

School Choice Discussion

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Introduction

Carlisle Public School's (CPS) stated goal for participating in the School Choice program is to **increase socioeconomic and racial diversity¹ in the Carlisle Public Schools**. The questions regarding and objections to implementing School Choice fall into two categories: A. Does School Choice increase socioeconomic and racial diversity in our schools? and B. What are the financial implications of participating in School Choice?

Several discussions have taken place regarding School Choice both at School Committee meetings and during meetings of the Visioning Committee. Below is a discussion that needs to take place publicly and in a data-based manner rooted in the legislative framework in order to address the two questions noted above.

A. Does participation in School Choice increase diversity in our school?

Statement 1

Some members of the School Committee stated that because our neighboring towns are similarly affluent, CPS will not succeed in increasing diversity by participating in School Choice.

Discussion 1

- a. Indeed, many of the surrounding towns are similarly affluent. Consequently, many of the surrounding towns operate schools that provide high quality education to their student population. Just like it is not necessary for Carlisle parents to send their children to a neighboring town to receive a high quality education, it is not necessary for parents from these neighboring towns to send their students to Carlisle. Consequently, the assumption that parents with similarly high socioeconomic status will not apply for School Choice in Carlisle is a valid assumption. More details on the number of students neighboring towns receive and send through school choice (FY'19 data) can be found later in this document in Section C. Background Information.

Note: In statistical terms, this particular situation is not a case of random assignment but of self-selection.

- b. There are neighboring towns and cities, such as Billerica and Lowell (10-20-minute drive) that have a different socioeconomic and racial fabric. We can expect that most applications will be from this type of community. As the graphs provided in Section C show, that is indeed the case: Lowell and Billerica have high numbers of students who leave their home districts through the school choice program. Therefore, we can state that it is likely that school choice will allow the Carlisle Public Schools to accomplish its goal of increasing diversity in Carlisle.
- c. Parents from towns located far from Carlisle may enroll their children in the Carlisle Public School. In fact a study from the University of Washington surveying hundreds of parents with a household income lower than \$75,000 (the majority of respondents had a household income lower than \$55,000), finds that 76% of parents are "choosers" in the sense that they chose to send their children to a school outside their neighborhood or considered sending them to a school outside of their neighborhood². What we are attempting to do in Carlisle is give other parents and their children a choice, not make it for them.

B. What are the financial implications of participating in School Choice?

Statement 1

Carlisle Public School will receive from sending districts \$5,000 in tuition for each school-choice student.

¹ Racial segregation is a corollary of socioeconomic segregation (Holland, 1993, Kahlenberg, 2012)

Holly Holland, "Schools Worried by Clusters of Poverty," *Louisville Courier Journal*, December 11, 1993.

Richard D. Kahlenberg, "Turnaround Schools and Charter Schools That Work: Moving Beyond Separate but Equal," in *The Future of School Integration: Socioeconomic Diversity as an Education Reform Strategy*, ed. Richard D. Kahlenberg (New York: Century Foundation, 2012), 283–308.

² Paul Teske, Jody Fitzpatrick, and Tracey O'Brien, *Drivers of Choice: Parents, Transportation, and School Choice*, Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington, July 2009; retrieved April 11, 2020 8am

Discussion 1

In accordance with [MGL c. 76, §12B](#), “For each student enrolling in a receiving district, there shall be a school choice tuition amount”. Currently, that amount is \$5,000/student. There is ongoing discussion in the educational and policy circles³, public arena, and the legislature regarding an increase in the school choice tuition amount⁴.

Statement 2

Parents are responsible for transportation for school-choice students and consequently, CPS will not incur transportation costs for school-choice students.

Discussion 2

Correct.

Statement 3

Receiving districts (CPS) are not responsible for special education costs. Sending districts are responsible for special education costs.

Discussion 3

[MGL c. 76, §12B](#) states: “For each student enrolling in a receiving district, there shall be a school choice tuition amount. Said tuition amount shall be equal to seventy-five percent of the actual per pupil spending amount in the receiving district for such education as is required by such non-resident student, but not more than five thousand dollars; **provided, however, that for special education students whose tuition amount shall remain the expense per student for such type of education as is required by such non-resident student.**”

This means that special education costs are paid for by the sending district. The sending district will use the circuit breaker system. The receiving district (CPS) does not need to cover the special education costs and will not have to go through circuit breaker.

The law is also referenced in Massachusetts Department of Education’s (DESE) [FY19 Final School Choice Tuition](#) communication, dated June 2019, which states: “In addition, **the actual special education cost for each pupil with an individualized education plan is paid in full by the sending district.** That amount is determined using the same rate methodology for specific services as is used in the special education circuit breaker program.” Please note again that **it is the sending district’s responsibility to work within the circuit breaker, not the receiving district’s responsibility.**

This legislative provision is also referenced in policy papers⁵.

Statement 4

Should graduates of CPS decide to apply through school choice to the Concord-Carlisle Regional High School, CPS will not incur additional costs.

Discussion 4

New regulation (as of FY’20) does not allow for automatic transfer of school-choice students from a receiving District (i.e., CPS) to a Regional High School (i.e., Concord-Carlisle Regional High School CCRHS)⁶.

Moreover, at this time CCRHS does not have a school-choice program, very likely because a METCO program

³ Roger Hatch, *Inter-district School Choice in Massachusetts*, Pioneer Institute, May 2018

⁴ The Salem News, [Bill Would Raise School Choice Fee](#), April 9, 2019; retrieved April 11, 2020 7am

⁵ “The biggest concern raised by school committees and superintendents is that an applicant will end up on a costly individualized education plan (IEP). If a non-resident student needs special education services, there should be an IEP meeting that includes a representative from the former district (although that person does not have final say on the ultimate plan). The costs of that plan are added to the student’s \$5,000 annual tuition, so the sending district ultimately bears the expense. Even if the IEP requires placement at a private special education school or collaborative, the sending district bears the entire cost. Once this process is fully understood, school committees and superintendents’ concerns about special education choice students are usually put to rest”

Roger Hatch, *Inter-district School Choice in Massachusetts*, Pioneer Institute, May 2018

⁶ Please see “School Choice FAQs” document distributed by Mr. O’Shea – Question 34.

is being implemented in CCRHS. Consequently, CPS will not have any responsibility, financial or otherwise for school-choice students who graduate from CPS.

A discussion regarding possible fiscal responsibility of the Town of Carlisle, should any CPS school-choice student attend CCRHS through school-choice in the future, ensued during the School Committee meeting on April 10, 2020⁷. A statement was made that CPS would be responsible for tuition to CCRHS. This statement is not correct. The scenario under which a receiving district is responsible for school tuition for school-choice students applies to receiving districts that tuition out students (FAQ, Question 35). CPS is not a district that tuitions out students, it is a district that sends students to a Regional High School (CCRHS), although the Town of Carlisle contributes financially to CCHRS as agreed in the apportionment of expenses as per [MGL c. 71, §16B](#).

Given the fact that the Town of Carlisle is a member in a Regional School District (CCRHS), it is Question 34 and not Question 35 in the School Choice FAQ's that applies to CPS and the Town of Carlisle⁸. Consequently, the Town of Carlisle will not have financial responsibilities for school choice students that graduate from CPS.

Statement 5

This is a question that was posed on email (on 4/12/20) after the original document was emailed to the Visioning Committee (on 4/10/20). It is a pertinent question and as such it is added to the discussion.

"It should also be noted that Concord and Bedford embrace the METCO Program as well at the k thru 8 levels. I do not know whether there is enough State funding to support METCO kids at the \$5k level as is the care with Choice, but it should be clear that adding another 100 kids from other districts via either or both programs would be pretty much of a wash in terms of additional costs to Carlisle. We seem to wish to contain the discussion to "diversity" alone without addressing the elephant in the room that is "It costs \$20k per student in Carlisle!" while in fact, the marginal cost of adding 80 to 100 students over 9 grade levels and 3 classrooms per grade level would likely be covered by the \$400k to \$500k in "tuitions" for that many students. Will METCO be discussed in earnest as well?"

Discussion

"Thank you for your important input. Indeed, although the primary goal of considering the school choice program is increasing diversity in the Carlisle Public School, the fiscal implications of the program are relevant and have been considered and discussed in detail as illustrated in the document I shared. Mea culpa, I should have added to the document information related to your note. I will do so in this email and I will add your point to the document, which I am sharing publicly as an "edit" google doc here.

The METCO program is more complex and at this point it does not appear that CPS is prepared to tackle that option (logistically, administratively, or fiscally) although it may be in the future. In many ways, including fiscally, the legislative framework is different for the METCO program and it is not as straightforward as the clear-cut \$5,000 tuition associated with the school choice program. It is my understanding that it takes several years to plan METCO's implementation. Consequently, I suggest that we continue to discuss in detail the fiscal implications of school choice and have a similar discussion on METCO if and when CPS considers it.

One of the great advantages of the school choice program is that it is flexible and it allows school districts to add (or not add) any number of students to any grade in such a manner that no additional cost would be

⁷ Please see minute [CPS School Committee meeting recording](#), at approximate time 1:23:35

⁸ The example provided under Question 34 in the "School Choice FAQs" document, and which applies to the Town of Carlisle as a member of a Regional School District, is: "Student 1 lives in District A and, beginning in fiscal year 2020, attends school in District B through school choice. District B is a municipal school district and offers grades K-8. Municipality B, the municipality in which District B is located, is a member of a regional school district, District C, for grades 9-12. Student 1 does not have an automatic right to attend high school in District C. Student 1, however, may be able to attend high school in District C if District C participates in school choice and has seats available."

incurred by the receiving district(s). In fact, educational policy scholars recommend that the legislature (and by extension future legislation) recognizes that school choice is a budget tool. Roger Hatch⁹ of the Pioneer Institute states: "Related to the concept of choice as a budget tool is the fact that some smaller districts, especially at the elementary level, use the program to keep their local schools open". Financial benefit to the receiving district is one of the reasons 188 school districts in Massachusetts participated in the school choice program in FY'19.

In Carlisle, we currently have several grade levels that can add a small number of students next year (FY'21) without adding additional expenses to the budget while tapping into this new revenue source. I am pasting here an example that can be found in the presentation that Mr. O'Shea made to the School Committee on 12/11/19 and again on 4/10/20.

"Scenario A

- Enrollment in Grade 7 for 2020-2021 looks to be 68 students
- Average class size would be 17 students
- We identify 8 school choice spots
- Average class size would increase to 19 students
- No increase in faculty necessary
- District would receive \$40,000, not including any special education costs, in FY21 and then again in FY22."

Your point is appreciated and well taken and I would take the liberty of noting that the discussion is not contained to "diversity" alone at the expense of detailed conversations on fiscal matters. The conclusion of these conversations regarding school choice and fiscal considerations is summarized in section "B. What are the financial implications of participating in school choice?" of the shared document. And this conclusion is that, when enrollment in school choice is done in a deliberate manner, CPS will not only benefit from adding a more diverse population to its student body but it will also benefit financially. Given the financial pressures that CPS is facing, I propose that implementing school choice in CPS is a win-win-win situation. The school choice students win by having the privilege of being taught by our amazing teachers, CPS current students win by having the privilege of learning alongside peers with a different socioeconomic background, and CPS wins by adding some dollars to its coffers."

⁹ Roger Hatch, *Inter-district School Choice in Massachusetts*, Pioneer Institute, May 2018

C. Background Information

The inter-district school choice program allows a parent to enroll his or her child in a school district that is not the child's home district. Because of space limitations, not all school districts accept out-of-district students under this program. Every year the school committee in each school district decides whether it will accept new enrollments under this program and, if so, in what grades. The [school district profiles](#) page on the Department's website shows, for each district, whether they are accepting school choice students¹⁰.

In FY'17 60% of Massachusetts school district participated in school choice. Over 16,000 students enrolled in a school-choice program, representing 1.71% of the student population in Massachusetts. The cap for participation in the school choice program is set at 2% of the student population. There is discussion in policy and legislative circles regarding raising the cap¹¹.

A [district summary](#)  workbook can be found on DESE's School Finance webpage, which lists all receiving and sending districts' full-time equivalent pupils and tuition amounts for the year as of June 2019. There were 188 receiving districts and 312 sending districts. There were 17,327 full-time equivalent pupils participating, with total tuition amounting to \$112,925,017. After incorporating \$36,979 in adjustments to FY18 tuition, the net tuition statewide is \$112,888,038¹².

The following graphs from DESE's [district summary](#)  workbook present, in town alphabetical order, the number of students sent and received through school choice since FY'10 by neighboring towns. The associated tables present the number of school-choice student FTE's sent and received in FY'19. There are some small discrepancies between the FY'19 graphs and the numbers in the tables. Consequently, both the tables and the graphs should be used to understand trends rather than be used for further analysis.

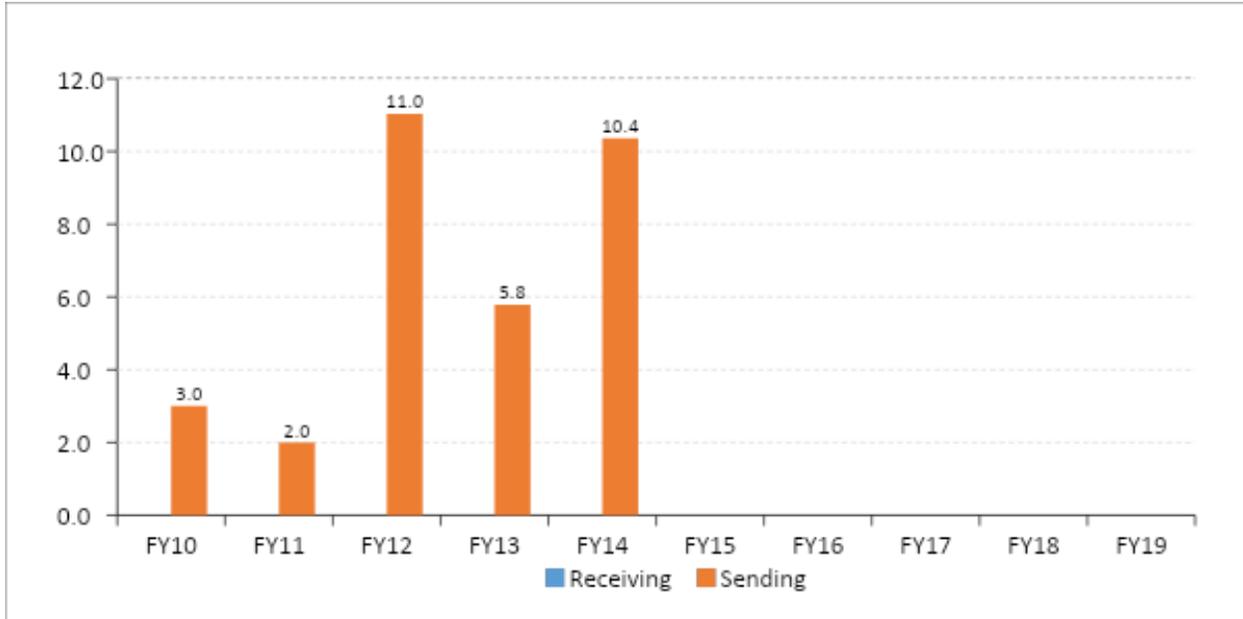
¹⁰ [Choosing a School: A Parent's Guide to Educational Choices in Massachusetts](#)

¹¹ Roger Hatch, *Inter-district School Choice in Massachusetts*, Pioneer Institute, May 2018

¹² [FY19 Final School Choice Tuition](#)

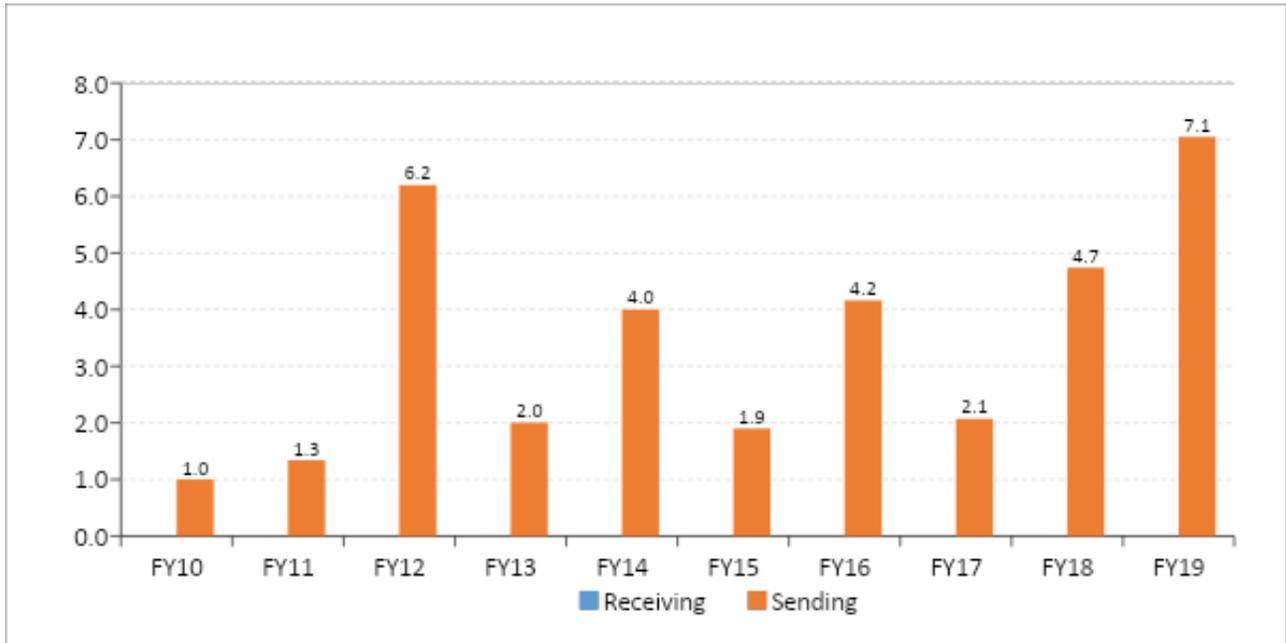
Graphs of Neighboring Towns School Choice Send-Receive Status

Acton



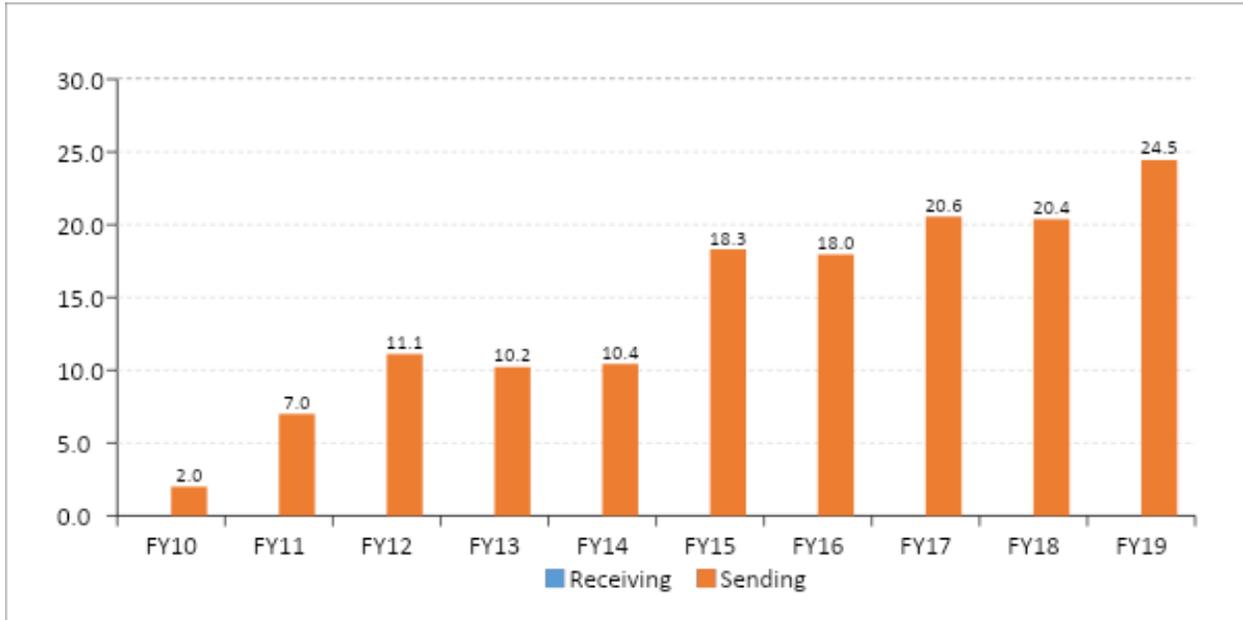
Acton FY'19	
Receiving From	Sending to
None	None

Bedford



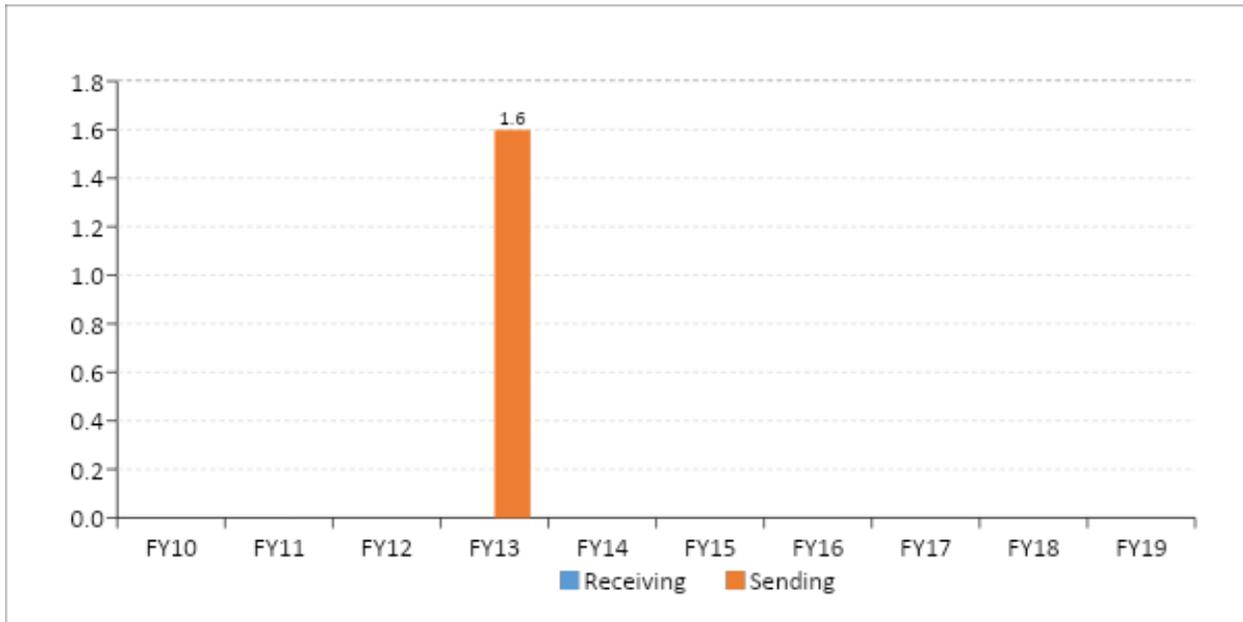
Bedford FY'19			
Receiving From	# FTE's received	Sending To	#FTE's Sent
		Haverhill	00
		Massachusetts Virtual Academy at Greenfield Commonwealth Virtual District	1.0
		TEC Connections Academy Commonwealth Virtual School District	6.1

Billerica



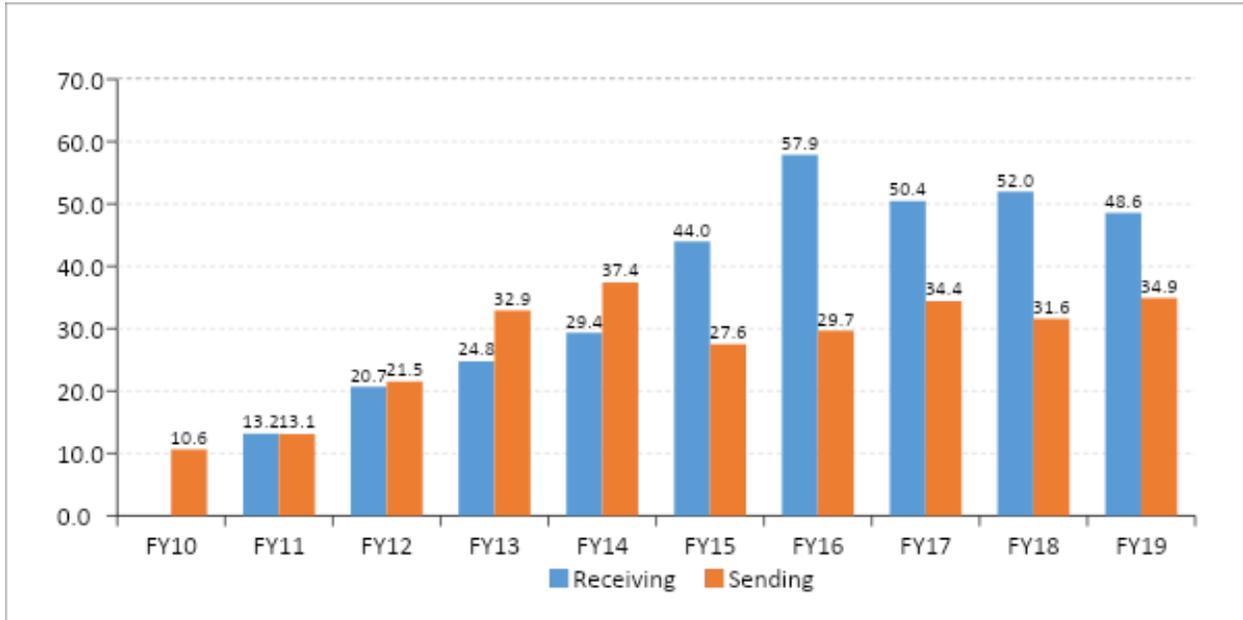
Billerica FY'19			
Receiving From	# FTE's received	Sending To	#FTE's Sent
None	None	Burlington	5.0
		Chelmsford	3.0
		Massachusetts Virtual Academy at Greenfield Commonwealth Virtual District	2.4
		Peabody	2.0
		TEC Connections Academy Commonwealth Virtual School District	12.0
		Westford	0.0

Carlisle



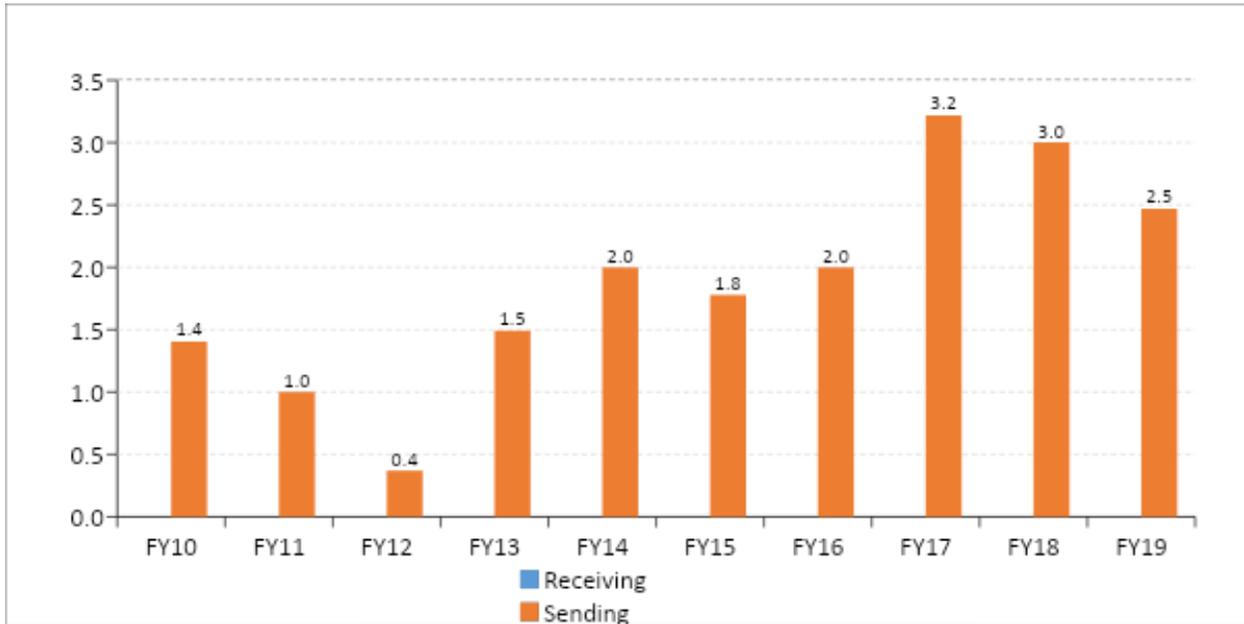
Carlisle FY'19	
Receiving From	Sending to
None	None

Chelmsford



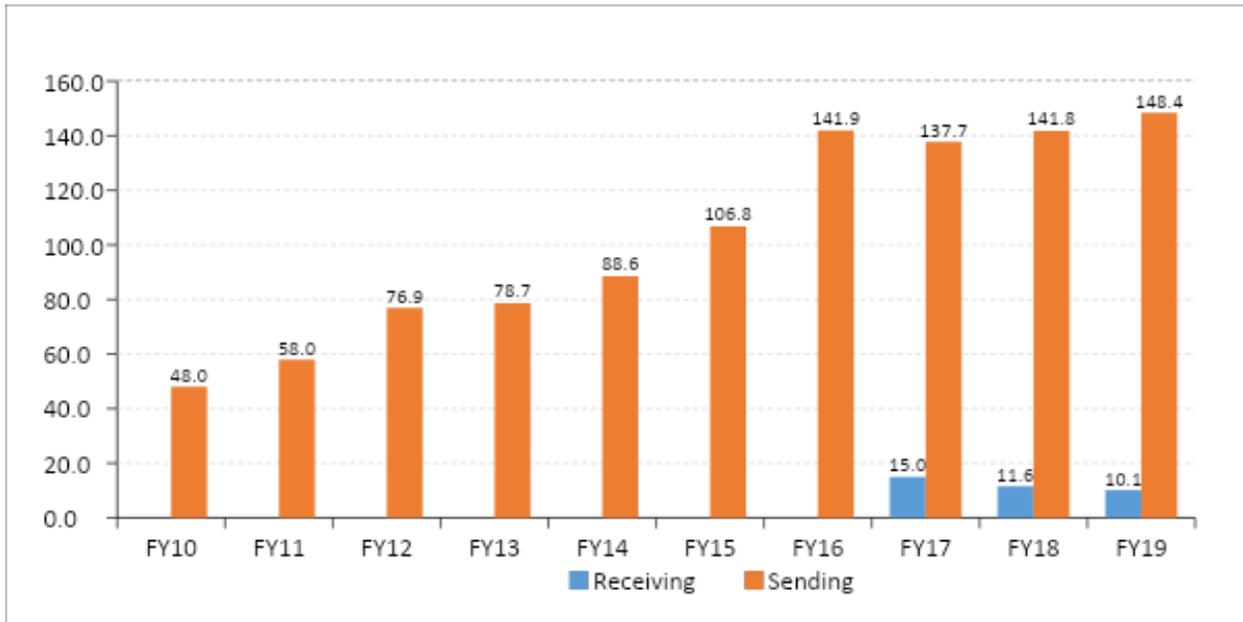
Chelmsford FY'19			
Receiving From	# FTE's received	Sending To	#FTE's Sent
Billerica	3.0	Ayer Shirley School District	0.0
Dracut	1.0	Dracut	1.0
Lowell	40.0	Fitchburg	1.0
Tyngsborough	2.0	Hudson	0.0
		Massachusetts Virtual Academy at Greenfield	1.5
Westford	1.6	Commonwealth Virtual District	
North Middlesex	1.0	Nashoba	2.0
		North Middlesex	0.0
		TEC Connections Academy	11.8
		Commonwealth Virtual School District	
		Tyngsborough	1.1
		Westford	16.5

Concord



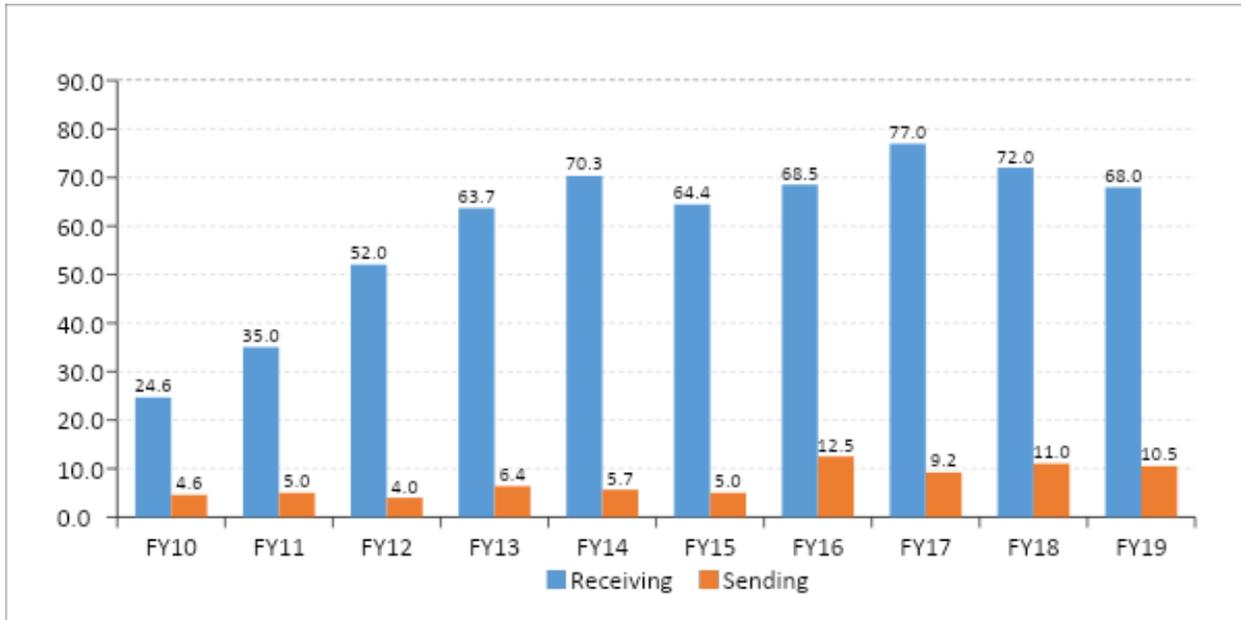
Concord FY'19			
Receiving From	# FTE's received	Sending To	#FTE's Sent
		Littleton	2.5

Lowell



Lowell FY'19			
Receiving From	# FTE's received	Sending To	#FTE's Sent
Dracut	6.1	Burlington	1.0
Lawrence	0.0	Chelmsford	40.0
North Andover	1.0	Dracut	24.0
Tewksbury	0.0	Littleton	4.0
Tyngsborough	2.0	Massachusetts Virtual Academy at Greenfield Commonwealth Virtual District	9.2
Groton-Dunstable	0.0	North Middlesex	0.3
Greater Lowell Regional Vocational Technical	1.0	TEC Connections Academy Commonwealth Virtual School District	40.5
		Tyngsborough	20.4
		Westford	9.0

Westford



Westford FY'19			
Receiving From	# FTE's received	Sending To	#FTE's Sent
Billerica	0.0	Chelmsford	1.6
Chelmsford	16.5	Littleton	1.0
Dracut	2.5	North Middlesex	1.0
Gardner	1.0	Peabody	0.0
Lawrence	1.0	TEC Connections Academy Commonwealth Virtual School District	6.9
Littleton	12.0		
Lowell	9.0		
Methuen	0.0		
Tyngsborough	12.5		
Ayer Shirley School District	8.0		
Concord-Carlisle	0.0		
Groton-Dunstable	2.5		
North Middlesex	3.0		

Conclusion

An appropriate, data-based discussion regarding the benefits and the impact of the school choice program must be conducted by the Carlisle School Committee. I invite School Committee members and other members of the public to read this document, add other data and research findings that they may have, and conduct a discussion at the appropriate level of detail so that an informed decision can be arrived at.

I am also asking the School Committee members to address specifically in a data-based manner and with reference to the existing legislative framework the statements and discussion points noted above and any other statements they or other members of the public may decide to add to this document prior to voting on the inter-district school choice program. Furthermore, I am asking that this document and its future versions as augmented by the public or by the School Committee be included in the School Committee meetings public documents for any and all future such School Committee meetings that discuss the inter-district school choice program.

Public Questions and Additional Information

Camelia Rosca 4/13/2020 Comment

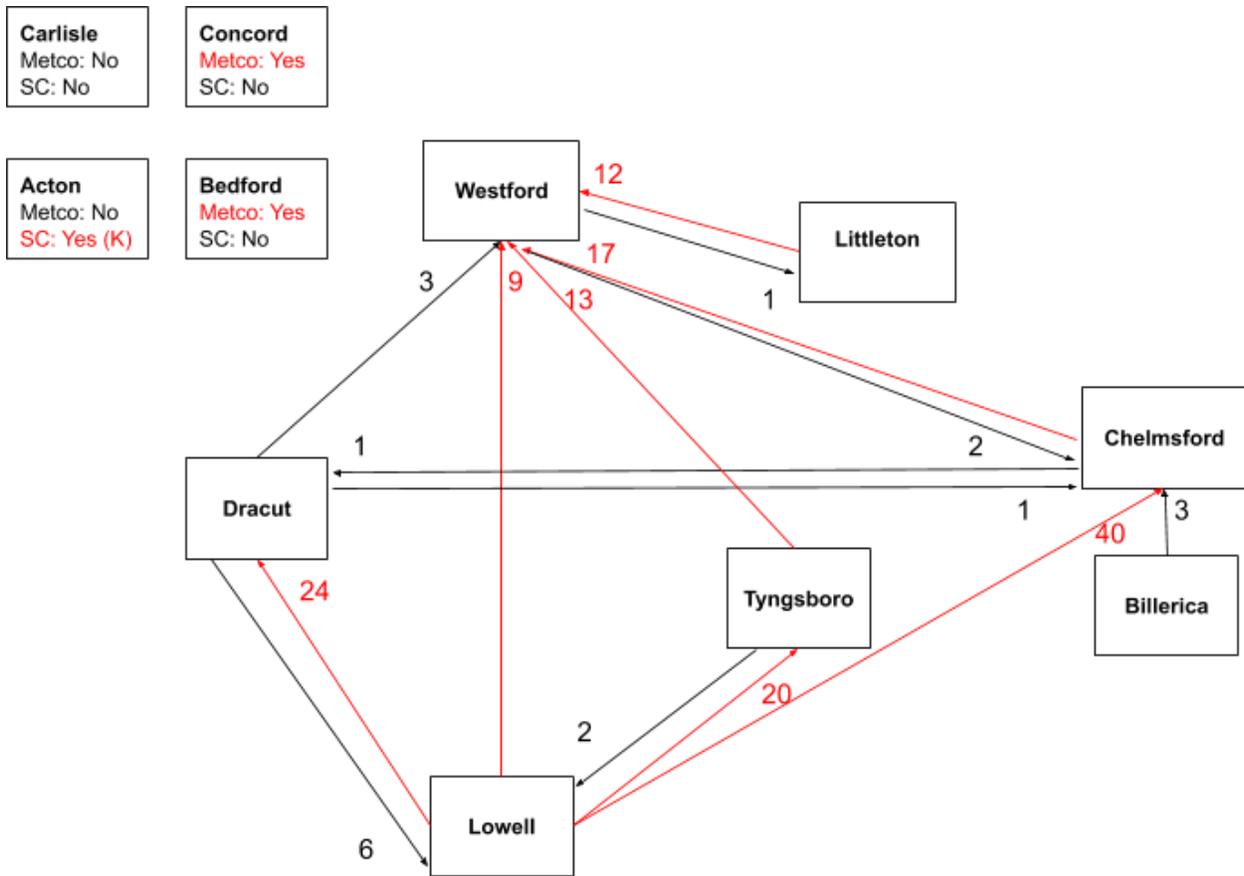
During the School Committee meeting on 4/10/20 one of the School Committee members urged CPS to “show leadership” by disregarding school choice and by designing its own, as yet undefined, initiative to increase diversity in the Carlisle Public Schools (CPS) in a fiscally responsible manner.

My comment to this statement is two-fold:

1. There is no existing legal or fiscal framework for this proposed, yet undefined, homegrown initiative. School choice (and METCO) are programs with a history that spans decades, are well understood, and have been implemented successfully in many school districts in Massachusetts (188 districts implemented school choice in FY’19). From a fiscal perspective, school choice is a program that benefits the receiving districts (in this case CPS). Sending districts do not benefit financially. It would be difficult and time consuming to design a homegrown initiative that is rooted in the existing legal framework, that would benefit all students, and that would have a positive financial impact on both the sending and the receiving (CPS) district(s).
2. However, I am happy to spend years working with the School Committee to design such a program. Meanwhile, it would behoove the School Committee to vote on school choice consistently with its stated goals: increase diversity and act in a fiscally responsible manner. The existing legal framework and financial mechanisms provide such an opportunity through school choice, as detailed in this document.

Camelia Rosca 4/16/2020 Comment

The following diagram synthesizes (based on the tables on pages 7-14) students' use of the school choice program for the school districts geographically close to the Carlisle Public Schools district.



As the diagram shows:

- Students' migration up the educational/socioeconomic scale is evident in the diagram above. Significantly larger numbers of students are moving to higher achievement/higher socioeconomic school districts from their own home districts (than from higher educational/socioeconomic levels to lower educational/socioeconomic levels).
- All neighboring school districts have a socioeconomic/racial integration program with the exception of Carlisle Public Schools. Concord and Bedford Public Schools are implementing the METCO program. Other districts implement school-choice or school choice and METCO. Carlisle Public Schools implements no socioeconomic/racial integration program at this time.