

How magnet schools might collaborate across housing and transportation agencies to enhance school diversity efforts

The federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program¹ (MSAP) offers multi-year grants to local educational agencies (LEAs) seeking to create, expand, or improve magnet programs that foster racial and socioeconomic integration. Magnet schools employ a variety of methods in order to enroll a diverse student body, such as targeted outreach, free and accessible transportation, encouraging choice across school districts, intentional school siting, and employing equitable lottery-based admissions policies.² Many magnets also offer innovative programs around an attractive and relevant theme, like experiential learning, STEM, or fine arts.³ Congress appropriated \$139 million for the MSAP program in FY 2024.

The U.S. Department of Education’s 2024 [Notice Inviting Applications](#) for the Magnet Schools Assistance Program (MSAP) includes a new **Competitive Preference Priority 5 (CPP5)** that relates to Promoting Equity in Student Access to Educational Resources and Opportunities.⁴

CPP5 encourages applicants to “*examin[e]...sources of inequity and inadequacy and implement responses*”⁵ that help address these inequities. Importantly, CPP5 acknowledges the relationship between community segregation and school segregation, and encourages applicants to propose projects designed to tackle this longstanding challenge.⁶ Applicants are encouraged to propose projects designed to “*increas[e] student racial or socioeconomic diversity, through developing or implementing evidence-based policies or strategies,*”⁷ specifically focused on: 1) interdistrict coordination; 2) *cross-agency*

¹ U.S. Dep’t of Educ., Magnet Schools Assistance Program, available at <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-discretionary-grants-support-services/school-choice-improvement-programs/magnet-school-assistance-program-msap> (last accessed Mar. 29, 2024). See also Kfir Mordechay & Jennifer Ayscue, CIVIL RIGHTS PROJECT/PROYECTO DERECHOS CIVILES, [White Growth, Persistent Segregation: Could Gentrification Become Integration?](#) (2017).

² Jennifer Ayscue et al., CIVIL RIGHTS PROJECT/PROYECTO DERECHOS CIVILES, [Choices Worth Making: Creating, Sustaining, and Expanding Diverse Magnet Schools. A Manual for Local Stakeholders](#) (2017); Genevieve Siegel-Hawley & Erica Frankenberg, CIVIL RIGHTS PROJECT/PROYECTO DERECHOS CIVILES, [Reviving Magnet Schools: Strengthening a Successful School Choice Option](#) (2012).

³ Mordechay & Ayscue, 2017, *supra* note 1.

⁴ The 2024 funding notice differentiates between applications from new potential grantees (Absolute Priority 1) and applications from existing MSAP grantees (Absolute Priority 2). Applicants that apply under Absolute Priority 2 may choose to address one or more of Competitive Preference Priorities 1–6, whereas applicants that apply under Absolute Priority 1 are only asked to respond to Competitive Preference Priorities 1–4. “Applications for New Awards; Magnet Schools Assistance Program,” 89 Fed. Reg. 18614, 18617 (March 14, 2024).

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Through CPP5, the Department encourages applicants to “review sources of inequity, and as part of their MSAP project, plan to develop or implement specific strategies to address the root causes of these inequities, which include collaboration with other LEAs, other governmental or community agencies, or across district leadership to effect policy change to address barriers to student’s access to equitable opportunities.” 89 Fed. Reg. at 18616. The Department specifically notes that it is “interested in projects from LEAs that propose to coordinate with other relevant government entities—such as housing and transportation authorities and through similar programs such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Rental Assistance Demonstration program—given the impact that other public policy choices may have on the composition of a school’s student body.” *Id.* Last, the notice states that “[h]igh-quality responses to [CPP5] will identify how the specific strategies outlined are integrated components of their overall MSAP project.” *Id.*

⁷ 89 Fed. Reg. at 18618.

collaboration, such as with housing or transportation authorities; and/or 3) improvements to school assignment or admissions policies.⁸

This fact sheet provides ideas and related resources for applicants seeking to respond to CPP5’s call for “cross-agency collaboration, such as with housing or transportation authorities.”

As reflected in a [2016 guidance letter](#) from the U.S. Departments of Education (ED), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and Transportation (DOT), local school districts should be collaborating with their local housing and transportation agencies on a number of levels – including siting or expansion of schools, location of new subsidized housing developments and bus routes, zoning approvals for multifamily developments, after school programs, and future enrollment projections.

Here are some concrete ideas on how MSAP applicants might address CPP5’s call for cross-agency collaboration with housing and transportation agencies:

HOUSING

- Districts can work with local public housing authorities (PHAs) to prioritize or actively recruit magnet school applications from families residing in public housing developments, including public housing undergoing redevelopment through the [Choice Neighborhoods](#) or the [Rental Assistance Demonstration](#) (RAD) programs. We saw an example of this in Tampa a few years ago, where children in a redeveloped public housing development were given priority for admission to two countywide magnet schools.⁹ This same approach can work with other types of subsidized housing, like family-oriented [Low Income Housing Tax Credit](#) (LIHTC) developments or other HUD-assisted housing non-public housing developments.
- Locate new magnet schools near existing HUD-assisted housing, including public housing and public housing redevelopment sites. In San Francisco, a similar approach was taken with the Willie Brown Middle School, a “magnetized” school built next to a public housing redevelopment, which attracted middle income children from across the city (as well as children zoned to the school from the nearby public housing development) because it was designated as a “feeder” school to the most popular high schools in the city.¹⁰ Magnet site selection should always be done with intention, but there are different angles to approach it from, many of which take housing patterns into consideration, e.g. prioritizing a site in a racially or economically diverse neighborhood if there’s a catchment preference, etc.
- For magnet schools located *outside* of low-income neighborhoods, work with the local housing authority to help families with [Housing Choice Vouchers](#) access rental housing near magnet schools and provide incentives to landlords near magnet schools to rent to families with housing vouchers. An increasing number of housing authorities have specialized “[housing mobility](#)” [programs](#) designed to help low-income families with housing vouchers move to low poverty areas. Partnering with PHAs in these 40+ metro areas would be a natural fit for magnet schools seeking to recruit low-income families.

⁸ Housing/transportation coordination can also factor into the school assignment or admissions policies priority, insofar as this funding notice encourages MSAP projects that are “designed to promote socioeconomic diversity and provide equitable access to educational opportunities for students from low-income backgrounds or students residing in neighborhoods experiencing concentrated poverty.” *Id.*

⁹ See POVERTY AND RACE RESEARCH ACTION COUNCIL, [Mixed Income Neighborhoods and Integrated Schools: Linking HUD’s Choice Neighborhoods Initiative with the Department of Education’s Magnet Schools Assistance Program](#) (2021).

¹⁰ *Id.*

TRANSPORTATION

- Work with regional planning organizations, such as councils of government and metropolitan planning organizations, to share data and discuss issues like projections for metropolitan demographic change, student enrollment, affordable housing planning, school siting and construction, and other areas of common interest. Sound planning can help reduce transportation times and costs, and/or help schools meet enrollment targets.
 - For example, the Denver Regional Council of Governments has partnered with Denver Public Schools to assess the effects of demographic change on student enrollment and convening events to discuss these issues.¹¹ The North Central Texas Council of Governments analyzes school siting, construction, and access and serves as a convener of local jurisdictions and school districts.¹²
- Work with the local or regional transportation agencies to:
 - Offer free or low-cost bus and metro passes to magnet middle/high school students (Nashville is one example¹³).
 - Identify transit stops and possible additional stops proximal to magnet schools.
 - Align routing to minimize transfers.
 - Align bus or metro schedules to ensure students' on-time arrival to school.
 - Identify supplementary transit service, paratransit, taxi, or other rideshare options that may be available to school districts to support transportation to magnet schools.

Additional reading:

- Poverty and Race Research Action Council and National Coalition on School Diversity, *[Finding Common Ground: Coordinating Housing and Education Policy to Promote Integration](#)* (2011).
- Poverty and Race Research Action Council, *[Coordination of Community Systems and Institutions to Promote Housing and School Integration](#)* (2018).
- Poverty and Race Research Action Council, *[Connecting Housing and School Integration Research, Practice, and Policy](#)* (2021).
- Genevieve Siegel-Hawley, National Education Policy Center, *[The Potential for Land Use and Housing Reform to Address School Segregation and Educational Opportunity](#)* (2024).
- For general information about the housing/schools landscape and how it relates to the work of magnet schools, see *[The Reciprocal Relationship Between Housing and School Integration](#)* and *[Housing and Schools: The Importance of Engagement for Educators and Education Advocates](#)*.
- Other resources related to the housing/schools connection can be found on PRRAC's website at <https://www.prrac.org/housing-school-nexus>.

¹¹ Denver Public Schools, *[Strategic Regional Analysis: Fall 2018](#)* 8 (2018).

¹² See North Central Texas Council of Governments, *School Site Planning & Access*, available at <https://www.nctcog.org/trans/plan/land-use/school-siting> (last accessed Mar. 29, 2024).

¹³ See POVERTY AND RACE RESEARCH ACTION COUNCIL, *[Coordination of Community Systems and Institutions to Promote Housing and School Integration](#)* (2018).