Enrollment Preference Task Force Recommendations

Use of Assessments for Public School Admissions Process

Recommendations

Number of Responses - 11 out of 28

KEY: Yellow – Assessment related - this document deals with Assessment only

(numbers) Comment transcribed into a recommendation

**Katie Rosch Hegedus**

**Assessment is not consistent with student choice:**

School choice is when a student/family chooses a school that is not his/her feeder school. They select the school (show interest by filling out an application); the school should not select them because of performance on an assessment.**(1)**

**“School Missions”:**

The mission of a traditional public district school is to educate every child who walks through the door who either lives in that school feeder pattern or has through a lottery if space allows choiced into the school.

The mission of a charter, vo-tech, or magnet school, should be to educate every child at every level who walks through the door because they expressed an interest in that school and then through a process that gives every student an equal chance at that school is fairly selected.**(2)**

**Public funding is equal access:**

Public libraries, parks, beaches do not use assessment or selective criteria to select who uses their services. Publicly funded schools should not either.**(3)**

**Un-Defensible system:**

Based on current student population data, these alternative public education systems are not giving fair access to students with disabilities. That is illegal.

**Original intent:**

The original intent of the legislation that created these programs did not intend to create schools that “selected” students, either based on report cards or special assessments. It intended to create alternatives to a traditional curriculum and/or structure. All children deserve to have access to an alternative curriculum and/or structure.

The original legislation (plus in the hearing transcript) actually mentions giving special preference, and then special support services (summer school), to children who have past records of being at risk in academic achievement. They were not to be disadvantaged.

**Julie A. Rumschlag**

Assessments in a given area as identified by the school's mission (Charter or Magnet focus) should be considered as valid and reasonable.**(4)** Admissions elements should directly relate to that specific mission and should be defensible.

It is critical that we place value on the unique aspects of a given school. Assessments should relate specifically to the uniqueness of a given school. **(5)**

Assessments should be fair and consistent, defensible with a rubric or other identified scoring method that is applied consistently to all eligible applicants.**(6)**

The lottery element should continue to apply to all applicants who meet the identified assessment guidelines. **(7)**

Applicants who do not meet the initial assessment requirements may still be considered if space permits. **(8)**

In the case of a secondary arts school, it is reasonable for that school to assess students in the identified arts areas. **(9)**

I further recommend that schools with a specific focus continue to review their practices, student populations, and continue to do outreach to populations of students who are under-represented as compared to the community they serve.

**Deborah Zych**

It is my opinion that assessment should be used AFTER admission for placement purposes. **(10)** I believe that a few specialized magnet schools should be allowed to conduct assessments relative to the school’s focus (Cab Calloway, for example). **(11)**

**Elizabeth Lockman**

After the last meeting I remain concerned about the use of assessments and writing samples as part of the eligibility determination process for schools that feature magnet or other specialized programs.

My personal experience of assessment and observation processes is that they are largely conducted in a high stress and low accountability manner\*.But this leads me to fear that there is too much room in the current process for bias in student selection as well as multiple access barriers to student participation for the assessments to be deemed fair and reliable indicators. **(12)** And the proof is quite clear in the skewed populations we have been seeing in many magnet and charter programs.

Some obvious issues: Preparation nights give an edge to those who can make it to them; assessments occur on weekends, sometimes incredibly early, at a time of year when weather can intervene but assessment scheduling remains inflexible. I have seen cases in which teaching staff appear solely responsible for determining what they will ask of prospective students, and unfortunately this seems to be something of the norm. I hate to single one place out but I cannot think of a better way to illustrate my point: there is a preparation packet (freely published on their website, btw) for the singing department at Cab Calloway which specifically prohibits children incorporate any of the following into their self-selected audition: "gospel or rap" (see attached) - I was astonished (see how these are grouped with "anything inappropriate") and think it is indicative of an unacceptable lack of attention to the process on the decision level, preventing sensitivity or accountability for equity issues. It seems that oftentimes one individual does the scoring of all students. After students are scored, results appear to be sealed.

Because of the widely disparate nature of parent and elementary schools ability to specialize their students, particularly in high needs environments, I am AGAINST aptitude-oriented assessments of interest for entry to middle school magnet programs and believe that this should be an all-lottery admission process for those who apply; **(13)** I believe that without the promise of exclusivity you would actually see more students applying because they desire the programs rather than to access the currently perceived guarantee that certain demographics are being limited entry to those buildings.

I also think, with greater opportunity for exploration available at comprehensive middle schools, assessments of this type are more acceptable on the high school level when students are likely to have more agency in determining their goals and interests. **(14)** (This, of course, puts weight on the districts to ensure middle schools offer strong opportunities for such exploration, and adequate guidance staff to identify and guide potential at this critical age - and I am fine with that.)

If assessments are to continue (on either level), however, I would like to see a process conducted with more accountability, balance and transparency, with an onus on the schools to do so. **(15)** If there are to be auditions and interviews, if a district-based program I think at least some should occur onsite at the host district's middle schools during school time, to encourage access, with the application facilitation of guidance counselors (this already happens to some degree, school staff OI have met seem happy to help bridge this gap). **(16)** There should be multiple observers and panels to determine the all-important student "score" if there must be one. All documentation for decision-making ie. completed rubrics and comments should be made freely and completely available to parents upon request and potentially, some level of scoring and admission information (allowing for student anonymity) about applicants and invitees should be publicly accessible.

[Not wholly relevant I also believe the student composition should be weighted to ensure some degree of similarity to district wide composition and that the lottery and waitlist systems themselves should also be much more transparent. It currently has the appearance of a great deal of internal informality, whether true or not.]

Essentially, if we are to undertake this sort of mechanism in determining student assignment, the schools/districts need to be held accountable for a rigorously equitable and transparent process, or else not do it at all.

In my ideal world, we would see:

On the middle school level or younger - NO assessment/writing,**(17)** all-transparent and SES-weighted (if necessary - some reasonable threshold would need to be set) lottery for those who express interest by filling out a common choice application. Possible exception for delivery of special needs (including gifted)\*\* education.

On the high school level - YES, IF a rigorous and fully transparent assessment taking place during school day at district middle schools, and transparent lottery/waitlist process, SES-weighted **(18)** (if necessary - some reasonable threshold would need to be set).

\* Of course it is up to individual schools to set standards for themselves, so I am aware there is lots of variety - those who are doing this well should be identified and commended for their best practices and they should be replicated.

\*\*I am on the fence about gifted education as a silo-ed program BUT I do like the idea of encouraging a statewide revisiting of how we categorize and provide for gifted ed, since it is now so inconsistent.

**Dr. Terri L. Hodges**

I am not averse to using assessments on the supplemental portion of the application **(19)** to determine student interest if the receiving school has a specialized curriculum or purpose. I believe that assessments to demonstrate student interest in a school’s particular educational focus serve a valid purpose, if administered with integrity and fairness. For me the issue is not IF these assessments should be used, rather it is HOW we administer and use the resulting data. **(20)** The assessments, whatever form that may be, should not be as prescriptive as to either intentionally/unintentionally deny any student equal opportunity, but at the same time, the process of evaluating the student assessments cannot be so subjective that the unintended consequence is exclusion. **(21)** It has to be a delicate balance and even then, assessments should only be used in the supplemental application, and not weighted heavier than other components of the application process. **(22)** There should be a system of checks and balances that prohibits any one particular school from using “interest requirements” to circumvent the process and screen for students deemed “more capable”

For example, my child has a very strong interest in the sciences. However, based on programs and services offered in our area, her extracurricular activities have been limited to Science Olympiad and sporadic summer programs offered through the STEM Council. If she were to apply to a Charter, Magnet of Vo-Tech with a Science focus, and all components of her application were apples to apples with another student, what is the likelihood that her level of interest be deemed “insufficient” when compared against another student who perhaps had access to more extensive science programs? This type of subjectivity devalues the assessment process. **(23)** We can’t say my child doesn’t have a strong interest in science because she didn’t have the same opportunities as another student.

Vo-techs, Magnets and Charters are public schools. As such, they should serve all students. The ability to effectively offer outreach and serve all students is predicated on the school’s ability to remove system barriers that prevent students and families from applying or successfully getting through the process, thereby systematically alienating certain populations of students. “

**Mark T. Pruitt, Jr.**

The issue of assessment as a supplemental enrollment criterion **(24)** when determining interest and/or aptitude is complex and the answers may in fact vary in relation to charters, vocationals, and magnets. Public educators have a responsibility to ensure equality of access to all of these schools and data indicates that this may require a closer look. No protected class can be left out. However, this equality of access is a separate discussion from your question but necessary going forward.

As the principal of a magnet school in Red Clay and as a Red Clay resident, I believe it is important to let the families who use these schools everyday- 4000 students currently attending Red Clay magnets/charters and thousands of future families- weigh in on the topics we are debating and better understand the potential impact of our committee’s possible recommendations. I say this because I believe the Red Clay *community supports reasonable assessment in the enrollment process and in many or most cases, these expectations are a factor when they choose the schools. As I discuss the issue with our parents at Conrad and at other Red Clay schools, they seem surprised at the possible direction of the committee.* **???**

As for a recommendation, I believe the State should provide oversight concerning equal access and the legality of admissions procedures. **(25)** However, a “one size fits all determination” for such diverse systems- charters/magnets/vo-techs/other programs within schools- is too prescriptive at the state level. I would recommend that all legal admissions criteria (including assessment when legal) for charters, magnets, votechs, IB programs, AP programs, honors courses, advanced bands, etc be determined by local officials with public oversight and state support. **(26)**

**Victoria C. Gehrt, Ed.D.**

The charters, magnets, IB, gifted/talented, vo-techs have developed over the years a very complex "fabric" of their schools that have clear distinctions from each other. Tearing these apart, in my opinion, is not justified or wise.

As a task force we have taken the time to shift through what the group believes should be on the choice application and now, we are needing to address the most entrenched issues.

I believe that we should recommend the elimination of essays, interviews and letters of recommendation. **(27)**

I believe that we should recommend that pre-admission requirements such as assessments, auditions and report cards/transcripts be considered as part of the supplementary application. **(28)** We need to compromise and not "throw the baby out with the bathwater" and not create unnecessary strife amongst the many stakeholders.

**Yvonne Johnson**

I believe that for specific interest such as arts, sciences, math, etc. a school should be permitted to determine interest through a student assessment. **(29)** The assessment could be one that could measures aptitude but not be limited to aptitude. **(30)**

I firmly believe a student’s academic record should be part of admissions if the school is one that promotes a rigorous curriculum and a heavy workload.

I support the use of interviews with a set rubric. Interviews can be subjective and therefore should not be the only measure.

I promote the diversity in our schools which is why the applicant pool should be across the board. Students should not have preferences based on where they live.

I do not believe that there is a one size fits all answer. Multiple indicators should always be used to determine interest. A student simply applying to a school does not demonstrate interest. Parents may encourage a student to apply to a school because the parent wants them to go there but the student has no interest in the theme or the mission of that particular school.

I recommend that the task force promotes the unique opportunities Delaware school choice affords our students.

**Henry Clampitt**

Executive Summary – Enrollment Preferences Task Force (EPTF)

The broad purpose of the EPTF is to make recommendations about admissions preferences and

practices at charters, magnets and vo-techs (the “Schools”). With respect to the use of assessments in this context, I recommend the following to be incorporated into the EPTF’s broader final report:

Regarding the concept of “Assessment” herein, it should be inclusive of:

1. Admissions procedure elements such as auditions, standardized tests, essays,

recommendations, and interviews; and

1. Prior-year(s) school records such as standardized tests , report-card grades, honors enrollments, student portfolios, extracurricular participation, school attendance and discipline **(31)**

Regarding the use of preferences:

1. **Keep the current preferences allowed for the Schools. Value the uniqueness of the Schools.**
2. Ensure that Assessments are **defensible** by requiring each School’s immediate oversight or authorizing authority to conduct a review at least biannually at a public meeting. **(32)**
3. Ensure the conduct of active **outreach** activities by requiring each School to present an annual review of its past actions and future plans at a public meeting.

Regarding the issue of defensibility:

* 1. Assessment practices must involve **multiple measures** and not rely on a single measure **(33)**
  2. Assessment practices must be **reasonably related to** the nature of the School’s programs, philosophies, methods, curriculum-level, areas of educational focus, or mission. **(34)**

Regarding the EPTF’s review of practices:

1. The above-mentioned biannual review by each School’s immediate oversight or authorizing authority shall include a review of all School application forms, materials and practices; and
2. The biannual review shall include appropriate legal counsels for the authority and for the School in order to discuss the practices used and their conformance with law.

Regarding the consensus of the EPTF:

a) Report both the majority and minority views of the EPTF membership to the Legislature

b) To accomplish “a”, the EPTF should self-select a drafting workgroup comprised of both views

**Background Commentary**

**Consensus**

As I recall from our October 28, 2014 meeting, we lined up like this:

FOR Assessments with Defensibility 4 members

FOR Assessments with Defensibility and Outreach 3 members

“OK” Assessments with Defensibility and Outreach 2 members

NO Assessments until after enrollment 2 members

NO Assessments at any time 3 members

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14 members in discussion

**The Public Will**

Several members suggested that we (the EPTF) should determine the degree of support for Assessments among the thousands of families who actually attend the Schools which use Assessments in admissions. **(35)** I believe that the consensus views expressed on October 28th are reasonably representative of this public will; however, for those EPTF members with opposing views it might be helpful to build our collective confidence in this conclusion through use of a well-designed and thoroughly circulated survey. I would be glad to lead or participate in this effort.

**Preferences and “Access”**

On October 28th the EPTF engaged in discussion about “access” for “all”. As I recall the comments, a minority of the membership appeared to believe that the use of preference-lotteries is exclusionary. Upon examination of the context, that belief was put forth only in the context of assessments and “specific-interest”, and not in the contexts of preferences for siblings or geography where such preferences are arguably just as “exclusionary”. I also recall the comments of a majority of the membership which appeared to believe that preference–lotteries only have effect when there are too many applicants, thereby serving the purpose of allocation. If the various authorizers and authorities decline to expand the size of these in-demand public Schools to provide “access” for all who apply, then we should at least discourage the semantics of “exclusion” and focus instead on the concept of “fair allocation” of the scarce resource (i.e., the limited number of available seats).

I believe that the use of preference-lotteries is a fair way to allocate the scarce number of seats at these popular Schools. Some preferences are strongly within the long-term choice opportunity of families (e.g., siblings, geographic preferences), others are within the mid-term choice opportunity for students and schools to jointly find a match (e.g., specific-interest; at-risk; SSPs) and others are short-term choice opportunities for families (the act of application; the randomness of lotteries among those with equal preferences). The overall balance of influence is currently in favor of families over all time horizons.

With respect to specific-interest as it is assessed by the multiple-measures rubric at The Charter School of Wilmington, I believe it has a strong connection with fairness, with finding a match between applicant and School, and that it resonates with the American tradition of personal choice freedom and the rewards of hard work, motivation and effectively-directed perseverance. We can strive to make the use of this preference more widely accepted (e.g., through defensibility-review and through outreach, as I have recommended) but I feel very strongly that we should not discard the use of the specific-interest preference in the midst of such high demand for the Schools under discussion.

**Assessments and Defensibility**

A wide variety of communities, advocates and authorities have this common belief: that no single measure should be used alone for a high-stakes purpose. With respect to Assessments in the context of admissions discussed by the EPTF, one clear advocate to consider for recognition is the joint report published by the Community Service Society of New York (CSS) and the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF).[[1]](#footnote-1) I have enclosed a copy of this report for consideration by the Task Force. The CSS and LDF recognize that high performing public schools hold the positive promise to level the income-gap playing field but that there are risks in exacerbating the gap which should be mitigated. The report suggests a menu of Assessment alternatives that would provide both a rigorous standard of admission as well as opportunities for students of all backgrounds. In addition to validated standardized achievement tests, the report suggests the additional use of student grades, class rank, academic portfolios, attendance, essays, interviews, and school staff recommendations in order to mitigate the “opportunity gap” risk. The report is a worthwhile perspective on Assessments.

In my opinion, our EPTF discussions have demonstrated that Delaware magnets, charters and vo-techs use a variety of multiple-measures assessments. This is to be applauded. My recommendation seeks to ensure the continuity of this best-practice by incorporating this principle into DE Code.

**Specific-Interest**

I believe that the inclusion of “specific-interest” in the current DE Code is intentional, important, and something far more than the mere act of application to a School. If the act of application were to suffice as “interest’ there would be no reason to have enumerated it as an admission preference.

With respect to Assessments which are collected in a rubric to demonstrate specific-interest, along with the backstop of an effective interview, I believe that The Charter School of Wilmington does this very robustly. CSW has been using such a rubric for well over a decade (since the school started to see an excess of applicants) and its annual administration and effectiveness is reviewed by the CSW Board to ensure that the overall practice does not exclude an applicant from the preference if the applicant has a compelling demonstration of specific-interest in CSW’s educational focus (i.e., science; math; computer science), methods (e.g., ability grouping; block scheduling; student-led school culture) and/or philosophy (e.g., as articulated in the School’s published Mission and Beliefs statement).

The Assessments used in the CSW rubric align well with psychometric validity, preference-relevance and broad inclusiveness. Over the past three years, among all applicants who participated in the rubric or who requested a follow-on interview: ~500/900 had the specific-interest rubric and ~300/900 did not elect to request a follow-on interview (i.e., clear shortfall of interest). With ~500/600 active applicants receiving the specific-interest preference, the rubric/interview process at CSW is highly inclusive.

**Representative Kimberly Williams**

Senate Bill 200 (1995) original intent was to “provide an opportunity to every child in the district, every child in this area and to make sure that this school is not marked as an elitist school. Not a school that you can only get into if you do well in science and math in grades one through eight.” The bill also stated: “children who might not have done very well in math and science up to the point of ninth grade, nevertheless, have an opportunity to benefit by this school, which will be excellent in math and science.” “This will be a school which not only caters to those children who have already displayed excellence in math and science and takes them one stop further; it will also be a school that reaches out to those kids who think they want to succeed in that area.”

We have strayed away from the original intent of the legislation which was signed into law July 10, 1995. We should recommend removing interviews, essays, and letters of

recommendations; **(36)** very subjective for middle and high school. I do not support assessments of interest into middle schools. If we are going to use auditions for an art based school, I believe it should be based on talent alone not if a student can read music. Cab vocals require a student to be able to read music. Question, are all of our elementary schools teaching students to read music? If we are going to use assessments to determine interest in high schools the assessment should be aligned with the school’s mission/interest. Remove other measures such as extracurricular activities/clubs, honor classes, sports you have played etc. These measures can be barriers for students if the school the student previously attended did not offer the extracurricular activities/clubs, honor classes, sports that the schools are using to assess students. Questions, do all our schools offer the necessary clubs, sporting programs, and honor classes needed to apply to these schools? All qualifying students should be put into a lottery and randomly selected, no ranking of students.

Where schools are located should reflect the surrounding student population. We need to provide more outreach to families and students. We need to make sure that each school has a representative where families can turn to and ask choice questions. We could recommend that the state/DOE hold an annual event, one for middle and high school students and their families. All schools would be there to meet parents and students and to answer questions families might have pertaining to choice. The state could hold one in the city and one in each county.

**Dr. Mervin Daugherty**

As the only Superintendent in the State with Magnet and Charters Schools I believe it is important to let the families who use these schools everyday receive information to better understand the potential impact of our committee’s possible recommendations. I believe the Red Clay community supports reasonable assessment in the enrollment process and in many or most cases, these expectations are a factor when they choose the schools. I recommend that all legal admissions criteria (including assessment when legal) for charters, magnets, vol-techs, IB programs, etc. be determined by local officials with public oversight and state support. **(37)**

1. CSS; LDF “The Meaning of Merit: Alternatives for Determining Admission to New York City’s Specialized High Schools”; October 2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)