



# COMMUNITY EDUCATION COUNCIL DISTRICT 3

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### **Resolution on Family Welcome Center Accountability and School Waiting Lists**

*(Approved at the June 16, 2021 Calendar Meeting by the unanimous vote of all Council Members present (11): Kristin Berger, Lisa Byrd, Naveed Hasan, Lucas Liu, Mike McCarthy, Dennis Morgan, Sharmilee Ramudit, Deirdre Garret Scott, Assietou Sow, Eric Wright)*

The Family Welcome Center (FWC) plays a vital role in assisting families through the school placement process. For at least the past six years, this council has remained concerned about the opaque manner in which the Family Welcome Center operates.

**Whereas**, there is no clear line of responsibility nor communication between the FWC, the district office and the Community Education Council.

**Whereas**, it is unclear who the Family Welcome Center reports to and how they are held accountable and, as one administrator put it, “it is like the wild west” at the FWC.

**Whereas**, the FWC method of determining school matches continues to be unclear and confuses both administrators and families:

- Some schools seem to receive a disproportionate number of high needs students after the school year has begun.
- It is unclear how the FWC determines what schools have seats available.
- The process for determining an appropriate match is not specified.
- All students have a right to appropriate services; however, does the FWC take into consideration the financial costs to a school if they are forced to open an additional section after the start of the school year?
- CEC 3 remains concerned that the Family Welcome Center directs students toward schools of the Family Welcome Centers choosing rather than listening to family preferences.

#### **Waitlists**

The Admissions system in the DOE has undergone a number of significant changes over the last two years. One of which is the introduction of universal opt-out waitlists, with this change we have seen a significant increase in the number of students on the waitlists.

**Whereas**, waitlists are closing in the middle of August for the September 2021 intake and this early date means that in practice the waitlists close before the period that sees the most movement in school enrollment.

**Whereas**, we know from past years that the period of time with the greatest fluctuation in enrollment is Mid August- mid September. Families who will not be attending a DOE school are not incentivized to inform the school placement that they are declining. Reasonably, a student remains enrolled in the NYC Department of Education system until they have received confirmation that a student is enrolled elsewhere. This relies on families being proactive to send official notice from their new school to the DOE in order to fully decline a

seat. As the process to officially decline all DOE offers is laborious and relies on families to be proactive, students often do not come off their DOE school enrollment list until late August or into September.

Additionally, it is unclear if the waitlist closes before promotion has been established for students attending mandated summer school.

**Whereas**, The Family Welcome Center administrates school matches for students after the waitlists close. It appears that students who were on the waitlist do not have the option of using the FWC or any other mechanism to continue to wait for a spot to open; however families moving into the system after waitlists have closed will have the ability to be placed in schools with open seats through the FWC. It is important that families who have newly moved into the DOE system are not privileged over the families who have been waiting and applied earlier in the year.

**Whereas**, families who did not receive a match to a school listed on their application in either the Middle or High School application process remain an area of great concern. The waitlists were redesigned as *opt-out* to ensure that more families participate in the process. We applaud that effort however students who did not find a seat at any of the 12 choices (less for middle school) which they listed are truly left at a disadvantage and the DOE must work with those families to find them a satisfactory school placement. As the waitlists are currently opt-out, many families remain on waitlists for seats they no longer wish to accept.

**THEREFORE be it resolved**, all parties shall increase accountability, oversight and transparency of the activities of the Family Welcome Center.

**Be it further resolved**, that each Community School District will have its own Family Welcome Center reporting directly to the district superintendent. At the district level the FWC will be in greater communication with district schools and families.

**Be it further resolved**, that the FWC must educate the community on their process and priorities for matching students and they must post these processes in an accessible manner for families to read.

**Be it further resolved**, that the Middle and High School waitlist be extended to accommodate the period with the greatest changes in enrollment.

**Be it further resolved**, that the DOE provide an *opt-in* period for a round two waitlist for families who have not received a satisfactory match and are willing to still participate on a waitlist up until the day of school opening.