NSPRA Gold Medallion Entry 2022

Student Assignment Planning
Fostering Equity and Access in Education
Public Engagement/Parental Involvement Category

PreK-8 School District: 7,000 students

Evanston/Skokie School District 65 (Entrant)
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Team Members:
Deb Keegan, Communications Specialist
Tania Margonza, Specialist for Family & Community Partnerships
Melissa Messinger, Executive Director of Communications
Sarita Smith, Director of Student Assignment
Stephanie Veloz, Bilingual Support Specialist

*Please consider this entry for a Golden Achievement Award.*
In spring 2021, District 65 embarked on a multi-year process to develop a comprehensive Student Assignment Plan (SAP) in order to modernize its structure and address historic inequities that continue to most significantly impact students of color. The process included updating school attendance boundaries, selection process for magnet schools/programs, and returning a school to the Fifth Ward community.

Despite changes to enrollment, student demographics, and academic services/programs, the District had not reviewed attendance boundaries holistically or recommended changes in nearly 30 years. This process should be completed annually per Board policy.

District and Board leaders knew that tackling student assignment, after decades of neglect, is a critical and necessary process in the longstanding effort to close opportunity gaps and eliminate racial predictability in student outcomes. Knowing the impact that this process would inevitably have on our community, District 65 was committed to making informed, thoughtful decisions rooted in community voice.

District 65 has been a public school district deeply committed to equity and improving access and educational outcomes for historically marginalized students. In 2016, the School Board adopted the District’s first-ever Racial and Educational Equity Statement and has been on the cutting edge of diversity, equity, and inclusion ever since. In the midst of a dual pandemic, Superintendent Dr. Devon Horton was hired with a goal of implementing a new student assignment plan to more fully and equitably meet the needs of our diverse student body.

After over a year of robust community engagement, on March 14, 2022, the School Board approved a new Student Assignment Plan and a funding plan to build a school in Evanston’s Fifth Ward.
Brief History of Student Assignment in District 65

Beginning in the 1960's, District 65 school configuration and attendance boundaries underwent changes, like many districts, based on desegregation legislation and increasing population. When desegregation was formally implemented, the Evanston population decreased drastically. The District 65 attendance area map changed three times from 1966 to 1970.

The most significant impact was the closing of Foster School in 1967. Foster was 99% African American and served all K-8 grade students living in Evanston's Fifth Ward. As a result, all students in the Fifth Ward were reassigned and bussed to other schools.

Evanston was the first Northern city to desegregate all of its elementary schools. Through 1979, boundaries continued to change to address enrollment shifts and to racially balance schools. Since then, there have been minimal changes with the last significant revisions in 1994-1995.

Since the closing of Foster, many urged D65 leaders to bring a school back to the Fifth Ward noting that Black students experienced a disproportionate burden of desegregation. This included loss of their neighborhood school, increased busing, reduced sense of community, and lack of access to before/after school programming. (Resource: Evanston 15 Stories: 150 Years - Evanston Roundtable)

Policy Review

7:30 Student Assignment and Intra-District Transfer

Attendance Areas - The School District is divided into school attendance areas. The Superintendent will review the boundary lines annually and recommend any changes to the Board. The Superintendent or designee shall maintain a map of the District showing current school attendance areas. Students living in a given school attendance area will be assigned to that school.

Student Transportation Analysis

Beginning in 2016, District 65 was grateful to enter into a partnership with Northwestern University to assess student transportation including policies, systems, and ridership patterns. NU researchers, Dr. Karen Smilowitz and Dr. Nichole Pinkard, were deeply involved in the SAP process. Dr. Smilowitz developed a tool funded by the National Science Foundation later used by the SAP Committee to review the feasibility of over 50 boundary change scenarios.
Student Demographics and Enrollment Analysis
Student demographics have shifted over the years, including increases in students with special needs and Emerging Bilinguals. Efforts have been made to expand programming to meet students’ diverse learning needs in proximity to their homes. Annually, the District produces an Opening of Schools Report with an analysis of enrollment and student cohort data. Reports were generated as early as the 1990s and were reviewed by SAP to better understand trends, programming needs, and more.

Master Facility Planning and Geodemographic Study
District 65 currently operates 18 schools and a warehouse. Gathering comprehensive facility data was a critical component to making an informed, data driven recommendation for a new student assignment plan. In June 2021, the School Board approved the hiring of an independent firm, Cordogan Clark, to develop a Master Facilities Plan and to conduct student enrollment projections over the next 10 years.

PLANNING

Overall Goals
Goal 1: Develop a Student Assignment Plan that more fully and equitably meets student needs by considering attendance boundaries, overall school configuration, and enrollment process for magnet schools/programs.

Goal 2: Engage robust and representative community voice by establishing a Committee to develop student assignment plan scenarios to be presented to the School Board.

Goal 3: Ensure regular, accessible communication to build awareness and understanding of the development of a new student assignment plan and stakeholder impact.

Roles and Responsibilities
Director of Student Assignment
The Director Student Assignment was responsible for leading all facets of the SAP process from establishing a committee to support plan development, data collection, largely serving as the community spokesperson, and leading scenario creation in alignment with district processes and board policy.

Student Assignment Planning Committee
The SAP Committee, led by the Director of Student Assignment, was comprised of approximately 40 staff, administrators, current and prospective parents/caregivers, and residents. The Committee charge was to make a recommendation to the School Board for a new student assignment plan.

Executive Director of Communications
The Executive Director was responsible for developing a Communications Plan and supporting community engagement efforts throughout the planning process. With the support of the Communications Team, the Executive Director was responsible for executing all elements of the plan and ensuring communication was accessible, timely, and focused on reaching the most marginalized within the community.
Timeline

PHASE 1
Review of all systems and processes, current student assignments, policies and procedures related to student assignment, and existing community information
Establish detailed timelines
Establish working team
SAP application development and selection metrics

PHASE 2
Goal Setting
SAP applications and selections
Community surveys
Engage superintendents youth advisory team
Ward town halls
Data Analytics

PHASE 3
Analyze Master Facilities Plan to inform recommendations
Community Feedback Forums
SAP Work Teams
Board Recommendations

Audience

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<td>➔ Prospective parents/caregivers</td>
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<td>- Educators</td>
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<td>- Paraprofessionals</td>
<td>➔ Alderpersons</td>
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<td>- Admin. Assistants/Clerical</td>
<td>➔ Parent/Caregiver Groups (PTAs, BPAC)</td>
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<td>➔ Community Leaders</td>
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IMPLEMENTATION

In the spirit of transparency and a strategy to broadly document the process, a detailed timeline was created and posted to our SAP Resource Hub that outlined key milestones and associated communications/actions along with rolling media coverage. The timeline also included links to various resources.
Phase 1

Key Communication Channels Established

- **Creation of SAP Resource Hub** - The Hub contains background; Committee info including a listing of members, minutes, and agendas; FAQs, master facilities information; and various resources.
- **Community-based Meetings and Partnership** - Identification of regular opportunities to connect in-person or virtually to gather information, solicit input, and share updates. In addition, “key communicators” were identified and **Communication Toolkits** (link to a sample) were used to support information sharing within and across the community.
- **School Board Meetings** - Ensuring the process was transparent and the School Board remained informed of progress over the course of the year, regular updates and presentations were built into the Board Planning Calendar. **Board Meeting Videos On-Demand**
- **Regular Community Communications** - The *Fast Five* is the district’s weekly eblast that goes out in English and Spanish to staff, families, and residents who have signed up. There are almost 13K subscribers and the weekly open rate hovers around 54%. Communications also included dedicated emails and text messages with important updates, announcements, and reminders.
- **Social Media Engagement** - Posting of updates on the District’s social media platforms including **Facebook**, **Twitter**, and **Instagram**.

Establish SAP Committee

- Broad invites were shared with the community to garner interest and applications.
- Committee members were selected by an independent consultant, with District input, to ensure representation. This included all Evanston Wards and Skokie, representatives from all bargaining units, those involved with special education and Emergent Bilingual programming, schools/grade levels across the district, and community partners directly connected to student services.
- Focused efforts were made to seek voice and participation from historically underrepresented communities which included outreach to local alderpersons, Bilingual Parent Advisory Committee, local branch of the NAACP, faith-based community, City of Evanston to ensure reach beyond current families/staff, local group of COFI (Community Organizing and Family Issues), among others
- An online feedback form was available throughout the process for the broader community to share feedback with the Committee. Questions were responded to by the Director of Student Assignments.

Review of Systems and Launch of SAP Process

- Various meetings held to learn from internal and external stakeholders directly involved in previous student assignment planning efforts, including attempts to build a 5th Ward School
- **Video presentation** created and shared with the community which included historical context and goals for embarking on this process.

Phase 2

Community-based Interviews and Testimonials

To guide the work of the SAP Committee and ensure community voice, the Committee identified a diverse group of students, parents/caregivers, and staff members to interview. This included students from the 1960s who were bused out of the 5th Ward, currently bussed students, families enrolled in magnet schools/programming, and families attending school within their neighborhood.
Taking it on the Road!
Speaking engagements and discussions across the community were held to assist in furthering understanding of “the why” behind this work, the history of student assignment, and the overall process to make a recommendation on a new plan. This included attending local ward meetings; meetings at the public library focused on school segregation; engagement with STEM School Evanston group; meetings of school PTAs, Bilingual Parent Advisory Committee, Special Education Parent Advisory Committee and Superintendent Student Advisory Committee; and other school and community gatherings.

Superintendent Chat n’ Chews
To focus on building staff connections, Superintendent Horton hosted lunch events at all 18 D65 schools. Student assignment planning and its impact on schools was a topic in many conversations. Feedback was collected and monitored by the team to incorporate into the planning process.

Launch of Community-based Survey
To ensure representation across the community, a geocoded survey was issued to a random sampling of residents that focused on gauging understanding of the current registration process and enrollment options, level of support for a new 5th Ward school, programming, and community values. The survey was issued and results were analyzed by an independent consulting firm. A separate survey, with the same questions, was issued to all staff and families to ensure equal opportunity to participate.

D65 used its communication channels (referenced above) to promote. In addition, many SAP Committee Members heavily promoted within their networks and district representatives visited schools for a week during pick-up/drop-off and passed out postcards with QR codes, and spoke with families about the process. D65 received 1,804 completed surveys from parents/community and 197 from staff.

Interactive Presentations: Deep Dive into Community Survey
Five community-based events were held to publicly share survey results and analysis. To take a deeper dive and incorporate additional community voices into the process, a series of questions were asked as part of the virtual sessions to gather additional feedback. Each session was held in English and Spanish and focused on topics including Neighborhood Schools, Selective Enrollment Programs, and Magnet Schools. Approximately 350 people attended and participated in these virtual sessions.

Use of the Thought Exchange Platform
D65 used Thought Exchange throughout the process to crowdsource feedback and lend equality to voice.

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Phase 3
Community Presentations of Scenario Options
The community-based SAP Committee met throughout the first and second phases and incorporated all of the data and community feedback to recommend two options for a new Student Assignment Plan (out of more
than 50 scenarios considered). Given the impact on our community (and some schools in particular), the sequencing of notification, intentionality, and engagement was incredibly important. A series of conversations was planned to present the scenarios and obtain real time feedback. **These included:**

- Cabinet ➔ School Administrators ➔ Union Leaders ➔ Bessie Rhodes and King Arts Staff ➔ Bessie Rhodes and King Arts Families ➔ All Staff ➔ All Community (three sessions)

**Development of Scenario 2.0**

**Community feedback was critical in this process and deeply valued** by the SAP Committee, Board, and District Leaders. In listening to the community and reflecting on all of these conversations, the Committee believed it was in the best interest of students and the district overall to recommend a revised scenario. The community overall expressed their appreciation in being heard and their feedback incorporated.

**EVALUATION**

At the time of this submission, evaluation is still ongoing. This is largely a result of the timing and the culmination of the process, including Board approval, only two weeks ago. And yet, we believe that we largely satisfied the goals set forth and have an ongoing commitment to continuous evaluation.

**Goal 1:** On March 14, 2022, over 100 people attended the **Board Meeting** (recording viewed over 1,000 times) for the discussion and action on the Student Assignment Plan. This included updated boundaries, shift for Bessie Rhodes (including planned building closure), and a new K-8 school in the 5th Ward. The presentation to the Board included a **hype video** featuring D65 students, staff, parents/caregivers, and community members.

There were 24 public comments, all in favor, and appreciation was expressed for a transparent process and for the Committee's commitment and receptiveness. There were no unsupportive or negative comments.

The District's first Student Assignment Plan in nearly 30 years was unanimously approved in a historic vote by the School Board (7-0). All Board Members made comments in favor of the proposal and lauded the community-driven process and high levels of opportunity and engagement.

The SAP Committee recommended an annual review of student enrollment and attendance-area boundaries. This includes the creation and annual review of an Equity Dashboard (to be created through Northwestern partnership). The data will include students who receive free/reduced meals, Emergent Bilinguals, students with IEPs, race, and Ward. The 2019-2020 school year data will be used to assess student assignment and proximity to needed programs. This tool will be grounded in District 65 equity goals and can provide real-time information to the District.

**Goal 2:** The SAP Committee met 18 times from May 2021-March 2022. Over 100 people applied for 40 seats on the Committee. The group pushed each other to think beyond personal interests to determine how to modernize student assignment through an equitable lens.

**Goal 3:** Based on the timeline, there were approximately 118 communications or engagement opportunities through a variety of mediums. Further, feedback shared by the Board and community via Thought Exchanges and the **plan approval meeting** expressed satisfaction and support of the process.
## Branding

### Creating a Better and More Equitable District 65

**Student Assignment Project (SAP)**

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Communications and Engagement Timeline

Communications and Engagement Timeline
(Available on SAP Resource Hub - Outlines various project and communication milestones with links as well as tracked media coverage of the process.)

Testimonials

“The process Dr. Horton and his team have undertaken has been extensive, inclusive, and makes sure that the right people are included in the conversation.”

- Joey Hailpern, D65 Board Member

“Today I am honored to add my support for the proposed 5th Ward School. I feel blessed that I have lived long enough to see a wrong done in my community attempting to be repaired.”

- Delores Holmes, Former 5th Ward Alderperson

“...you have done such extensive and thoughtful research as well as shared data and opportunities for input every step of the way in this more than a year-long process. All of the emails, texts, info sessions, surveys, Thought Exchanges, and info provided on the website have helped me to feel very included in this important and complex process. You have been responsive and flexible to integrate community feedback into your proposals and create a solution that will work for the most people. Change is never easy. You have gone above and beyond, in a pandemic, to make sure as many voices as possible were brought to the table to address historic inequities.”

- Sarah Peterson, District 65 Parent

“Thank you for the many months you have put forth with communication and solicitation from the community to come up with the various scenarios that have been put forward.”

- Oliver Ruff, Evanston Resident and Former D65 Foster School Student

“The SAP Committee offered multiple opportunities to share those things that feel vital and important to me and then contextualize those priorities within those of the broader community. They further situated this conversation within the decades of concerns brought forth by 5th Ward families that were met with excuses and deferrals. This responsive and inclusive effort gives me confidence that the proposals brought forward today are those that address our most essential shared values and do the least harm.”

- Beth Brady, District 65 Parent and Educator

“We have been right alongside you all for the past year and the intensive communication plan over the past month. As such, we may have exhausted you all and may have exhausted ourselves with questions over this final scenario. “

- Anya Tanyavutti, Board President

“Since Foster School closed, there has been a steady community voice advocating for a school to be reopened. As a member of Citizens for a Better Evanston, I joined that chorus over a decade ago. What a great feeling to have arrived at this moment.”

- Bobby Burns, Fifth Ward Alderman & D65 Parent
Social Media

Facebook

Twitter

Instagram

District 65 would like to hear from students, staff, and families on facility needs and priorities across our schools both in the short term and well into the future as part of a virtual Thought Exchange. Visit http://evansonskokie65.org to learn more and share your thoughts through November 23.
Fast Five e-blast

**DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY**

D65 Schools will be closed on Monday, January 17, 2022. All classes will resume on Tuesday.

**JANUARY 17, 2022**

1. **Join Us! Student Assignment Project (SAP) Virtual Interactive Presentation Sessions**

   Last spring, District 65 launched a multi-year Student Assignment Project (SAP) to modernize our district structure and address historic inequities that continue to most significantly impact students of color. Student assignment is a part of our multi-faceted approach to long-term planning for the future of our public schools.

   Last fall, a community survey was released to gather input and perspective. We invite members of the D65 community to join us for a virtual interactive presentation on January 18, 22, 26, or 29 to dive into the survey data and gather additional feedback. The presentations will be held remotely on Zoom, and each session will focus on topics such as neighborhood schools, selective enrollment programs, and magnet schools. Sessions will be available in English and Spanish.

   Visit the Student Assignment Planning section of our website for details and links to the virtual sessions, data, and other SAP resources.

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**¡Acompañenos! Sesiones de presentación virtual interactiva del proyecto de asignación estudiantil (SAP)**

La primavera pasada, el Distrito 65 lanzó un proyecto de asignación de estudiantes (SAP) de varios años para modernizar la estructura de nuestro distrito y abordar las desigualdades históricas que continúan afectando de manera más significativa a nuestros estudiantes de color. La asignación de estudiantes es parte de nuestro enfoque multifacetado para la planeación a largo plazo para el futuro de nuestras escuelas públicas.

El otoño pasado, se lanzó una encuesta comunitaria para recopilar opiniones y perspectivas. Invitamos a todos los miembros de la comunidad del D65 a que nos acompañen para una presentación virtual interactiva el 18, 22, 26, o 29 de enero para profundizar en los datos de la encuesta y recopilar comentarios adicionales. Las presentaciones se llevarán a cabo de manera virtual por Zoom, y cada sesión se enfocará en temas como escuelas de vecindario, programas de inscripción selectiva y escuelas técnicas (magnet). Las sesiones se llevarán a cabo en inglés y en español.

Visite la sección de Planificación de asignación de estudiantes de nuestra página web para detalles y enlaces relacionados con las sesiones virtuales, los datos, y otros recursos SAP.
SAP Survey

District Population vs Voluntary General Population Survey Data Comparison

Survey Results

SAP Postcard

SHARE YOUR VOICE!

Creating a Better and More Equitable District 65
Student Assignment Project (SAP)

SURVEY OPEN THROUGH OCTOBER 22

¡COMPARTA SU OPINIÓN!

Creación de un Distrito Mejor y Más Equitativo 65
Proyecto de asignación de estudiantes (SAP)

ENCUESTA ABIERTA HASTA EL 22 DE OCTUBRE
Interactive Proposed Boundary Maps

D65 SAP Scenarios Maps

Interactive Boundary Maps