

Cambridge Preschool Program Seat Allocation Policy

Introduction:

As the lead agency responsible for implementing the Cambridge Preschool Program (CPP), the Cambridge Office of Early Childhood (OEC) strives to maintain a healthy mixed delivery system that balances the competing priorities of allowing for sufficient family choice while also minimizing unfilled seats across the CPP system. OEC is committed to a mixed delivery model in which families have access to a range of high-quality preschool options and can make preschool choices that best meet the needs of their child and family. Additionally, recognizing the detrimental financial impact that unfilled preschool seats can have on community-based preschool providers, OEC is also committed to minimizing unfilled preschool seats among CPP providers.

Purpose of this Policy:

This policy is designed to provide transparency about the methodology that OEC uses to determine the number of seats that should be in the CPP system each year, and how those seats are distributed across the three CPP sectors - Cambridge Public Schools (CPS), Department of Human Services Programs (DHSP), and community-based preschools (CBOs).

Description of the Seat Allocation Methodology and Process:

The seat allocation methodology is designed to balance the following objectives:

- 1) Maximize family choice
- 2) Minimize empty seats
- 3) Maintain a healthy mixed-delivery system with a relatively balanced distribution of seats across our community-based providers, DHSP programs, and CPS preschools

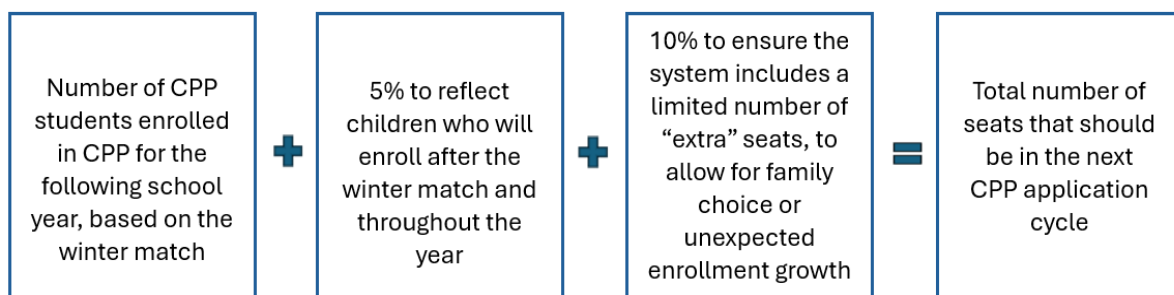
In developing this methodology, OEC analyzed enrollment data and trends from prior CPP application and enrollment cycles, and this data showed that CPP enrollment has remained relatively stable from year to year. As such, the methodology is based on the assumption that CPP enrollment will remain relatively stable in the upcoming years. OEC will continue to monitor enrollment trends each year and will adjust this methodology as needed. The methodology is designed to be accommodate both upward or downward enrollment shifts over time.

Step 1: Predicting the optimal number of seats that should be included in the CPP system for the upcoming school year:

This process begins in the spring each year, after the CPP match has been completed for the upcoming school year, and is based on trends in the demand for CPP seats. Through this process, OEC:

- 1) Identifies the number of children who received a CPP seat in the fall match and enrolled in CPP for the following school year.
- 2) Adds 5% to the number of children matched and enrolled for the following school year. This 5% is designed to reflect the children who enroll in CPP post-fall match. These are children who recently moved to Cambridge or who otherwise missed the fall CPP application deadline.
- 3) Adds 10% to that number. This 10% is designed to accommodate unexpected growth in the demand for CPP seats, and to allow for a limited number of “extra” seats in the system. The provision of “extra” seats is designed to increase the likelihood that the majority of families applying to CPP will receive one of their top choices.
- 4) The resulting number is the number of seats that should be included in the CPP system for the next CPP application cycle.

In summary, by late Spring or early Summer each year, OEC calculates the number of seats that should be included in the next CPP application and match cycle using the formula below:



Step 2: Distributing seats across the sectors of the CPP system:

The formula described above is used to identify the total number of seats that should be included in the CPP system for the next school year. The next step in the process is for OEC to determine how those seats should be distributed across the three sectors of the system (CPS, DHSP, CBOs). In order to maintain a healthy mixed delivery system, OEC strives to achieve a proportional seat distribution across the system, with roughly a third of seats dedicated to CBO classrooms. The exact distribution of seats across the three sectors will fluctuate from year to year to accommodate classroom or school closures, CBOs exiting from CPP, or other circumstances.

Step 3: Distributing seats within individual CPP preschools:

During the early fall months each year, OEC works with each CPP provider to determine the number of seats that will be allocated to that provider in the upcoming CPP application and match cycle for the following school year.

For DHSP and CPS classrooms: Because all children enrolling in DHSP and CPS¹ classrooms are placed in preschool seats through the CPP match, the number of seats allocated to DHSP and CPS classrooms will generally equal the total capacity of those classrooms.² OEC works closely with colleagues in CPS and DHSP each year to determine the number of classrooms and seats that should be included in the upcoming CPP application and match cycle.

For CBO Classrooms³: For community-based CPP preschools, OEC works with each CPP provider to determine how the seats will be allocated within each program. For each CPP preschool:

- **Continuity of Care Seats:** OEC works with the preschool provider to determine how many children who are currently enrolled at the preschool will become newly-eligible for CPP in the next school year. These are referred to as “continuity of care” (COC) children. In order to prevent children from having to transition to a new, unfamiliar preschool program, OEC will ensure that all COC children who are enrolled in and attending a CPP program will be granted a CPP seat at the same program.
 - *NOTE: Children who move to Cambridge after the CPP application has closed may enroll in CPP through the CPP Ongoing Enrollment policy. If a child is already enrolled in a CPP preschool as a private-pay student when they move to Cambridge, OEC will convert their private-pay seat to a CPP seat if the child has been attending the preschool during the prior school year. (The preschool will be asked to submit documentation of the child’s start date and attendance at the preschool.) If the child has not been attending the preschool during the prior school year, they are not eligible for COC status and they should access a CPP seat through the general CPP application process.*
- **Priority Seats:** In alignment with the City’s commitment to equity, OEC is committed to ensuring that families with Priority status have access to all of the preschool programs

¹ Note that children with IEPs are generally placed in classrooms through Special Start rather than through the CPP match.

² In other words, all seats in these classrooms are CPP seats, with the exception of Special Start classrooms and a small number of DHSP seats that are allocated to the non-resident lottery.

³ Note that Harvard and MIT affiliated providers follow a unique matching process that occurs in the summer before the start of each school year.

within the CPP system. In order to do so, all CPP preschool providers are required to commit to reserving some 3-year-old seats for priority children each year. Most community-based CPP providers will be asked to reserve at least three seats per CPP classroom for priority children.⁴

If a provider's priority seats are not filled in the fall match process, the seats will be held open for newly-enrolling priority families until June 1st of each year. If the seats are not filled by June 1st, the preschool program has the option to "take back" those seats to be filled by private-pay families, or to hold those seats open in the CPP system for newly-enrolling priority families.

- *NOTE: In alignment with its commitment to promoting diverse, inclusive, and equitable preschool classrooms, OEC expects that CPP preschool providers will ensure that their programs are welcoming and inclusive of all CPP families, which includes examining their policies, practices, and outreach strategies. If a program fails to fill its Priority seats for three consecutive years, OEC may consider exiting the program from the CPP system.*
- **Additional CPP Seats** – OEC asks that all CPP providers commit to dedicating at least 40% of the seats in each CPP classroom to CPP students. Once COC seats and priority seats have been calculated, OEC will work with the provider to add additional seats in order to ensure that at least 40% of the classroom's seats are CPP seats.

A Note About Exiting Providers from the CPP System:

If demand for CPP seats declines significantly in future years due to a declining population of young children in the City, it may be determined that fewer seats are needed in the CPP system. If it is determined that the CPP system has significantly more seats than is needed to meet enrollment demand, OEC will reduce the number of total seats allocated across the CPP system, and this may involve exiting preschool classrooms or programs from the system. In these situations, OEC will consider the following factors when determining which CPP programs / classrooms should be exited from the CPP system:

- Program Quality – Programs that are on a PIP or Action Plan may be considered.
- Enrollment Demand – Programs that have not filled at least 75% of their CPP seats for three or more years may be considered.
- Priority Enrollment - Preschool programs with lower percentages of families with Priority status may be considered.
- Program Location - Preschool programs that are located in an area where there is an

⁴ Family childcare and other small, one classroom programs will be asked to reserve 2 Priority seats, in proportion to their total enrollment.

overabundance of CPP seats, or in communities with few families with Priority status, may be considered.

- a. Bonus Factors – OEC will also prioritize retaining preschool programs in the CPP system based on:
 - i. Non-Profit Status – Locally-based, non-profit community preschools will be prioritized.
 - ii. Age-Range – Preschool programs that also serve infants and toddlers will be prioritized.

Alternatively, if demand for CPP seats grows or existing CPP providers exit the CPP system, OEC will implement a Request for Proposals (RFP) process to assess the qualifications of community-based providers that are interested in joining the CPP system.