

BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

EXPANDING GREAT OPTIONS 2012-13: HIGHER QUALITY OPTIONS FOR MORE STUDENTS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

What is Expanding Great Options?

Expanding Great Options is the process Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools) uses to review and manage its portfolio of schools. Through Expanding Great Options, the district conducts a rigorous review of its schools and programs in an effort to ensure that all students have access to options that meet their interests and needs.

How does a school get identified for recommendations under Expanding Great Options?

The process starts with all schools undergoing a review process that considers numerous factors: academic performance as well as enrollment trends, facilities needs, the range of options for families in a given geographic area and opportunities for new school creation. Based on this analysis, City Schools determines which schools are meeting the needs of students and their families and which schools are not, and what actions it can take to provide a higher-quality academic experience for students in low-performing schools.

What recommendations are being proposed for 2012-13?

For 2012-13, City Schools is proposing closing one low-performing high school; reconfiguring the grades at three elementary/middle schools to meet the needs of students and the projected needs of surrounding communities; developing a model Advanced Academic program for the middle grades; and increasing the enrollment caps at six high-performing charter schools to allow them to serve more students.

Why is the district recommending changing the grade configuration at some schools from pre-k-8 to pre-k-5?

During its annual school review process this fall, City Schools found that in three elementary/middle schools there were higher enrollment—and in some cases achievement—levels in the elementary grades than in the middle grades. Based on an analysis of surrounding middle grades programs and projected enrollments trends for elementary seats in those communities, City Schools saw this as an opportunity to make grade configuration changes that would allow the schools to focus on educating younger students and expanding their capacity to do so. It would also allow middle grades students at these three schools to take advantage of other, higher-quality middle grades programs that better serve their needs and interests.

Didn't several schools change from pre-k-5 to pre-k-8 a few years ago? Is the district reversing its position on k-8?

No, the district is not reversing its position on the k-8 model. Rather, City Schools is constantly assessing its portfolio of schools to make sure schools are meeting their communities' needs and interests.

Why do certain charter schools and Transformation Schools get to increase their enrollment caps? How will this affect traditional schools?

City Schools is recommending an increase in the enrollment caps of four high-performing charter schools and Transformation Schools as part of its effort to create more and higher quality school options for students. This will add 291 high-quality seats to the district's current portfolio and move the district closer to ensuring that all students have access to quality schools. City Schools is a district of choice where students can choose their schools, so traditional schools will not be adversely affected by the proposed enrollment cap increase if they are meeting the needs and interests of their students and families.

I have children in both elementary and middle grades at the same school. With these recommendations, they will have to attend different schools. Will I get help with transportation?

City Schools' transportation policy applies to all students, including those at schools affected by Expanding Great Options recommendations. Elementary grades students who live one mile or more from their school receive bus transportation; middle and high school students who live 1.5 miles or more from their school receive MTA bus tickets. Students who are experiencing homelessness may also receive transportation assistance; students with disabilities will receive transportation assistance as stated on their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

Why do certain charter schools and Transformation Schools get to add new grades?

New schools often open on a staggered basis, with a few grades at first and the addition of another grade each year until they reach their full grade span. For example, a new combined middle-high school might open with just 6th grade, and then add a grade each year until it serves students in grades 6 through 12. The schools adding new grades for 2012-13 are doing so to fulfill enrollment plans and contracts between the district and the school operators that were approved in prior years.

Are charter schools and Transformation Schools part of the Expanding Great Options evaluation process? If not, why?

Charter schools and Transformation Schools currently have a separate review that is part of their contract renewal process. As part of its 2012-13 Expanding Great Options work, City Schools is developing a comprehensive, consistent and rigorous process for evaluating Transformation Schools and charter schools when their contracts are up for renewal to ensure that those schools offer a quality academic option to the students and families they serve. As a first step in this direction, the district is postponing the renewal of four charter schools this year until 2012-13, when another 21 charter schools come up for review and when it will have a new process for considering charter renewals in place. The four schools are Maryland Academy of Technology and Health Sciences, ConneXions Community Leadership Academy, Renaissance Academy and Baltimore Talent Development High School.

Is there an opportunity for community input before final decisions are made?

Throughout the months of February and March, school-based parent, staff and community meetings are being held at each of the schools directly affected by this year's Expanding Great

Options recommendations. In addition, City Schools and the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners will hold state-mandated public hearings for the school recommended for closure on Tuesday, March 6, and Saturday, March 10. At that time, the public can comment on all the recommendations being presented to the Board. In addition, the Board is accepting written comment or data until 5 p.m. on March 15, 2012. In order for the Board legally to accept your written testimony, you must identify yourself fully. Please send your comments to the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners, 200 E. North Ave., Room 406, Baltimore, MD 21202, or email your comments to expandinggreatoption@bcps.k12.md.us.

How will the community know when it can participate in the Expanding Great Options process?

City Schools follows standard procedures required by COMAR (Code of Maryland Regulations) which mandate that a school district proposing a school closure must post the information in at least two local newspapers at least two weeks prior to any scheduled hearings. In addition, City Schools backpacks information home to the families of the schools affected, places information on district and school websites and shares information with local media.

Who makes the final decision on the Expanding Great Options recommendations? When?

The Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners will make the final decision on the recommendations. Board members are expected to vote on the proposed school closure and other recommendations at their meeting on Tuesday, March 27, beginning at 6 p.m.

What recourse do I have if I disagree with the Board's final decisions?

If you do not agree with the Board's final decisions, you can appeal to the Maryland State Board of Education. You have 30 days to appeal, following the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners' written decision.

Where can I get additional information about Expanding Great Options?

For more information on City Schools' Expanding Great Options work and process, please visit www.baltimorecityschools.org or call the Office of Engagement at 410-545-1870.