

Options/Magnets Exit Process for Students
Review and Feedback from the JCPS Magnet Steering Committee

Executive Summary

Purpose of Review

The Magnet Steering Committee reviewed the current magnet exit policy and corresponding Options/Magnets Exit Process for Students to evaluate equity in practice and implementation and to determine community perspective on this policy.

Method of Review

The Magnet Steering Committee took several steps to review the exit policy and to address concerns raised.

1. Reviewed of the current process to understand expectations and timelines for families, schools, and the district Magnet Office.
2. Examined student exit data from 2011 through 2016 to gauge scope and impact.
3. Solicited community and school input to survey opinion and experience.

Conclusions and Suggested Process Improvements

The review of the current policy, student exit data, and community input led to a Committee consensus that the policy should be retained, but the process should be improved and reviewed every few years. Suggestions from the Committee for process improvements include:

1. Refocus the policy and process to emphasize student support and a need for student adjustments to successfully complete the program.
2. Increase consistency in documentation, data collection, and school processes.
3. Establish greater transparency in due process for students and families.
4. Seek feedback from families who leave magnets (parent- and school-initiated).

Purpose

The JCPS Board of Education requested that the Magnet Steering Committee review the current policy and process for exiting students from magnet schools and programs. The Options/Magnets Exit Process for Students allows magnets to remove (i.e. “exit”) students and place them in non-magnet JCPS schools for reasons such as low academic performance or persistent behavior violations¹. Non-magnet schools do not have the power to exit students², although families can opt to apply or transfer to another school.

The rationale historically for allowing JCPS magnet schools to exit students is that this practice ensures magnet students are willing and able to participate in the specialized magnet curriculum. For example, students interested in Gifted and Talented programs must demonstrate capacity (based on minimum CogAT scores) for applications to be considered, and they must demonstrate academic persistence in these areas for continued participation. Furthermore, some have argued that removing students for behavior violations allows the magnet to maintain the specialized learning environment.

Others have argued that the policy allowing for school-initiated exits should be eliminated due to equity concerns. One rationale proposed for discontinuing the practice is that it allows magnets to displace students with challenges into non-magnet schools, especially persistently low achieving (PLA) schools. This circumstance may further disadvantage the student and the receiving schools, which may have no additional resources than the magnet program to support the student. A related concern is that magnet schools/programs may opt to exit students without providing sufficient intervention (required by State regulation for all schools) to address a student’s challenges. Finally, questions have been raised about potential disproportionality in exiting certain student groups more than others.

Method of Review

The Magnet Steering Committee took several steps to review the current magnet exit policy and to address concerns raised. First, the Committee reviewed the current process to understand expectations and timelines for families, schools, and the district Magnet Office. Second, the Committee requested five years of data on students exited from all magnet programs to gauge scope and impact. Finally, the committee asked for community and school input to survey opinion and experience.

Current Policy and Process Review

The Options/Magnets Exit Process for Students is not publicly available currently. Thus, most Steering Committee members were not familiar with steps involved in the process. The Student Assignment Office, who manages the exit process at the district level, provided a presentation to make clear that there are several parts to the process with responsibilities for schools to provide intervention and to notify families of potential issues for students. The Student Assignment Office also has a responsibility to work with schools on student reassignment and with families on appeals. The exiting of a student by the school only can occur at the end of a school year after the school implements their part of the process. The current process does include steps designed to ensure equitable practices and supports for students.

Student Exit Data

The Committee reviewed a report on student exit trends with data from 2011-12 through 2015-16 (see *Student Exit Trends Report: 2011 through 2016*). This report was based on data recorded on Student Exit Forms used by magnet schools to document any students moving to and from a program. As part of this review, the Committee became aware of terminology differences applied to JCPS magnet school data compared with non-magnets when referring to those students who move from school-to-school. Specifically, all magnet students who move between or out of their programs are recorded as ‘exits’

¹ The current Exit Process for Options/Magnets Schools and Programs was implemented in the 2001 *Student Assignment Plan*.

² The only exception for comprehensive schools is in the case of extreme behavior incidents that lead to alternative school placement based on the JCPS *Student Support and Behavior Intervention Handbook*.

whether school-initiated or parent-initiated, while JCPS uses the terms ‘student movement’ or ‘mobility’ when tracking parent-initiated student movement to or between non-magnet schools. Recognition of terminology differences is important to ensure we are comparing “apples to apples” and accurately estimating the scope and magnitude of the issue because the magnet exit policy only pertains to school-initiated exits.

The Committee learned that magnet schools/programs initiate approximately 400 student exits per year (2% of all magnet students enrolled), while about 800 families voluntarily move each year. The primary reasons cited by schools for exiting students were failing grades, chronic absenteeism, and/or persistent behavior violations. As a whole, the data do not show clear patterns of process violations by schools or disproportionate impact on certain student groups. The reasons for initiating exits largely seemed in line with published school criteria and guidelines.

However, the data also strongly suggest that some magnet schools implement steps in the exit process inconsistently. Even in the latter cases there simply is insufficient documentation by many of these magnets to determine whether true inequities exist over these years (e.g., use of an ‘Other’ category without additional information, no reason identified for exit, incomplete forms).

Finally, the type of data collected also does not allow for clear conclusions on the extent of disproportionality. The current Exit Form, which has been in place since 2001, has limited differentiation of some groups (i.e., race/ethnicity) and no tracking of other student categories (e.g., ELL, students with disabilities, free-reduced lunch). Exit Form data are recorded in such a way that matching and tracking these students in Infinite Campus to obtain additional student characteristics is extremely cumbersome.

Community Conversation & Survey

While the number of students exited is relatively small, many Committee members still wanted to assess opinions and experience of the community and schools. To do so, the Committee developed three options for providing input: (1) a public survey, (2) a community conversation hosted by the committee, and (3) comments by email. The survey and community conversation focused on the current process for exiting students and suggested several specific options for changing or eliminating this process. Participants also could offer their own suggestions for changing the process if different from those proposed by the Committee.

The cumulative responses provided by participants across each feedback opportunity supported retaining the current policy, but many responses also focused on methods for improving the process to ensure better monitoring, transparency for families, and student support. For example, survey results showed that 78% (of 1809 survey respondents) explicitly selected the option to “Retain the current policy and process”, while 10% wanted to see the process modified to apply only to behavior violations and 3% wanted a focus on academic progress only. Approximately 9% of respondents wanted to see the policy eliminated entirely.

Conclusions and Suggested Process Improvements

The review of the current policy, student exit data, and community input led to a Committee consensus that the policy should be retained, but the process should be improved and reviewed every few years. The reasons proposed for retaining the policy are that the scope of the issue is small (2% of students are exited by schools), and the Student Exit Form data do not show clear, persistent patterns of inequity. In addition, community input gathered in a public forum and a survey demonstrated overwhelming support for this policy.

However, the Committee also noted that the absence of clear inequity trends may be due to gaps in Exit Form data. In addition, the majority of persons who participated in the community conversation and survey were affiliated with magnet schools despite broad outreach to solicit input from various organizations and non-magnet schools. While a minority responded with opposition to the exit policy, these views did point to negative impact on students, families, and other JCPS schools. Thus, the

Committee pointed to areas for significant process improvements. Some process improvements could include:

1. Refocus the policy and process to emphasize student support and a need for student adjustments to successfully complete the program.

The current policy including the targeted action (i.e., 'exit') focuses on the end result – getting students out – instead of on student improvement and completion. Consider changing language to focus more on corrections needed by students (e.g., continuation requirements; student responsibilities for completion) and less on the final outcome of 'exiting'. Schools should include a focus on program retention rates (e.g., how can we keep students?) as a measures of success in addition to student achievement. In addition, some steps in the process could be updated to better align with current district priorities (e.g., equity) and communication practices as well as to make the process more accessible to families.

2. Increase consistency in documentation, data collection, and school processes.

The Student Assignment Office should work with magnets to increase consistency district-wide in how schools implement the process, document student improvement steps, and communicate with families and students about expectations. For example, all magnets should be required to make a reasonable attempt to hold meetings with families and students to clearly establish the issues, expectations, and timelines for improvement (this is an option among several on the current Exit Form). Second, Student Assignment should update the Exit Form to distinguish student characteristics, type of student movement (family vs school initiated), and reasons for movement more accurately. Finally, it would be more efficient and less burdensome for the Student Assignment Office and schools if these data could be collected electronically (as opposed to paper forms), preferably using an existing technical system.

3. Establish greater transparency in due process for students and families.

First, ensure that all expectations and requirements for continuation are communicated to students and families as part of the application process before students are admitted to the program, (e.g., school marketing materials; a school-student-family contract). Second, if student academic performance or behavior does necessitate a review of their program continuation, part of the process for families could include access to an individual (e.g., family advocate) who is not affiliated with the school or the Student Assignment Office to help guide families in making the best decision for their child. Finally, the Student Assignment Office may consider the implications of establishing an end date for when schools can remove students or complete the appeals process should families make use of this option.

4. Seek feedback from families who leave magnets (parent- and school-initiated).

Families should have the opportunity to provide feedback on their school experience. Several feedback mechanisms should be implemented, such as progress review for struggling students, exit counseling (e.g., by school, by family advocate), and/or an exit survey after student enrolls in another school.

In the short-term, these process changes should improve family experience. In the longer-term, the district will gain more accurate data for monitoring and for periodic assessment of policy impact on student success.