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**For Workgroup Discussion**  
**Purposes Only**

# **Enrollment Case Study: Denver Public Schools**

**May 2020**

Prepared for the Oakland Enrollment Workgroup by  
Brian Eschbacher, Independent Education Consultant  
Former Executive Director, Choice & Enrollment Services, Denver Public Schools

# Purpose & Agenda

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## Purpose

Provide the Oakland Enrollment Workgroup with a case study from Denver Public Schools as an example of an approach and implementation strategy related to enrollment challenges that Oakland is also facing.

## Agenda

- Context of Denver and Oakland
- Enrollment challenges Denver was experiencing
- Workgroup structure and mission statement to address challenges
- Prioritized challenges that were pursued
  - Goal of the strategy
  - Approach to implementation / engagement
  - Pilot programs
  - Lessons learned, both positive and negative

## Disclaimer

This case study has been prepared by Brian Eschbacher, former Executive Director of Denver Public Schools. While the case study draws heavily upon publicly available reports, the opinions expressed within the report belong solely to the author and not the school district.

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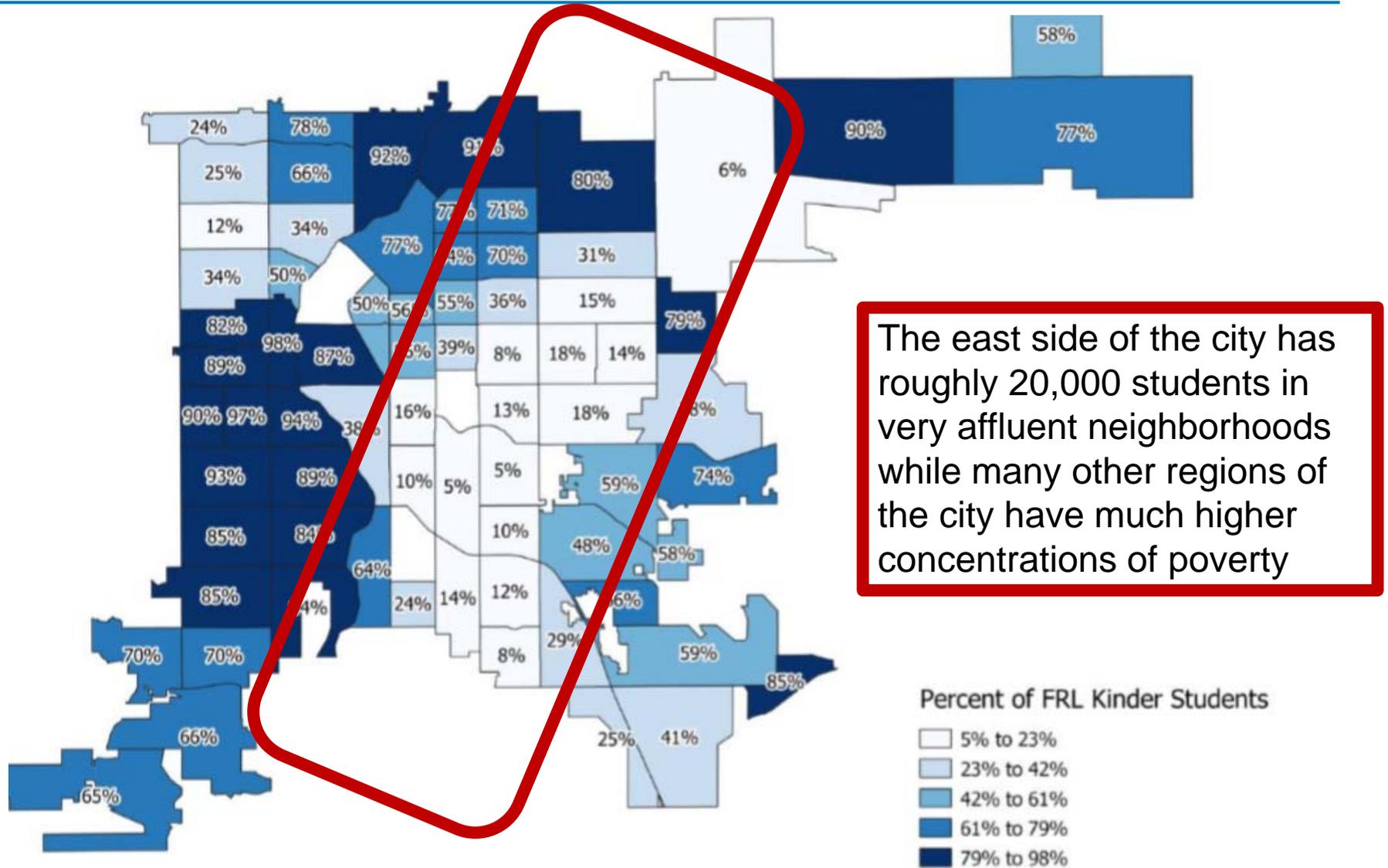
# Context of Denver and Oakland

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	Denver	Oakland
Public Schools Enrollment (2019-20)	93,815	49,215
Schools (district and charter)	207	116
Socioeconomic diversity (% qualify for FRL)	65%	74%
English Language Learners	36%	33%
% of students attending a charter school	22%	27%
% of students attending their assigned school	49%	44%
Choice system vendor	SchoolMint	SchoolMint

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# Context Setting: Housing Segregation in Denver



The east side of the city has roughly 20,000 students in very affluent neighborhoods while many other regions of the city have much higher concentrations of poverty

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# Enrollment Progress and Challenges in Denver

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<b>Progress</b>	Implemented a unified enrollment system in 2012, where students applied to all public schools (district and charter) and received a single best offer through a single system.
<b>Match Rates</b>	Varied percentage of students receiving one of their top choices throughout the city; Families frustrated at both their neighborhood option and inability to choose elsewhere.
<b>Participation</b>	Despite outreach efforts, there continue to be gaps in the rate of participation by different socioeconomic levels and race/ethnicities.
<b>Segregation</b>	Very few schools reflected the district's demographics: many were either very high poverty (80%+ FRL) or more affluent (below 40%)
<b>Student Mobility</b>	High rates of housing instability, leading to student transfers (>20% annually in high-poverty schools) and the inability to choose into high performing schools.
<b>Transportation</b>	Limited access to private transportation and large square mileage of the city requires yellow busses to connect families with choice schools.

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# Process to Prioritize Challenges



- Two parallel work groups prioritized opportunities to improve the enrollment landscape, one organized to bring the perspectives of the community and another to focus on structuring the process details to operate the strategies.
  - **Strengthening Neighborhoods Initiative:** 35 community members, parents, teachers reviewed quantitative data, community feedback, and national exemplars. **Delivered a set of recommendations to the Board** on core beliefs, goal setting and progress monitoring, and support for policies that increase integration through the lottery and boundary system.
  - **Collaborative Council:** 10 school leaders (district and charter) and staff **wrote detailed policy and process language** to form the basis of pilot programs, set metrics to determine relative success and codify into formal policies.

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# Strengthening Neighborhoods Initiative Community Group Mission Statement and Enrollment Recommendations

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## Strengthening Neighborhoods Mission Statement

*“Research indicates that **high-quality, integrated schools offer both improved educational outcomes** for our children and serve a vital role in promoting and sustaining vibrant neighborhoods. **Our committee’s mission is to develop recommendations to increase integration and inclusion in all of our schools** and to effectively address issues associated with the declining number of school-aged children in impacted areas of the city.”*

## Strengthening Neighborhoods Enrollment Recommendations

*“The Committee recommendations focus on the importance of **increasing integration at the school level** and **acknowledge the tensions that exist with supporting neighborhood schools** and the availability of school choice.”*

*“The Committee believes that **all schools should make seats available for students to enroll across all grades throughout the school year** and that no school should restrict access based on testing or other factors.”*

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# Integration Strategy: Opt-in FRL Priority at Affluent Schools (those with student populations below 40% FRL)

<b>Goal</b>	At affluent schools, give a priority to FRL-qualified students to fill seats <b>after</b> assignment area students and siblings, maintaining the neighborhood guarantee.
<b>Approach</b>	<b>Opt-in from schools for authentic buy-in</b> ; Supported by <b>data simulations</b> of the impact to demographics; <b>Most decided to join the program</b> , knowing that the neighborhood guarantee and sibling priority would be maintained.
<b>Pilot Program</b>	<b>Piloted at 11 schools</b> in 2016. Additional schools engaged with preliminary impact, which led to more approvals and a <b>ramp-up to 27 of the 40 most affluent schools</b> in 2018. No transportation was provided due to cost and driver shortages.
<b>Impact</b>	Students assigned <b>increased from 69 in 2016's pilot to 388 in 2018</b> . More than half were assigned to 2 of the 27 schools while many others had below 10.
<b>Key Takeaways</b>	<b>Opt-in was critical for local buy-in</b> , so it became a local solution instead of a district mandate. Having a <b>large cohort of participating schools</b> made it easier to defend than parents protesting against one individual school.  One key input to this engagement process was having <b>strong data systems from unified enrollment</b> that allowed us to <b>simulate the impact</b> to dispel myths.  Most affluent elementary schools have few seats available after neighborhood students and siblings. Citywide and larger schools saw larger impact. <b>To create a larger impact, FRL needs to be prioritized higher.</b>

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# Integration Strategies: Contrasting FRL Priority versus FRL Minimum Levels

## FRL Priority After Neighborhood

### Enrollment Priorities:

1. Assignment area students
2. Siblings
3. Denver FRL-qualified students
4. Denver non-FRL qualified students

100 seats are allocated in SchoolMint

75 are assigned to assignment area

10 qualify for FRL

65 do not qualify for FRL

20 are assigned to siblings, none are FRL

5 remaining seats are assigned to the 5 best lottery numbers of FRL Denver residents

**Outcome: 15% FRL rate**

**Outcome: All assignment area and siblings are assigned**

## FRL Minimum of 25%

### Enrollment Priorities:

1. Assignment area students
2. Siblings
3. Denver FRL-qualified students
4. Denver non-FRL qualified students

25 seats are allocated for FRL-qualified applicants and 75 seats for all applicants

25 FRL-qualified seats:

10 are assigned to assignment area residents

15 are assigned to Denver residents

75 seats open to all applicants

65 are assigned to assignment area residents

10 are assigned to siblings with the best

lottery numbers, none happen to be FRL

**Outcome: 25% FRL rate**

**Outcome: All assignment area are assigned, but only 10 of 20 siblings are assigned**

**Lesson learned: when the boundary population fills many of the open seats and/or there are a large number of siblings, the FRL minimum is likely more impactful.**

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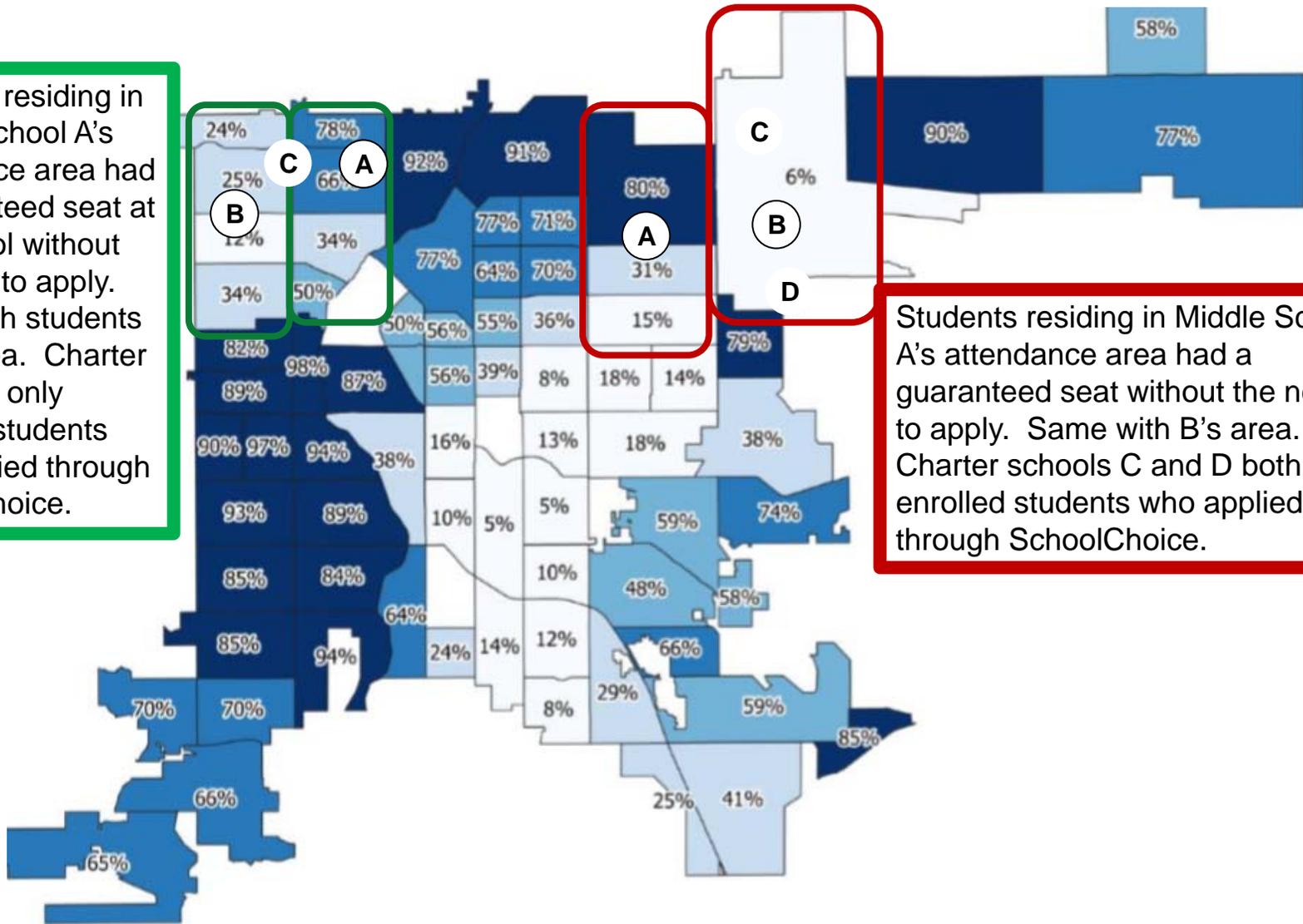
# Integration Strategy: Creating Shared Enrollment Zones

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<b>Goal</b>	Identify <b>adjacent school boundaries of different economic backgrounds</b> and consider <b>merging them into enrollment zones</b> with equal access to more schools.
<b>Approach</b>	<b>Leverage triggers</b> such as high enrollment growth/capacity shortages or school closures <b>to change feeder patterns to increase socioeconomic diversity</b> . All schools, including charter schools, geographically located in the zone were included in zone creation, with few exceptions (single gender, alternative schools, etc.)
<b>How it Operates</b>	<b>Families no longer have a guaranteed seat at one particular school, rather have a guaranteed seat at one of the schools in their zone</b> . They must apply through Choice for transition grades. Seats are saved for non-participants and new arrivals. Outside of sibling priorities, <b>students have equal priority at each zone school</b> , regardless of which they live closest to, though some have an FRL priority.

# Enrollment Prior to Zone Creation

Students residing in Middle School A's attendance area had a guaranteed seat at the school without the need to apply. Same with students in B's area. Charter School C only enrolled students who applied through SchoolChoice.



Students residing in Middle School A's attendance area had a guaranteed seat without the need to apply. Same with B's area. Charter schools C and D both only enrolled students who applied through SchoolChoice.

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# Integration Strategy: Creating Shared Enrollment Zones

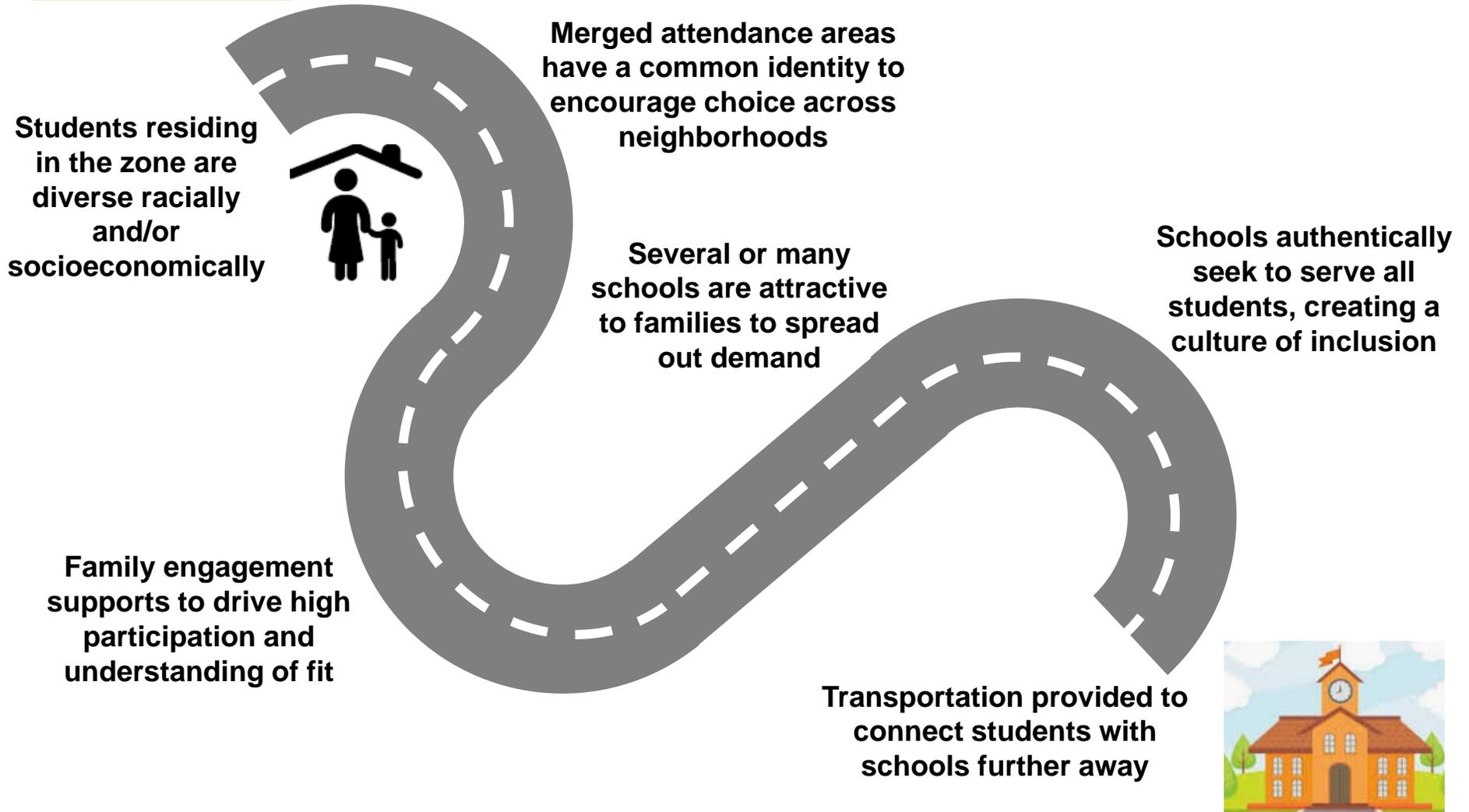
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<b>Impact on Diversity</b>	<b>In most cases, integration improved</b> through higher participation, transportation offerings, and programs that sought to appeal to all students. Challenges included when a zone could not be drawn with enough diversity nearby or school models that sought to serve a homogenous population.
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# Integration Strategy: Creating Shared Enrollment Zones

## Factors Supporting Successful Zones

### Starting Point



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# Summary Integration Strategies Lessons Learned

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## School and Community Engagement

Given the sensitive nature of enrollment, it was key to **have schools opting in as often as possible** to increase their focus not only on enrolling a more diverse student population, but especially to ensure that all students would be well-served once the school year started.

## Planning

To **support school conversations**, it was key to use historic application data to **simulate the potential impact of different approaches**: FRL priority, weighted lottery, FRL minimum, or creating a shared enrollment zone.

## Tailored Approach

Whereas other districts have moved to a single strategy for integration across all schools, such as controlled choice, given the political reality and existing enrollment policies in Denver, moving to a universal controlled choice system was not feasible, instead **a tailored approach has been pursued**.

## Pilots / Ramp-ups

Strategies often involved **pilot phases and ramp-up periods to help schools and communities plan** for the adjusted enrollment patterns. This helped reduce resistance and ensure that students would be well-served, such as added language supports or adjusting grade sizes.

## Much More Work Remains

While the solutions that have been implemented have made some impact, more work remains to have a greater number of schools reflect the diversity of the city.

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# Student Mobility: Context-Setting

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## Size of the Situation:

**Over 14,000 students** are moving in late spring or summer, which is **outside of choice windows**

## Student Profile:

Students who move over the summer are **more educationally disadvantaged** than choice participants

## School Options:

**High-quality schools are typically filled** through the lottery process and do not serve summer arrivals

## School Quality:

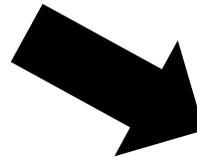
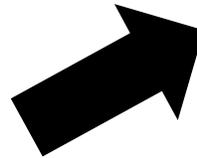
Shut out of choice options, summer arrivals **enroll at lower performing schools**

# Student Mobility: Prior Process for Summer Enrollment Using a Hypothetical Situation



## Neighborhood

16 7<sup>th</sup> graders move in over the summer and are looking for a great school



**School A: 100 students / grade**

100 seats filled  
85 students reenrolled from 6<sup>th</sup> grade  
15 students filled from the lottery



**School B: 100 students / grade**

85 seats filled with 15 open seats  
70 students reenrolled from 6<sup>th</sup> grade  
15 students filled from the lottery

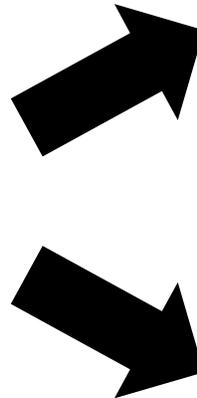
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# Student Mobility: Pilot Solution for Summer Enrollment Building on the Hypothetical Situation



## Neighborhood

16 7<sup>th</sup> graders move in over the summer and are looking for a great school



## School A: 100 students / grade

100 seats filled due to high demand  
85 students reenrolled from 6<sup>th</sup> grade  
7 students filled from the lottery  
**8 seats reserved for summer arrivals**  
On-time students remained on waitlist



## School B: 100 students / grade

85 seats filled with 15 open seats  
70 students reenrolled from 6<sup>th</sup> grade  
15 students filled from the lottery  
**8 seats reserved for summer arrivals**

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# Student Mobility: Lessons Learned

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<b>Access to Quality</b>	Far more educationally disadvantaged students are enrolling in “A” or “B”-rated schools as a result of seats saved for summer arrivals.
<b>Family Eligibility</b>	To <b>prevent gaming the system</b> , families needed to demonstrate that they had a change of address to qualify for requesting a late arrival seat.
<b>Pilot Expansion</b>	A regional pilot has been <b>expanded city-wide and now reserves over 2,500 seats</b> in all highly-mobile areas and high-performing schools, district and charter. It is key to <b>use historic data</b> to size up the number of seats to save.
<b>Operational Complexity</b>	Checking family eligibility, building awareness of options, checking available seats, and completing registration is <b>time-intensive during a busy summer period</b> . DPS was committed to ensuring families knew their school of assignment before they left the Enrollment Office that day.
<b>Community Pushback</b>	There was a level of <b>pushback from some round 1 participants</b> who were waitlisted at high-performing schools due to seats being reserved for a yet-to-arrive student, since they felt that they played by the rules. To counter these specific concerns, it has been key that the <b>district and Board be firmly aligned with the equity benefits of the program</b> .

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## **Reference Materials for Denver-related Choice Analyses and Presentations**

- **Strengthening Neighborhoods Committee Recommendations** – summarizes the community process, core beliefs, and recommendations related to access (choice and enrollment).
- **2019 Choice Round 1 Overview** – details on the participation and match rates from the main lottery round, including dives into how enrollment zones impact these key metrics.
- **Analysis of Enrollment Zones' Impact on Diversity** - analyzes the benefits of enrollment zones, and the impact of zones on integration, with details on each zone analyzing the relative impact.
- **FRL Pilot Analysis** – explains how FRL priorities work and the detailed impact of priorities, with lessons learned and next steps to improve the program.