

Belmont-Redwood Shores School District

Frequently Asked Questions

The New Enrollment Process and Assignment Criteria (Effective the 2012-13 School Year)

What is the new policy for student enrollment and school assignment?

The Board of Trustees approved a new policy [Board Policy 5116] governing student enrollment and school assignment in October 2011. In adopting a new policy, the Board's priority was to preserve the community's commitment to neighborhood schools while "providing flexibility for variations in enrollment over time." The policy eliminates school attendance areas, the former geographic boundaries for each of the six elementary schools, and establishes a district-wide attendance area with the goal of assigning students to schools near their homes.

The policy directs the Superintendent to establish an "unbiased enrollment process" and an "objective assignment criteria." The Superintendent created a forum for the community to discuss and assist the District in drafting new regulations establishing the enrollment process and assignment criteria [Board Policy 5116]. Parents from each of the six elementary schools, along with school administrators, two Board members, and District staff, met to develop the regulations.

The plans for a new procedure for student enrollment and school assignment are discussed below.

What is the new process for student enrollment?

The new enrollment process will start in February 2012 for the 2012-13 school year. Under the new process, a new Kindergarten enrollee with an older sibling in Kindergarten through fifth grade will be enrolled at their older siblings' school (*i.e.*, "grandfathered"). Students without currently enrolled older siblings will be centrally enrolled at the District Office on Hallmark Drive in Belmont or at another designated location. Information about the enrollment process, along with instructions and the necessary paperwork, will be posted on the District's Web site. Because new students will no longer be enrolled on a first-come, first-served basis, waiting in line will not be necessary. Camping will not be permitted due to the process and the length of time for enrollment.

The District will have three enrollment periods: the first spanning the month of February 2012, the second from March 1, 2012 to June 8, 2012 (the last day of the school year), and third from June 9, 2012 to August 17, 2012 (shortly before the start of the new school year).

Students who enroll during each period will be assigned to one of the six elementary schools. For the upcoming 2012-13 school year, students who enroll in the first period will be notified of their school assignment by April 1, 2012; students in the second period will be notified by July 1, 2012; and students in the third period will be notified by the opening of school in August 2012. Because students will be assigned to schools in each enrollment period, families are encouraged to enroll their children during the earliest period. Remember, however, that there is no advantage to enrolling earlier within the period. The first student to enroll in the February period has no priority in assignment over the last student to enroll in the February period; all students who enroll in the February period will be assigned to schools before students who enroll in the second enrollment period.

What is the new process for school assignment?

Under the new process for school assignment, students will be assigned to elementary schools based on the walking distance from their homes. The assignment criteria will take into account the walking distance from each new incoming student's home to each of the six elementary schools as well as the limited capacity of each of the schools. Each enrollment period is a self-contained cycle.

The District will use a well-studied algorithm to optimize school assignment by assigning students to the closest schools that have available room. In a test using this method, 97 percent of new Kindergarteners (*i.e.*, those without older siblings currently attending an elementary school) in the 2011-12 school year would have been assigned to one of their two closest schools as measured by walking distance. The District also tested hypothetical enrollment patterns, which produced corresponding results.

For Families With Children Currently Attending a School in the District

Under the new policy, can my child stay at his/her current school?

Yes. The new school assignment system will affect only students new to the District. Children enrolled in an elementary school in the District will continue to attend their current school, even if their school is outside their former "home" boundary because of an intra-district transfer or for some other reason.

What about my child's younger sibling—can he attend my child's school?

Yes, if the older sibling of the incoming Kindergarten student is currently enrolled at one of the District's six elementary schools. This is referred to as "Sibling Priority." If so, your younger child must be enrolled in February at your older child's school to ensure assignment to that school. If you miss the February enrollment period, or if your older child is in middle school or is older, your younger child will be assigned to an elementary school based on the new assignment criteria. This policy respects the District's commitment to keeping siblings together at the same school, minimizes the stress on families by avoiding multiple drop-offs at different schools, and balances the desire of new incoming families to send their children to their neighborhood schools.

My family is planning to move to another residence within the District. Would my child continue her education at the school that she currently attends? And what about her younger sibling—would he be assigned to my child's current school?

Yes. Your currently enrolled student may continue to attend the same school, even if you move to a new residence. The incoming younger sibling would attend the older sibling's school if the older child were currently enrolled at one of the District's six elementary schools. If you chose, however, you could elect to have your currently enrolled student or the younger sibling assigned to a new school for the next school year based on the new assignment process.

My family is moving out of the District but plans to return in the future. When we return, what school would my child attend?

If your child must withdraw from elementary school—because your company relocates you abroad, for example, or because your child temporarily moves to a relative's home—the District will make its best effort to place your child in the same school when she returns. If there were no longer room at the school, however, your child would be assigned to a school with available space.

How do I enroll my “Sibling Priority” child?

“Sibling Priority” enrollment occurs in February at all of the elementary schools. Only siblings who enroll during February will be guaranteed assignment to the school their Kindergarten – 5th grade siblings currently attend. The elementary schools will provide information on specific dates and times for enrollment at their sites. If you miss the February enrollment period your younger child will be assigned to an elementary school based on the new assignment criteria. Please check the District’s Web site [BRSSD.org] for additional information.

For Families Who Don’t Yet Have Children Attending School

Where will my child attend school?

It is likely that your child will attend one of the elementary schools closest to your home. The District will assign students to the closest schools that have available room. In testing its new assignment process, the District found that 97 percent of current Kindergarteners would have been assigned to one of the two elementary schools closest to their homes.

Can I guarantee that my child would be assigned to a particular school?

No, although under the new assignment process, the closer a student lives to a school, the more likely that it would be that the student would be assigned to that school. The District cannot guarantee that a student would be assigned to a particular school, however. The new assignment process seeks to assign students to schools so that, collectively, all students will travel the shortest distance to school. Some students will be assigned to slightly more distant schools because others would be required to travel longer distances if the students were assigned to their closest schools.

Can I state a preference for my child to attend a particular school?

After consideration, the District decided against a system based on preferences. This District has a long tradition of neighborhood schools. The new school assignment criteria involve walking distance, which preserves the concept of neighborhood schools. A preference-based system, with all schools open to selection by any student, would move the District away from neighborhood-based schools.

How do I enroll my child?

Enrollment begins in February; First Enrollment Period dates and times follow:

February 15 1:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. at Ralston Middle School, 2675 Ralston Avenue, Belmont

February 16 8 a.m. – 4 p.m. at the District Office, 2960 Hallmark Drive, Belmont

February 17 8 a.m. – 4 p.m. at the District Office, 2960 Hallmark Drive, Belmont

February 20-24 Midwinter Break (Schools and District Office closed)

February 27 8 a.m. – 4 p.m. at Nesbit School, 500 Biddulph Way, Belmont

February 28 3 p.m. – 6 p.m. at the District Office, 2960 Hallmark Drive, Belmont

February 29 8 a.m. – 4 p.m. at the District Office, 2960 Hallmark Drive, Belmont

Because school assignment will be based on the distance from students’ residences to schools, there is no need to be first in line. All new students enrolled during the First Enrollment Period will be assigned to

schools during the initial school assignment algorithm run and will be notified of school assignment by April 1, 2012.

Enrollment during the Second (March 1, 2012 – June 8, 2012) and the Third (June 11, 2012 – First Day of School) Enrollment Periods will take place at the District Office, 2960 Hallmark Drive, Belmont.

Please call 650-637-4800, extension 1013 if you have questions or wish to schedule an appointment. Additional information will be posted on the District's Web site [\[link\]](#).

Can you provide more details about the assignment algorithm?

The school assignment algorithm developed by the District is based on a linear optimization (also known as linear programming) function known as “minimum-cost flow” formula [\[link to Wikipedia\]](#).

Companies use similar linear optimization functions to make important business decisions. For example, airlines use a linear optimization function to determine flight routes that are most direct and minimize fuel costs, and shipping companies use a similar method to move packages from warehouses to stores to customers most efficiently.

In this case, the District will use a linear optimization method to assign incoming students to schools close to their homes and within the limits of the enrollment capacity at each school. The assignment algorithm will allow the District to find the “optimal” solution to minimize the total distance travelled by all students to their schools. One way to think about the District's goal is to imagine a pedometer attached to every student for one morning's walk to school; the optimal assignment would minimize the sum of the distances of all students' walks to their schools. Instead of pedometers, however, the walking distance for all students will be determined by querying the same Web-based mapping service, such as Google Maps.

As enrollment approaches the total capacity at the District's schools, the optimal assignment likely will not place every student at the closest school. In periods of high enrollment, some students will be assigned to schools that are slightly farther from their homes. An alternative assignment would not be “optimal” because it would require other students to travel a further distance, increasing the total distance traveled by all students. In periods of low enrollment, however, an optimal assignment would place students at their closest schools.

At the beginning of the process, the District will determine the capacity at each of the six elementary schools by grade. For example, each school is expected to have enough classroom space to accommodate 75 Kindergarteners (except Cipriani Elementary, which is expected to have space for 50 Kindergarteners). As part of the capacity assessment, the District will determine the number of incoming siblings of older students, which will reduce each school's capacity for new students. Sandpiper Elementary, for example, might have 15 incoming Kindergarteners who are the younger siblings of currently enrolled students; the 15 siblings would reduce Sandpiper's Kindergarten capacity from 75 to 60. In this way, younger siblings of currently enrolled students are given priority for enrollment.

After each school's capacity is determined, the District will assign all of the students who enroll in the month of February, the first enrollment period. Families will be notified of the assignment by April 1, 2012. Following the assignment from the first enrollment period, the District will assess each school's capacity for assignment in the second enrollment period, from March 1, 2012 through the end of the school year. For example, all of the available capacity might be filled at Cipriani Elementary after the first enrollment period, but there might be 15 spaces available at Fox Elementary, 12 at Central Elementary, and so on. These spaces would be filled with students who enroll in the second enrollment period. Similarly, school capacity would be assessed in advance of the third enrollment period from the end of school year through shortly before the next school year begins in August.

What if there are openings at the school closest to my family when the school year begins but my child was assigned to a school farther away from our home?

It is possible that openings will occur at the start of the school year. The District recognizes that some families move away before school begins or choose to enroll their children in schools outside the District. If this occurs, there may be openings for students who were assigned to more distant schools during the assignment process. The District plans to fill the openings during the week that school begins in August. Openings will be filled based solely on walking distance from the schools, with the closest students who were assigned to more distant schools being given the first opportunity to fill the openings. Priority will be given to students enrolled during the First Enrollment Period.

Background

Why did the District undertake to change the process for student enrollment and school assignment?

As many of you know, new families with young children have been moving to Belmont and Redwood Shores in the past several years to take advantage of job opportunities, affordable housing, and high-performing schools. As a result, enrollment in the District's six elementary schools and its middle school has been steadily rising. The following table shows the rise in enrollment: [table showing enrollment beginning in 2006 in elementary and middle schools].

School Year	Elementary Enrollment	Ralston Middle School Enrollment	Total Enrollment
2005-2006	1,648	773	2,421
2006-2007	1,661	800	2,461
2007-2008	1,832	761	2,593
2008-2009	1,942	801	2,743
2009-2010	2,111	833	2,944
2010-2011	2,232	908	3,140
November 2011	2,384	1,003	3,387
Total increase from 2005 to 2011	+736	+230	+966
2012-2013 [projected]	2,443	1,049	3,492
2016-2017 [projected]	2,347	1,278	3,625

How has rising enrollment affected the District's schools?

While the District is proud of the vote of confidence in its schools and pleased to accommodate all students, the increased number of students has created certain stresses on its existing facilities and produced imbalances in the enrollment across the elementary schools. For example, Cipriani Elementary, the smallest school in the District, was built to accommodate approximately 300 students. In the 2011-12 school year, Cipriani enrolled nearly 400 students, approximately one-third more than its capacity. The school accommodated the extra students only by converting the teacher staff room and its dedicated science room into permanent classrooms.

What has the District done to accommodate rising enrollment?

The District pursued a variety of strategies to address this growth over the past several years, including the following:

- In 2008, the Redwood Shores community approved the District's proposal to build a new elementary school, which opened in the fall of 2010. Because of continued growth in Redwood Shores, the District secured additional funds from the State of California to build additional classrooms at the new Redwood Shores Elementary School in the summer of 2012.
- Beginning in 2009, the District's elementary schools began two shifts of Kindergarten classes, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, which allowed the schools to enroll more Kindergarteners with the same number of classrooms.
- Beginning in 2010, with the assistance of the District's teachers, the maximum number of students in each Kindergarten to third grade classroom was increased from 20 to 25, allowing the District to fit more students into existing classrooms.
- In November 2010, voters approved the sale of approximately \$35 million in school bonds. The District is using the proceeds of the bond sales to update and modernize school facilities, but also build additional classrooms at Ralston Middle School and the elementary schools.

Kindergarten Enrollment Caps

School	2012 – 2013	2013 – 2014	2014 – 2015
Central	63	62	75
Cipriani	50	50	50
Fox	75	75	75
Nesbit*	75	75	75
Redwood Shores	75	75	75
Sandpiper	75	75	75

*Potential Capacity up to 87

Until now, how has the District assigned students to schools?

The District has used geographic boundaries to assign students to each of the six elementary schools. While this system worked well and fostered a sense of “neighborhood schools,” the inflexibility of the boundary system revealed imbalances in enrollment across the District as enrollment rose. For example, as discussed above, Cipriani Elementary became over-enrolled, as did Central Elementary, while Nesbit Elementary’s small boundary caused it to be under-enrolled. To address the imbalances, the District was required to place some students at schools with available classrooms outside their “home” boundary school. The first-come, first-served enrollment process, along with the uncertainty of school assignment, led some families to camp out overnight on school grounds in an attempt to assure themselves that their children would be enrolled at their neighborhood schools.

What alternatives for school assignment did the District consider?

In the spring of 2011, the Board of Trustees engaged the community in a process to consider student enrollment and assignment. In considering various alternatives over several months, the Board decided not to re-draw the school boundaries or to implement a new system based on random lottery. The Board decided to eliminate fixed geographic boundaries for school assignment and implement a new and more flexible system designed to assign as many students as possible to the schools closest to their homes.