



Lawrence Public Schools

Policy

Section J: STUDENTS

JFBA

Subject: INTER-SCHOOL VARIANCE

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POLICY STATEMENT

A variance request seeks permission to attend a school other than the one to which a student should be enrolled under the LPS assignment policy.

Summary:

The school assignment policy for Lawrence Public Schools is centered on neighborhood schools, assigning students to the schools closest to their homes, with minimal exceptions for substantially separate specialized learning programs, or when a school reaches maximum capacity for any grade.

While our district schools deliver instructional services to meet the diverse needs of students in their neighborhoods, cited below are instances when students may benefit from attending a school other than their neighborhood one. This policy provides an orderly and thoughtful process for variances to the assignment policy, under the following conditions.

A student must meet one or more of the criteria outlined below:

1. The student will be entering the last grade of their current elementary or middle school and would benefit by remaining for the final year, even though s/he has moved outside of the catchment area for that school;
2. The student has a sibling who lives in the same household, but attends a different school and the parents would like the students to be assigned to one location for practical and engagement purposes; and/or
3. The requested school is physically located closer to the student's home than the assigned school, as measured by walking distance via an online source such as Google Maps.

Variance timeline and deadline:

In an effort to support smooth transitions for all students, variance applications for fall enrollment must be submitted between May 1 and the last day of the current school year. Students and families will be notified by July 1 of any decision, allowing them to plan accordingly for the start of the school year in August. There are two exceptions to this timeline: variance requests for transition year students and for newly enrolled applicants will be entertained on a rolling basis. Students enrolled on variances prior to January 2016 will be grandfathered into the revised policy.

Variance process:

1. Parents may obtain a variance application at any district school, at the Family Resource Center (FRC), or online at www.lawrence.k12.ma.us.
2. The parent/guardian must complete the application in full and deliver it to the Family Resource Center between the dates of May 1 and the last day of the current school year, for enrollment in the coming school year. Variances are not accepted after the last day of school, with the exception of transition grade students and new to LPS students who meet one of the criteria above.
3. All requests will be reviewed based on space availability, program availability and the criteria listed above.

Original adoption: 5/24/01

1st Reading:

2nd Reading:

Revision Adoption: 1/15/16, 3/15/17, 4/08/20

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4. The FRC will notify families of variance decisions by July 1, excluding the exceptions outlined above, (who will be notified within 48 hours of delivery). The FRC will supply a list of approved variances to the receiving schools by July 1 and notify schools of rolling applications on the same day they are approved.

Capacity to accept variance applicants:

The district endeavors to prioritize school services for neighborhood students, while considering the unique needs of students as outlined above, who may not live within its boundaries. To aid in this effort, schools will complete their census and promotion/retention lists annually before May 30, in order to establish existing capacity in their schools. Only if a grade is closed to new students will qualified variances be denied.

Rules for enrollment under a variance:

1. Parents and students understand that district transportation will not be provided.
2. Parents are responsible for ensuring their student(s) gets to school on time, every day.
3. Siblings who are granted a variance (criteria #2) are allowed to remain through the end of the school year in which the elder sibling ages out. At that time, the younger sibling will be returned to his/her neighborhood school. If the younger sibling is entering a transition grade, a new variance application must be submitted.
4. Variances granted based on the fact that the school is physically closer to their home (criteria #3) are valid through the highest grade offered at the school.
5. The granting of a variance is privilege. As such, it can be revoked and students re-assigned to their neighborhood school at the end of any given marking period if:
 - a. A student's attendance in school falls below Massachusetts' definition of Chronic Absenteeism of at least 10% of days enrolled (e.g., 18 days absent if enrolled for 180)**
 - b. A student receives out of school suspension for a total of five or more cumulative days.
6. Requests will not be denied based on academic performance, special needs, or ELL status, provided the school (or program) can meet any mandated requirements. Schools are not required to establish services to meet the needs of students requesting variances.

Notification process:

- Applicants will be notified by the FRC of their status by July 1 (or within two business days of rolling applications). Notification may happen by email, phone or in person.
- The FRC will ensure that all students enrolled on a variance are indicated as such in the district's student information system. S/he will also record the criteria used for approval. Copies of all applications will be maintained by a designee at the FRC.
- For applications approved on a rolling basis, the FRC will update the school leader and the clerk by email two days before the student will begin school.
- As part of any annual orientation activity, students enrolled on a variance and their families will have the opportunity to be welcomed by the school, learn about resources, expectations and engagement opportunities.

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Variance records and policy review:

- The FRC will indicate approved variance requests in the district’s student information system. Variances that are expired or revoked will be updated in this same system, allowing schools to easily identify the students enrolled on a variance.
- Schools will review their lists of students on variances at least one full week before the end of any given term and notify parents of any changes in status at least four school days before the end of the term.
- The Superintendent’s office, via an appointed designee, reserves the right to extend this policy to address extenuating circumstances; however, requests related to a school’s proximity to either a parent’s place of employment or their extended family will not be entertained.
- The Office of Engagement will convene a workgroup periodically to review and evaluate the effectiveness of the variance policy. This evaluation and any recommendations shall be completed in consultation with the Superintendent.

**Absences due to significant illness, when documented by a physician’s note, will be reviewed by the principal on a case by case basis.*

Related resources and departments:

TOPIC	RESOURCE	LPS CONTACTS:
Enrollment	LPS Assignment Policy	Community, Family and Student Engagement
Accommodations	Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008	LPS Special Learning Services
Safety Issues	LPS Code of Conduct	First: School principal Second: Community, Family and Student Engagement

Inquiries pertaining to this policy should be addressed to:

Community, Family and Student Engagement
 237 Essex Street, 4th Floor
 Lawrence, MA 01840
 (978) 975-5900

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