



Manatee County's School Choice Program 2011/12



We believe that School Choice in Manatee County plays a vital role in accomplishing the district's *EdVantage* strategic mission: Inspire our students with a passion for learning, empowered to pursue their dreams confidently and creatively while contributing to our community, nation, and world.

Historical Overview of the School Choice Program

Manatee County's Choice Program was first implemented during the 1998/99 school year at the high school level. Over the next two years, the Choice Program was expanded to include the middle and elementary school levels.

During 1997, a massive communication campaign was conducted through town meetings, the media and through a district-wide committee of community leaders. This committee designed the original School Choice Open Enrollment Program. This plan called for the implementation of School Choice at the high school level beginning in the 1998/99 school year.

For the 1999/2000 school year, the Choice Program was expanded to include the middle school level. Transportation was provided for the first time to middle school students requesting a school outside their attendance zone, but within their designated East or West Region.

The expansion of Choice at the elementary level for the 2000/2001 school year piloted three major initiatives.

- The Choice process was used to populate the district's first three magnet schools.
- Transportation was provided to elementary students seeking choice within a designated Cluster Area to reduce mobility rates.
- The district's first Parent Information Center opened which provided registration and School Choice information.

As a result of Manatee County being awarded the Magnet School Assistance Program (MSAP) grant, Choice options during the 2001/2002 school year increased as the number of magnet schools increased from three to ten. Magnets were incorporated into the Choice program as one of many choices available to students. Transportation was also expanded to include all four elementary cluster areas and both middle school regions.

With each successive year of growth in Manatee County, modifications to the Choice Program have been made and new features added. Grant funds awarded by the State of Florida's Department of Education totaling over two million dollars provided the funding for this initiative through the 2007/08 school year.

Choice as the Vehicle

Manatee County's School Choice plan provides all students the opportunity to apply for choice to district schools that meet their educational goals and needs. Parents have the option to select from forty-one traditional public elementary, middle and high schools; ten magnet schools; numerous high school academies and alternative programs, a Tech Prep program; ten charter schools; home-education programs; and over thirty private schools. This public school parental choice plan allows Manatee County to make student assignments using parent's indicated preferential school choice as a significant factor.

- ***The Application Process***

The district's plan includes an ***Open Enrollment Application Period***, a ***Targeted Population Period***, and a ***Special Choice Period***.

The **General Application Period** is open to all current Kindergarten through 9th grade students. At the High School level only incoming 9th and 10th grade students or students applying to attend the IB program, an academy or special academic program may apply for Choice. Students who wish to remain at their zoned school are not required to complete an application.

The **Targeted Population Period** is open to specially targeted population groups who were under-represented in the General Application Period. This period is not advertised publicly, but is extended to only those special groups designated as that period approaches. The "targeted groups" are determined by specific principal requests, (ie, a school initiating a new academy).

The **Special Choice Period** is limited to students who are made eligible for choice under state and federal mandates (NCLB, Scholarships Programs, etc.).

- ***Choice Options***

During the Open Enrollment Application Period, usually held during the months of January/February, parents may select up to four schools and rank them in order of preference. The application must be returned to the Parent Information Center, either in person or by mail. Completing an application does not guarantee assignment to the choice school. Students not completing an application are assigned to their designated attendance boundary area as determined by the enrolling parent/guardian's address.

The Targeted Population Period is held to address specific goals of the district and recruitment to attractor programs such as academies and magnet schools.

The dates and options for the Special Choice Period are determined by state and federal guidelines.

- ***Guarantees***

The Choice plan provides guarantees for placement of siblings within the same school and placement of employee's children at the parent's work site. Although these students are guaranteed their Choice, they must apply for during the General Application Period.

- ***Choice Procedures***

The district uses a computer software program, "GeoChoice" to process School Choice applications. This program applies race-neutral weighted factors to applications. Students are approved to attend schools based on a comparison to a District Model Community School. The model school reflects a percentage of each of the race-neutral factors that is consistent with the district-wide percentage on that factor.

- ***Race-Neutral Factors***

One of the goals of the School Choice program is to create a student population at every district school that reflects the diversity, based on these factors, of the county overall. This goal is based on research that has shown that students show greater educational success, as well as greater success in future careers, when they have been educated in an environment that reflects the diversity of the population with which they may later work.

To that end, an imaginary model is created, the *Manatee County School Board (MCSB) Community Elementary School*. The population of this school reflects the county-wide average of four race-neutral factors: Exceptional Student Education students (ESE) *gifted*, ESE *non-gifted*, students of *low socio-economic status*, and students with *limited English proficiency*. This MCSB Community Elementary School is the diversity model against which every elementary school in the district is measured. Similarly, a model has been created for the middle schools.

The district utilizes these four race-neutral factors plus a student's proximity to their Choice School in determining approval for School Choice. The capacity of the school requested is also considered.

- ***Appeal Process***

Students who are denied their choice may appeal to a Review Committee which consists of district level administrators. Each appeal is considered individually.

- ***Transportation Zones***

The district is geographically divided into five elementary clusters and three middle school regions. Transportation is provided at the elementary level within clusters and at the middle school level within regions, except for students living in designated remote areas. Transportation is not provided for High School students receiving School Choice, except for the International Baccalaureate Program or other programs as approved by the Superintendent.

- ***Parental Involvement/Awareness***

A centrally-located Parent Information Center (PIC) located at 234 Manatee Avenue East in Bradenton provides the community with information on the educational options available for students living in Manatee County. This center offers information on public, magnet, charter, and private schools, as well as information on home-education. Employees from the Parent Information Center work collaboratively with local newspapers and broadcast media while utilizing other effective communication avenues to inform parents of the opportunities available. The Parent Information Center also assists parents with registration, guardianships, and other details necessary for enrollment in school.

In addition to the PIC, each year a Choice Information Guide is available, local news media publicize the program, and information and forms are available on the district's internet Website at www.manateeschools.net.

- ***Special School Choice Period***

This Choice Period provides a process to those students who are eligible for choice programs under state and federal law. Examples: State legislation pertaining to "failing" schools, and Federal legislation from the No Child Left Behind Act pertaining to Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

Summary:

The following flow chart reflects the application and selection process.

MANATEE COUNTY SCHOOL CHOICE APPLICATION/SELECTION PROCESS

SCHOOL CHOICE PERIOD
School Choice Application Period
(During January and February)
Parents Submit Choice Applications
Controlled Open Enrollment
AYP Early Notification

Student data entered into Database
(Name, School Choices, Zoned School,
ESE Status, Socio-Economic Status,
Limited English Status, etc.)

Magnet & feeder schools are given data related to the composition of applicant pool to better focus recruitment efforts on groups that are under-represented before Targeted Application Period.

At close of School Choice period, a computer report is generated, detailing the characteristics of the applicant pool for each school, showing how closely the race neutral factors come to attaining individual school model goals. Under-represented groups are identified as defined by characteristics cited above.

District recruitment team reviews applicant pool analysis and focuses district-wide recruitment efforts on under-represented groups to increase applications from these groups for the Targeted Application Period.

Strategies are designed by each school recruitment team and implemented to increase applications from these under-represented groups prior to Targeted Application Period.

Applicants who have the needed characteristics for the school chosen are approved. Those denied may appeal the decision if circumstances warrant.

District-wide advertising and intensive efforts for recruitment conducted prior to Targeted Application Period.

Committee reviews all appeals. Letters of notification are sent to parents.

TARGETED APPLICATION PERIOD
(Includes under-represented populations)

The same cycle of applicant pool analysis occurs again. Every applicant receives weighted points for every characteristic needed at the Choice school.

Targeted Results: Students are assigned to remaining slots at requested schools. All remaining applicants not meeting school criteria receive letters denying their Choice.

SPECIAL CHOICE PERIOD
(Includes No Child Left Behind and State Choice Mandates)