

To: School Committee
From: Lemma Jn-baptiste, Director of Finance and Operations
Date: February 23, 2026
RE: Buffer Zone Implementation

Buffer zones are areas identified on our district zone maps where newly registered students, or students whose home address is changing, may be assigned to one of two elementary schools.

The District has determined that buffer zones are needed as part of the FY'27 budget process in order to facilitate planning for Kindergarten classrooms.

Buffer zones create greater flexibility in student assignments, help us stay within class size guidelines, and enable staffing in a fiscally responsible manner. Buffer zones are especially vital in a district that experiences fluctuations in Kindergarten enrollment and has small elementary schools.

Guidelines for implementing buffer zones will be:

1. Existing school assignment zones will remain unchanged. This means that the primary elementary school associated with an address will remain the same.
2. Siblings will continue to be assigned to the same elementary school together. For the purpose of buffer zone assignment, rising Middle School students are not counted as siblings in the same elementary school. In addition, existing practices for student assignment to Special Education programs will be unchanged.
3. Families of students that reside in buffer zone addresses will be given the opportunity to state a preference for which elementary school to which they would like their child assigned. Family preference will be taken into consideration along with other pertinent factors, but will not be the sole determining factor in determining school assignment.
4. Buffer zones assignment will be used when the volume and pace of student registrations suggests that the enrollment at the start of the school year will likely exceed the school committee class size guidelines.
5. Buffer zone assignment will not be used before enrollment reaches specific thresholds:
 - a. Grades K-3: 18 students per classroom
 - b. Grades 4-5: 20 students per classroom
6. Bus detours and the length of bus rides will be minimized wherever possible. The ability of students to walk to school will be taken into consideration during assignment. Eligibility for yellow bus transportation for a buffer zone school will be determined in accordance with the School Committee transportation policy.

7. Families that reside in buffer zone addresses will be informed of the school assignment in accordance with the date of registration. If they registered by:
 - a. May 1, then they will be informed by May 15
 - b. After May 1, but on or before June 1, then they will be informed by June 15
 - c. After June 1, within three weeks or August 20, whichever comes first
 - d. After August 20, on a rolling basis at the time of registration

8. The final decision about school assignment for students in buffer zones rests with the Superintendent of Schools and is not subject to appeal.

Maps of elementary assignment zones will be generated with the buffer zone addresses indicated, and a list of the buffer zone addresses will be published. The district also intends to address frequently asked questions about buffer zones on its website, for ease of access for families.