**DRAFT Policy Brief: Entry, Transfer, & Exit Policies—FOR DISCUSSION ONLY**11/18/16 – For review and feedback by Task Force members

This policy brief includes an updated mid-year entry, transfer, and exit policy proposal or “strawman” for review and to share with education stakeholders and the public for input. This strawman has been updated based on the Task Force members’ discussions and ratings generated during the October retreat. This strawman policy proposal is intended to provide something concrete for your reaction and to identify the issues or questions that need input from education stakeholders and the community. Some of those questions are highlighted in red; there are likely others which the Task Force will discuss during the November meeting. This strawman (and the accompanying graphic) also recommends a suggested implementation timeline. This policy brief is not intended to be a final recommendation, but is to facilitate further discussion and get clarity on the components of these policies as the Task Force and community considers them.

**Description & Purpose**  
New students who enter the public school system mid-year (i.e., after October 5th) almost exclusively enroll at DCPS rather than at public charter schools. In addition, the majority of students who transfer between public schools in DC transfer to DCPS schools rather than charter schools. Thus, DCPS experiences a significant net increase of students over the course of the year, while public charter schools experience a net decrease. As schools-of-right, DCPS schools cannot limit the number of new students who join them mid-year; public charter schools, however, can limit the number who join mid-year. For many DCPS schools, especially those East of the River, these dynamics contribute to high levels of mid-year entry and exit (i.e. high churn), which is correlated with low student performance. This imbalance puts a strain on DCPS school staff, students, and resources, and doesn’t afford students the opportunity to attend public charter schools after the October count.

Charter schools are currently paid based on a single October count, and thus have no financial incentive to accept new students mid-year. Task force members expect that the upcoming payment reform (the LEA Payment Initiative that is expected to pay both school systems based on actual students present during multiple counts throughout the year) will provide charter schools with an incentive to both retain students and to fill empty seats with new out-of-state students. The proposed set-aside policies will allow schools to serve students experiencing crisis or special circumstances, as well as provide seats to new students entering from out of state.

The intended purposes of these policies are as follows:

1. Better understand why students enter, transfer, or exit mid-year.
2. More equitably distribute new mid-year students or transfer students to schools across both sectors so as to reduce the concentration of mid-year transfer students in high-churn schools.
3. Ensure that schools are better prepared for new students who transfer or enter mid-year by providing the school with information on incoming students.
4. Ensure that students and families are aware of their school choices should they enter or transfer school mid-year, across both sectors.
5. Facilitate charter schools’ ability to take on transfer and entry students mid-year.

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| **Component 1: Centralized citywide process for students who enter, transfer, and exit mid-year** |
| This centralized citywide process will better facilitate students entering or transferring between schools mid-year because it will:   * Ensure that students/families are aware of available seats; * Provide neutral information about the schools that have available seats; * Collect information from students/families about why they are entering or transferring schools mid-year; * Trigger OSSE to provide necessary information from SLED and SEDS for the incoming school, so that schools have the information they need when students enter/transfer mid-year; * Better ensure that the sending school releases student records to the receiving school, both within DC and possibly through relationships established with neighboring jurisdictions; * Create a standardized method of identifying available seats.   This centralized process may result in fewer mid-year transfers as information will be collected and there will be more transparency about why students are transferring schools mid-year, and the additional steps may foster resolution of issues so that students/families to remain at their schools. We expect that the LEA Payment Initiative will be in effect and the centralized citywide process will assist those LEAs that historically do not have waitlists after October 5. This centralized process will be implemented in year 1.  Parameters   1. The central transfer office will be managed by My School DC (with additional staff and resources). This involves My School DC staff presenting the student/family with 1) seat availability for all schools participating in the centralized process and 2) neutral information about the schools that have available seats, similar to the types of information that My School DC provides now. The student/family would select a school to enroll in from the list of schools with available seats.  * The My School DC will provide referrals to qualified providers for school counseling for families who so desire it (e.g., Office of the Ombudsmen, DC School Reform Now, Office of Student Advocate). These referrals would be made with the recognition that students need to enroll in a school in a timely manner. More in depth counseling opportunities could occur in the future.  1. The My School DC team would collect basic information about reasons that the student is enrolling mid-year or transferring schools mid-year. This information would be collected via a standardized survey. 2. This process would be in effect for the entire school year after October 5. There will not be a designated window for transfers or new entries. 3. All PK3-12 schools would be eligible to participate, including DCPS out-of-boundary schools, DCPS citywide, DCPS selective, and public charter schools that provide grades within PK3-12. It also includes DCPS in-boundary schools (which are currently not included in the My School DC application process). 4. This process does not alter students’ rights to attend their in-boundary DCPS school; however, mid-year entries to an in-boundary school are to go through the centralized process. 5. Participation of the PK3-12 schools would be voluntary. 6. All PK3-12th grade students entering the public school system mid-year from out-of-state or transferring between schools would go through this centralized process if they wish to enroll in any of the participating schools. 7. Students who wish to enroll mid-year in adult, alternative, or non-participating PK3-12 schools, would have to contact those schools separately. This would be similar to the process students go through to enroll in public charter schools that do not participate in the My School DC common lottery process. 8. The process would be timely so that there is virtually no delay in a student’s enrollment. The acceptable period of time to enroll through the process will be determined. 9. My School DC would implement a standardized methodology for identifying available seats for participating LEAs who opt into this system. The process may differ depending whether the schools are by-right neighborhood schools or are lottery schools. 10. The current process of maintaining waitlists will be maintained in year 1 of implementation. During year 1, any proposed changes to the waitlist would be explored, and implementation of changes to the waitlist would not occur until year 2. 11. The LEA Payment Initiative would be in effect. |
| **Component 2: Hardship transfer set-asides** |
| LEAs will be encouraged to create “hardship transfer set-asides” for students who are experiencing special circumstances and need to change schools mid-year. Hardship transfer students will operate outside of the waitlists and would be enrolled before other students on the waitlist. Students who wish to transfer for reasons other than “hardship” would go through the centralized process and go to the end of a school’s waitlist. Hardship transfer set-asides would be implemented in year 1.  Parameters   1. My School DC (with additional staff and resources) would manage the hardship transfer set-asides as part of the centralized mid-year entry and transfer process. 2. Students who meet the following criteria and have appropriate documentation will qualify for a hardship transfer set-aside.  * Students who are already enrolled in a DCPS or public charter school and meet one of the following criteria:   1. Medical reasons   2. Safety reasons either within the school building, around the school grounds, or in route to get to/from school, including bullying   3. Changes in legal or educational custody and/or guardianship   4. Change of residence within DC if the move has created a hardship in getting to school   5. **Expelled students (an additional opt-in provision for schools)**  1. LEAs would opt in – it would be a voluntary system to offer hardship seats. 2. LEAs would “set-aside” seats for hardship transfers. Public charter schools would need approval by DC PCSB if the set asides were above their enrollment ceiling. DCPS would work with their individual schools to determine the hardship set aside seats. 3. Hardship students would not enroll off of a waitlist; hardship seats would be filled by students in crisis or experiencing special circumstances, not by students from off of the general waitlist. 4. Hardship transfers could occur at any time throughout the school year. 5. Students who wish to transfer for reasons other than “hardship” would go through the centralized entry/transfer process and go to the end of a school’s waitlist. |

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| **Component 3: Waitlists and Set-Asides for Out-of-State Mid-Year Entries** |
| This proposal suggests that out-of-state mid-year set asides would be implemented after the centralized mid-year entry and transfer office are in effect and sufficient data are collected to understand the out-of-state mid-year enterers. In addition, out-of-state set asides would only be necessary if waitlists are still in effect.  During year 1, My School DC in conjunction with education stakeholders will explore the existing waitlist policies, in particular whether parents should actively indicate that they want to remain on the waitlist after a particular point in the school year to create updated waitlists or whether the waitlists are terminated after a particular point in the school year. If waitlists were terminated, any students, either coming from out-of-state or from within the District, would enroll in open seats made available through the centralized transfer process.  If the My School DC and education stakeholders determine that waitlists will continue in some form and not be terminated, then the city could create set-asides for students new to the public school system mid-year. This is proposed because DCPS schools disproportionately enroll these students who move in from out-of-state or are new to the public school system mid-year. Other students wishing to transfer between schools (not as new entries) would go through the centralized process and go to the end of a school’s waitlist.  If Waitlists Continue, Parameters for Out-of-State Set-Asides   1. My School DC (with additional staff and resources) would manage the out-of-state transfer set-asides as part of the centralized mid-year entry and transfer process. 2. Planning for the out-of-state set-asides would occur in year 1 in order to implement them during year 2. 3. K-12 grade students who meet the following criteria and have appropriate documentation will qualify for an out-of-state set-aside. 4. Qualifying students include those who move into the District mid-year or decide to enroll at a public school during a school year for the first time after October 5. This includes students who have been previously disconnected from school altogether (i.e., drop out). 5. Students would only qualify if there was no proof of enrollment in SLED for the entirety of the school year in which they are trying to enroll. 6. **Students who had been enrolled in private, independent, or parochial schools, or students who had been homeschooled during the school year would NOT qualify for an out-of-state set aside. These students would go through the centralized entry/transfer process and go to the end of a school’s waitlist**. 7. Out-of-state mid-year entries would occur at any time throughout the school year after October 5. 8. LEAs would opt in – it would be a voluntary system to offer seats to students entering the District’s public school system mid-year. 9. LEAs would reserve a set number of seats for out-of-state set asides since waitlists will still be in effect. Public charter schools would need approval by DC PCSB if the set asides were above their enrollment ceiling. DCPS would work with their individual schools to determine the hardship set aside seats. |