



School District of Manatee County School Choice Plan 2024/2025

**School Choice plays a vital role in accomplishing the district's strategic mission:
Educate and develop all students today for their success tomorrow.**

Historical Overview of the School Choice Program

Manatee County's Choice Program was first implemented during the 1998/99 school year at the high school level. Over the next two years, the Choice Program was expanded to include the middle and elementary school levels.

During 1997, a massive communication campaign was conducted through town meetings, the media and through a district-wide committee of community leaders. This committee designed the original School Choice Open Enrollment Program. This plan called for the implementation of School Choice at the high school level beginning in the 1998/99 school year.

For the 1999/2000 school year, the Choice Program was expanded to include the middle school level. Transportation was provided for the first time to middle school students requesting a school outside their attendance zone, but within their designated East or West Region.

The expansion of Choice at the elementary level for the 2000/2001 school year piloted three major initiatives.

- The Choice process was used to populate the district's first three magnet schools.
- The district's first Parent Information Center opened which provided registration and School Choice information.
- Transportation was provided to elementary students seeking choice within a designated Cluster Area to reduce mobility rates.

As a result of Manatee County being awarded the Magnet School Assistance Program (MSAP) grant, Choice options during the 2001/2002 school year increased as the number of magnet schools increased from three to ten. Magnets were incorporated into the Choice program as one of many choices available to students. Transportation was also expanded to include all four elementary cluster areas and both middle school regions.

With each successive year of growth in Manatee County, modifications to the Choice Program have been made and new features added. Grant funds awarded by the State of Florida's Department of Education totaling over two million dollars provided the funding for this initiative through the 2007/08 school year.

Choice as the Vehicle

Manatee County's School Choice plan provides all students the opportunity to apply for choice to district schools that meet their educational goals and needs. Parents have the option to select from 31 traditional public elementary, 2 K-8, 9 middle and 7 high schools; high school academies and honor/advanced programs, Tech Prep programs, virtual programs, fifteen charter schools, home-education programs, and over thirty private schools. This public-school parental choice plan allows the School District of Manatee County to make student assignments using parent's indicated preferential school choice as a significant factor.



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- ***The Application Process***

The district's plan includes but is not limited to an ***Open Enrollment Application Period***, a ***Targeted Population Period***, and ***State Scholarship Programs***.

The ***General Application Period*** is open to all current Pre-Kindergarten through 11th grade students. Families of students who wish to attend/remain at their geographically zone assigned school should NOT complete a choice application.

The ***Targeted Population Period*** is open to specially targeted population groups who were under-represented in the General Application Period. This period is not advertised publicly but is extended to only those special groups designated as that period approaches. The "targeted groups" are determined by specific programs, (i.e., IB, AICE, etc.).

The ***State Scholarship Programs*** are limited to students who are made eligible for choice under state and federal mandates (Hope, Opportunity Scholarship Programs, etc.).

- ***Choice Options***

During the Open Enrollment Application Period parents may select up to three schools and rank them in order of preference. The application must be submitted online via the FOCUS Parent Portal. Completing an application does not guarantee assignment to the choice school(s). Students not completing an application are assigned to their designated attendance boundary area as determined by the enrolling parent/guardian's address.

The Targeted Population Period is held to address specific goals of the district and recruitment to attractor programs such as AICE or IB.

The dates and options for the State Scholarship Programs are determined by state and federal guidelines.

- ***State Scholarship Programs***

This choice option provides a process to those students who are eligible for programs under state and federal law. For example, legislation pertaining to Family Empowerment Students with Unique Abilities Scholarship, Hope Scholarship, or Opportunity Scholarship.

- ***Choice Procedures***

The district uses a computer software program, "Focus", to process School Choice applications. This program factors in class size allocations for the schools requested while providing priority in its controlled open enrollment process to all of the following:

1. Dependent children of active duty military personnel.
2. Children relocated due to a foster care placement in a different school zone.
3. Children relocated by court-ordered change in custody due to separation or divorce, or the serious illness or death of a custodial parent.
4. Placement of siblings within the same school.
5. Students residing in the district. Residents of Manatee County may not be displaced by a student from another district seeking enrollment under the controlled open enrollment process.



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- **Guarantees**

The Choice plan provides guarantees for placement of siblings within the same school **if class size allocation allows**. The placement of employee's children at the parent's work site is guaranteed. **These students must apply during the General Application Period to ensure availability of guaranteed status.**

- **Waitlist Process**

Students who are not placed at their choice school during the initial Controlled Open Enrollment run are placed on a choice waitlist for further review in expectation of allocation shifts.

- **Transportation for School Choice and Hardship**

Transportation is NOT available to any student attending any choice or hardship elementary school, middle school or high school, unless specified otherwise. Parents and/or legal guardians are responsible for the transportation of their child, to and from the choice school and any and all school sponsored events and activities.

The AICE/IB Programs at Johnson K8, Southeast HS and Palmetto HS only, or other programs as approved by the Superintendent are provided hub transportation. Students must live more than two miles away from the choice approved school in order to receive a hub bus assignment.

HUB STOP: A HUB stop will be a "centralized" location, preferably a school site to the greatest extent possible, which will be used as the designated bus stop. Pursuant to Florida Administrative Code, parent(s) or guardian(s) will be responsible to arrange transportation to and from HUB stop, and to ensure the safety of their student(s) while traveling to and from the HUB stop, and to supervise their student(s) while waiting for the bus.

- **Parental Involvement/Awareness**

The Office of Student Assignment (OSA), located at 1400 1st Avenue East in Palmetto, provides information on the educational options available for students living in Manatee County. The OSA informs parents about registrations, guardianships, and other details necessary for enrollment in public, charter, or private schools. Community Engagement Associates work collaboratively with local newspapers and broadcast media while utilizing other effective communication avenues to announce available parental choice opportunities. A school choice information guide and relevant forms are available on the district's website at manateeschools.net/schoolchoice before the open enrollment school choice window to allow parents time to plan their upcoming school year.