School Committee Sets School Choice Hearing

At its next meeting on **Thursday, May 22**, Medfield School Committee will once again hold its **annual public hearing** to consider **inter-district School Choice**.

Under state law enacted more than 30 years ago, districts that adopt School Choice may voluntarily enroll students from **other Massachusetts communities** and receive **$5,000 per student** in state reimbursement.

Receiving districts can limit the number of available slots (no minimum required), designate slots by grade level, and hold a lottery, if needed.

Districts are presumed to adopt School Choice unless School Committee holds the mandated hearing (with advance legal notice) and votes to opt out of the program by the **June 1** deadline. The purpose of the hearing is to allow **members of the public to voice their opinions** on whether or not the district should allow nonresident students to attend their local public schools.

Comments will be taken in person at the hearing, and feedback can also be e-mailed to **Medfield School Committee**.

Financial considerations

While districts that enroll students from other communities receive a per-student tuition reimbursement from the state, sending districts lose that amount because the funds follow the student to the new school.

Although Medfield has never accepted students through the School Choice program, its own students have used the program to enroll in other districts. According to **data published by Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education** (DESE), from fiscal years 2015 to 2024, a total of about 67 students (full-time equivalent) left Medfield through School Choice. Over that 10-year period alone, the district lost more than **$392,000** in state tuition reimbursements, as the funding followed those students to their new schools.

Enrollment trends are overarching considerations in district decisions to adopt School Choice. This is especially so for Medfield, which has seen a **20 percent decline in high school enrollment** since 2015 -- from 876 to 704 students for 2024-25 based on DESE data.

Last year, Marsden stated in a **School Committee letter** that Medfield spends $18,769.80 per student, suggesting that each School Choice student would cost the town nearly

$14,000 in unfunded expenses. But that assumes every new student brings with them entirely new costs -- which isn't always the case. When under-enrolled grades or classrooms exist, new students can fill seats without triggering additional hiring or expenses. In such cases, the $5,000 represents **net new revenue**.

In addition to the $5,000 tuition rate, an incremental amount is also provided in state reimbursements toward eligible special education costs for a School Choice student, if needed. The supplemental amount is determined based on a formula established by DESE.

Districts that adopt the program are also not required to accept siblings of existing School Choice students.

Other districts

Of about 321 school districts in Massachusetts, approximately 55 percent participate in School Choice, including nearby districts Holliston, Medway, Millis, Ashland and Bellingham, according to DESE data.

Newton, which has historically opted out of School Choice, has been weighing the pros and cons of the program with **extensive School Committee and Finance Committee discussions in 2024, as noted in this article.**

"A school district must identify untapped or realigned resources. To do that, a district must look outside typical pathways for funding enhancements," according to an article co-written by Medway Superintendent Armand Pires and Wellness Director Ryan Sherman for The School Superintendents Association magazine. (The national association named Pires 2025 "Superintendent of the Year.")

Last year, Holliston School Committee stated that an expansion of School Choice would be among the ways it could help avert an override.

Other considerations

Marsden warned in his letter that School Choice students would "take away opportunities" in athletics, arts, and electives, and could make Medfield less desirable for homebuyers.

However, especially considering a significant drop in Medfield High School enrollment, athletic teams and music ensembles may actually have the chance to fill gaps and become stronger when new students join the district through School Choice.

And in academic high school classes that rely heavily on class discussion or team projects, students may gain a richer, more diverse learning experience with 15 to 18 classmates (a class size considered ideal by educators) versus 6 to 10, for example. Even just opening 2

seats per grade for grades 8 to 12, for example, can generate significant revenue for the district, with minimal impact on class sizes and extracurricular experiences.

Regarding real estate impact, no definitive research shows a correlation between School Choice participation and declining home values, especially when the number of available school seats is set low.

Analysis and deliberation

For districts across the Commonwealth, School Choice is neither a silver bullet nor a guaranteed burden, but many School Committees (including Newton) have relied on a data-driven analysis and extended discussions to guide member decision-making.

More information about School Choice is available on the **DESE website**.