



Update from the Superintendent

To: Parents and Guardians
From: Bill Husfelt, Superintendent
Date: March 7, 2021

The School Choice window for this year just opened and I'd like to take an opportunity to remind everyone about this amazing program and the plethora of choices our parents have. I met a community leader at an event last week and he noted how overwhelming our school choice process can be to newcomers who are not used to having so many options when it comes to school attendance. That's a good "problem" to have and I'm pleased that Bay District Schools is so accommodating through school choice.

As you know, all schools have attendance zones and within those zones, we provide transportation for students who meet the state's criteria. We actually provide MORE transportation than the state funds for us because we believe all students deserve a safe route to school.

The School Choice process, however, allows those students who can provide their own transportation (or those students who have parents/guardians/family members who can take them to school) to apply to attend ANY school in our district (placements approved as long as the school remains under capacity).

Each year we receive hundreds of applications from parents who prefer their children attend a school closer to their place of work, for example, or from parents who want their children to attend a school that's closer to the location of a preferred after-school care program. Some parents, for example, live on the beach but work in town and prefer their students to attend school closer to where they work.

IF space is available at the school, we do our very best to grant those applications.

We also receive applications from parents of middle school and high school students who want their children to attend a particular school for a specific academic program. Bay High School, for example, offers the Advanced International Certificate of Education Diploma program through Cambridge University in England. Jinks Middle School, a feeder school for Bay High, then offers from Pre-AICE courses designed to prepare students for the high school AICE program. Students from any area of our community can apply, through School Choice, to attend the pre-AICE program at Jinks or the AICE program at Bay High.

Likewise, we have unique academic programs at many other schools. At J.R. Arnold High School, students can participate in a program designed to qualify them for FAA Drone Pilot Certification. Students attending Rutherford High School can apply for the school's prestigious International Baccalaureate diploma program and students who attend A. Crawford Mosley High School can select from a plethora of Career and Technical Education courses designed to open up workforce and collegiate pathways. And, of course, we can't forget that students from throughout the county apply to attend Deane Bozeman School's legendary CTE programs based upon agriculture and veterinary science

That's just a **tiny snapshot** of the many special programs offered at secondary schools within the county. I am positive that there's a program designed to meet the needs of every student and we definitely encourage parents to check out all of the options.

All students are eligible to apply for the School Choice option. Again, if space is available at the requested school, we do all we can to approve these requests.

If a request is denied, parents have the opportunity to apply for what we call a "hardship waiver" typically in mid-April. Again, we do all we can to research these requests, to approve them if at all possible and to offer parents other options if a spot at their first choice school isn't available. It's all a balancing act but it's one we're happy to work on because we believe parents have a right to choose.

There are certainly lots of benefits for children who attend their "home-zoned schools". Transportation is provided and children are attending school with neighbors and those who live nearby. There are just as many reasons, however, for parents to opt into the School Choice program to find a school that's more conveniently located to family or work, to find a specific academic program that's aligned with the student's needs or to secure a spot in a school that provides convenient access to after-school care or community programs.

I am firmly committed to the school choice program and I believe parents have a right to choose the schools for their children regardless of where they live, their socio economic status or any other situation. The number one indicator of a child's success in school is the level of involvement by his/her parent(s)/guardian(s) and so choosing the right school, and participating in the School Choice process, can be a huge part of that.

And don't get me wrong, I know that some parents will choose to send their students to charter schools or private schools and home schools and I completely support those options as well. We have a plethora of charter schools in our district, as well as several amazing private schools, and I firmly believe that parents should investigate all options for their children.

I also firmly believe, however, in the power of public education and the HUGE responsibility our public schools have when it comes to educating ALL children. I grew up in subsidized housing and was raised by a single mother who did an amazing job. I would not have had the opportunities I have had, however, if not for the incredible public school educators and coaches who invested in me. Every day, in every way imaginable, several thousand public school educators and support employees are doing the same thing for the children in our community and I applaud them and their dedication every chance I get.

I am confident that all parents can find the school that's best for their children and I am equally confident that all of our public schools are equipped to offer the very best education possible to the children of Bay County.

You can find out some basic information about each of our schools by visiting our website at www.bay.k12.fl.us and then selecting "schools" and the specific schools which interest you. You're also welcome to use the "contact us" link on each school's page to reach out with questions or to find out information about virtual tours available.

You can find out more about the School Choice process on our website or by calling 850-767-4135 or 850-767-4328.

Stay safe and God Bless!