



MAINTAINING LOTTERY INTEGRITY DURING TIMES OF CRISIS

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Clear and transparent lotteries are critical to ensuring equitable access for students to enroll in charter schools. All states require the use of lotteries in situations when charter schools are oversubscribed, and while quality authorizers ensure that all charter schools have appropriate lottery policies in place, policies and practices may require adjustments during times of crisis.

This guidance was developed to support authorizers in ensuring charter school lotteries are conducted with integrity and transparency in the best interests of students and families during the COVID-19 pandemic.

FOUNDATIONAL LOTTERY PRACTICES & CRISIS CONSIDERATIONS

1) REVISING POLICIES

Quality authorizers confirm that each charter school in their portfolio publishes a lottery policy (in all languages appropriate to the community) consistent with state statute on its website. The policy and process should always include, at a minimum:

- Any enrollment preferences or weightings (if allowable).
- The application period and/or deadline.
- A description of the lottery process including lottery date, location, and when and how families will be notified of the results.

During times of crisis, quality authorizers guide schools to update lottery policies and practices as appropriate and communicate changes to families and stakeholders as soon as possible. Consider counseling schools on statutory flexibilities (or available waivers) to extend lottery timelines to maximize equitable access to the process.

- Encourage schools to send out additional recruitment materials and/or reminders through multiple means and appropriate languages

so families don't forego opportunities for choice options while they juggle personal and professional challenges.

- Permit schools, as applicable, to lengthen the lottery application window as circumstances may prevent parents from dropping off paper applications at school sites and all families do not have reliable internet access to submit electronically.

2) EFFECTIVE NOTICING

Quality authorizers make sure charter schools adequately inform families, stakeholders, and the general public of their upcoming lotteries and opportunities to enter.

- Open houses, email, newspapers, newsletters, school websites, and social media platforms are generally useful and cost-efficient tools to help keep everyone informed in the weeks leading up to the lottery.
- Communication and noticing should include the grade span(s) and number of available seats to be filled via the lottery to help families gauge their students' likelihood of accessing a seat at a particular school.



During times of peak media consumption and competing priorities for many families, there is limited risk of over-communication—even when some information is in flux.

- Suggest that schools increase the frequency and modality of notices during times of crisis (such as personalized outreach and radio advertisements) especially if timelines shift to increase the likelihood of families receiving information.
- As schools may face significant uncertainties about overall enrollment for the coming year, authorizers can steer operators to use historical trend data, intent to return forms, and promotion-in-doubt information to forecast available seats.

3) HOLDING “OPEN” LOTTERIES

Quality authorizers hold schools accountable for ensuring lotteries are open and accessible to the public in terms of:

- Physical location,
- Capacity, and
- Accommodations for individuals with disabilities and translation needs.

During times of increased stress and uncertainty, it is even more critical that schools conduct lotteries with transparency even if the definition of “open” must change to protect the health and safety of the community.

- If large gatherings are not recommended, authorizers should encourage schools to conduct lotteries virtually with live streaming (such as Facebook Live, YouTube, Google or Livestream.com). Schools must ensure appropriate representation is present at the actual lottery site and communicate with families and community stakeholders about how to access the live streaming.

- Under circumstances where in-person convenings are not permitted, implementing an electronic lottery is an efficient option. Authorizers can share examples, such as this one from the New York City Charter School Center, to demonstrate how this can be done with limited technology and at low cost.
- In either case, authorizers should require schools to record the lottery, post recordings to the schools’ websites, and provide transcriptions of the recording as appropriate to refute any allegations of impropriety.
- After the lottery, authorizers ensure schools appropriately notify stakeholders of the results, including those students being offered seats and those on waitlists. During times of crisis, many families will appreciate extended time to make enrollment decisions considering possible changes in employment, housing, or other situations.