unused seats should be given to applicants from the other Zones who have applied to the school.
  - Students should be allowed to apply to citywide schools of choice at the same time they apply to their zone-schools of choice.
  - Citywide schools should accept students in accordance with the sibling preference and socioeconomic guidelines of this plan.

### ***Citywide Special Education Classes***

*14) Those citywide special education classes that serve relatively few students with specific needs should be centrally located so that they are assessable to special needs students in each zone.*

- Centrally locating unique special education programs to extent possible will also help to reduce disproportionately long bus routes for these at-risk students.

**Recommendations for Assigning Special Education Students to Schools  
within their Student Attendance Zone**

- 15) *We recommend that each zone should have a sufficient capacity to accommodate the instructional needs of its special education students that are not enrolled in citywide special education classes and that each school should reserve a percentage of special education seats proportionate to the zone's special education average for zone special education students.*

As is the case with general education students, parents of students receiving special education services should be allowed to choose the educationally appropriate schools they believe are best suited for their children within their respective Student Attendance Zone.

As documented earlier in this plan, 30% to 40% of the special education students with less restrictive educational needs are currently enrolled in schools outside of their Student Attendance Zone. According to the District's Special Education Department, many of the out-of-zone special education students – who have been diagnosed with learning disabilities, speech or language impairments, or emotional and behavioral disturbances – could be well served in their own new school zone.

Therefore, by centrally locating citywide special education classes and increasing the availability of less restrictive special education services within Student Attendance Zones, more special education students will be able to attend schools that are near to their homes.

## Recommendations for Assigning Bilingual Education Students

- 16) *We recommend that the parents of Limited English Proficient students should be given the opportunity to choose the educationally appropriate schools they believe are best suited for their children within their respective Student Attendance Zone.*

Although Limited English Proficient (LEP) students currently reside in each new Student Attendance Zone, this plan found that approximately 38% of the students currently enrolled in Bilingual Education Programs and 64% of the students in English as a Second Language classes are being transported to schools outside of their Student Attendance Zone. Locating bilingual education programs and ESL classes in each Student Attendance Zone will enable more Limited English Proficient students to attend a school of choice that is closer to their homes.

- Each Zone should have appropriate Bilingual Education Programs and each Zone should provide enough ESL classes to accommodate its resident LEP students.
- Zone-based Bilingual programs and ESL classes should be placed in a range of schools and no school should have more than one bilingual program.

### **Recommendations for Implementation Timeline**

17) *We recommend that this new student assignment plan should be implemented in accordance with a timetable that commences first with identification of Parent Action Center staff and sites in the 2001-2002 school year, moves next to enrolling new walk- in students in October 2002, then begins new kindergarten enrollment for the 2003/2004 school year during the fall of 2002 and winter of 2003, and become fully and effectively implemented by October 1, 2003.*

It is anticipated that District will enroll approximately 2,400 new kindergarten students in the 2003-04 school year, which will include approximately 650 in Zone A, 600 in Zone B and 1,150 in Zone C. These projections, which are based on the current geographic distribution of the District's kindergarten students strongly suggest that each Parent Action Center will have a manageable number of new kindergarten students to effectively register and assign for the 2003-04 school year and subsequent years.

The timetable on the following page ensures that the District will have sufficient time to establish its Parent Action Centers and that all of the student assignment components in this plan will be fully and effectively implemented by October 1, 2003.

***Implementation Timetable***

<b>2001-02 School Year</b>	<b>2002-03 School Year</b>	<b>2003-04 School Year</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify sites for the Zone Parent Action Centers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Open Parent Action Centers officially on October 1, 2002.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Parent Action Centers will process all voluntary transfers for the 2003-04 school year in July and August 2003.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Appoint the director and staff of the Parent Action Centers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All elementary students who newly enroll in the District after September 30 will be registered and assigned to a school of choice at their Zone Parent Action Center.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Parent Action Centers will assign all new students through the opening of the 2003-04 school year.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Install school choice registration and assignment software in District's computer system.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Parent Action Centers will coordinate the "early" kindergarten registration and school choice application period. This application period – for the 2003-04 school year –will begin on October 1, 2002 and end on January 31, 2003</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Parent Action Centers will process all voluntary transfers for the 2003-04 school year up to September 30, 2003.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Train Parent Action Center staff in all aspects of their duties and responsibilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Parent Action Centers will process all early kindergarten applications in February 2003 and all early assignments will be made by March 1, 2003.</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Parent Action Centers will register and assign all late kindergarten applicants on a first-come first served basis after March 1, 2003.</li> </ul>	



## **Rationale for Recommendations**

### ***Diversified Schools and Proximity Preference***

We recommend that students who live within a half-mile of a school should be offered proximity preference in enrollment. However, we do this not to favor neighborhoods – because they tend to be relatively homogeneous in the characteristics of their residents – but instead to reduce the cost of transporting students to and from school.

Our goal is to achieve as many diversified schools as possible because of their beneficial educational effects. Nevertheless, we favor limited proximity preference in student assignments because resources saved from not having to transport students to distant schools may be used to enhance instruction. Because we also found that diversity enhances learning, we have limited the proximity preference to one-half mile.

### ***Socioeconomic Fairness Guidelines***

We recommend that the Rochester School District use socioeconomic fairness guidelines as a way of managing school enrollment so that all schools are available to all students in an equitable way. The socioeconomic fairness guidelines should be based on the proportions of students eligible and ineligible to participate in the free lunch program. Whatever these proportions are for a Student Attendance Zone, the same should be used in assigning students to their schools of choice. However, the proportions actually enrolled in each school may vary around the zone-wide proportions by plus or minus 5 percentage points.

### ***The Achievement Liability of Socioeconomically Isolated Schools***

We recommend that special attention should be given to finding ways to make approximately one-third of the general education low-income concentrated elementary schools attractive to all students, and especially to students connected with the middle class and affluent families.

Recall our finding that most of the schools in the bottom quintile of the distribution of achievement scores on the fourth grade English Language Arts Test are socioeconomically isolated with 80% of more of their students connected with low-income families. We believe that creating more diversified student bodies in such schools is one way of overcoming this deficit.

We know that low-income children are helped when educated in diversified student bodies, since about half of the students enrolled in schools in the top quintile of the distribution of achievement scores mentioned above are eligible to receive free lunches. The use of socioeconomic fairness guidelines in the assignment of students to their schools of choice is one way of achieving more diversity.

### ***Race and Socioeconomic Concentration in Schools***

While we recommend that the Rochester School District use socioeconomic fairness guidelines in assigning students to schools, we are mindful of the fact that concentrated populations of people of color also are associated with low average achievement scores in schools.

However, we recommend the use of socioeconomic status because those two variables are significantly correlated with each other and, in Rochester, each, singly, accounts for a substantial proportion of the variance in average achievement scores of students in schools. Moreover, the percent of people of color and the percent of students eligible for free lunch by schools result in a correlation coefficient of .69, which means that about half of the variance in the distribution of one factor may be attributed to the other factor. Moreover, the sign is positive; meaning that as the proportion of students of color increases in schools the proportion of students affiliated with low-income families also tends to increase.

Although these two factors do not duplicate each other, they do show substantial overlap, so much so that what benefits low-income students will also benefit students of color. All of this is to say that the diversity process which we have recommended should be concerned with eliminating as many racially isolated schools as possible along with eliminating as many socioeconomically isolated schools as possible.

We note that 10 of the 12 socioeconomically isolated schools (86 percent) are at or below the median in the distribution by schools of children with low average achievement scores and that 16 of the 21 racially isolated schools (76 percent) are at or below the median in the distribution by schools of low average achievement scores. Since proportionately low socioeconomic status tends to be associated with low achievement performance on tests at a higher level than the people of color variable, we decided to recommend the socioeconomic status variable.

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