



NORTH CAROLINA OFFICE OF CHARTER SCHOOLS WEIGHTED LOTTERY GUIDANCE

Disclaimer: This document is for guidance purposes only and does not supersede any statute, rule, or policy. Please contact the Office of Charter Schools at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction with specific questions.

Pursuant to state statute [115C-218.45\(g1\)](#) and State Board of Education [Policy CHTR-014](#), a weighted lottery must align with the mission of the school and either:

- (a) be approved in the original charter application; or
- (b) be approved through the amendment process.

An amendment for a weighted lottery requires State Board of Education approval. As a result, this process takes a minimum of three (3) months once all materials are prepared and submitted to the Office of Charter Schools. Documentation will be submitted and collected through the Epicenter system. Please contact Ashley Baquero at ashley.baquero@dpi.nc.gov to begin the amendment process or for further information about weighted lotteries and/or amendments.

Federal Guidance

- Weighted lotteries are defined as those that give additional weight to individual students who are identified as part of a specified set of students falling under the educationally disadvantaged definition.
- Educationally disadvantaged students include – students who are economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, migrant students, immigrant students, English learners, and homeless or unaccompanied youth.
- Prohibits the use of weighted lotteries for the purpose of creating schools exclusively to serve a particular subset of students.

Economically and Educationally Disadvantaged Students

Weighted lottery policies must adhere to the following guidance for the subgroups of students that are eligible to be considered for a weighted lottery:

1. The weighted lottery shall provide students who are economically disadvantaged with additional weight in the lottery. Socioeconomic status, and economic disadvantage specifically, is often the closest statistical indicator of educational disadvantage. Schools should be mindful of the marketing and recruitment strategies they employ to ensure that weighting for economic disadvantage does not exclude other categories of educational disadvantage.

2. Schools have the flexibility to provide weighted preference for students who meet other educationally disadvantaged designations. Therefore, in addition to providing weighted preference for students who are economically disadvantaged, a school may choose to provide weighted preference for any additional categories of “educational” disadvantage. The additional subgroups of students defined as educationally disadvantaged are:
 - English learners;
 - Students with disabilities;
 - Homeless or unaccompanied youth;
 - Immigrant students; and
 - Migrant students.

In summary, weighted lotteries *must* provide preference for students who are economically disadvantaged and *may* provide preference for any additional categories of educational disadvantaged.

Weighted Lottery amendment requests should include:

1. A cover letter signed by the board chair and lead administrator (if applicable¹) that explains the following:
 - a. How a weighted lottery advances/aligns with the school’s mission;
 - b. How a weighted lottery allows the school to meet the needs of educationally disadvantaged students not currently served by existing high-quality schools in the area and/or allows the school to meet or exceed the percentage of economically disadvantaged students served by the local school administrative unit in which the charter school is located;
 - c. Current or projected economically disadvantaged (or educationally disadvantaged subset the school is targeting) student enrollment numbers;
 - d. The specific goal percentage the school hopes to reach through the weighted lottery – for example, 35% economically disadvantaged students in year one;
 - e. An explanation as to how the board determined the weighted lottery percentage goals; and
 - f. A detailed plan that evidences the school’s outreach, recruitment, support, and retention of the subset of students targeted through the weighted lottery.
2. The board-approved admissions/lottery policy that follows the guidance below.

****The policy should be reviewed and approved by the Office of Charter Schools PRIOR to seeking board approval.***

3. Board minutes showing approval of the policy and decision to request an amendment for a weighted lottery.

¹ Newly approved charter schools may not have a lead administrator hired at the time of request. In this case, board chair signature will suffice.

4. Tracked-changes version of the original charter application showing “YES” for a weighted lottery and answering any questions requested in the application regarding a weighted lottery.²
5. Clean version of the original charter application accepting all changes made.³

Admissions and Lottery Policy

This information should be specifically outlined in the school’s admissions/lottery policy:

- ✓ Information concerning the circumstances in which a weighted lottery would be used, including the specific categories of students the weighted lottery would favor – either economically disadvantaged or educationally disadvantaged. A school should determine what criteria qualifies a student for the weighted lottery and use correct and consistent terminology – either “economically disadvantaged” or “educationally disadvantaged” – in policy and application materials.⁴
- ✓ The school’s plan for running the weighted lottery. Weighted lotteries are typically conducted in one of the following ways:
 - **Weighting a student’s individual chances in the general lottery.** In this approach, a student who opts into a weighted lottery is given a statistically higher chance of being selected through a random, general lottery. For example, Student A, who qualifies for the weighted lottery, is weighted two times (2x) in a general lottery compared to Student B who does not qualify. An easy way to think about this is through a lottery that randomly pulls ping pong balls for available seats. Student A would receive two (2) ping pong balls placed in the lottery, while Student B would only receive one (1). Therefore, Student A has a higher likelihood of being selected based on their additional weight.
 - **Conducting the weighted lottery prior to the general lottery.** In this scenario, students who qualify for the weighted lottery are randomly chosen until the specified target percentage is filled. Then, the remaining students who qualify for the weighted lottery, but were not selected, are placed into the general lottery pool, and the remaining seats are filled through a general lottery. For example, a school setting a twenty percent (20%) weighted lottery threshold would draw students qualifying for the weighted lottery first to fill that designated twenty percent (20%). Any student qualifying for the weighted lottery that is not selected in the initial drawing is then placed into the general lottery,

² If your application asks for admissions information, state “See board-approved policy.” This is usually question #2 in the application, depending on the year of the application. If your school’s original charter application was prior to 2017, you will not have a section on weighted lottery. In that case, please reach out to Ashley Baquero (Ashley.baquero@dpi.nc.gov) for a template document.

³ Once the State Board of Education approves your amendment request, this becomes your new charter application.

⁴ If a school chooses only to weight economically disadvantaged applicants, the term “economically disadvantaged” should be used. Otherwise, the term “educationally disadvantaged” should be used with an explanation of what subgroups will be weighted for lottery purposes.

and the school conducts a general lottery of all remaining students to fill the remaining eighty percent (80%) of seats.

- ✓ A school must assess eligibility for the weighted lottery using an optional form. The form should state that the family gives consent for the school to verify economically or educationally disadvantaged status. The school should determine the criteria used to verify status. For economically disadvantaged students, it is usually household income or free and reduced lunch eligibility. For educationally disadvantaged students, the school will need to determine how to verify eligibility for each subgroup of student. For example, students with disabilities could be verified with an IEP. The school should specify in the policy what criteria the school is using to verify eligibility for the weighted lottery. **Verification should not take place until a student has been enrolled through selection in the weighted lottery.**
- ✓ The weighted lottery application should be separate from the standard lottery application for the school.
- ✓ The weighted lottery application should be clearly labeled as optional and that choosing not to provide the information will not alter chances in the general lottery.
- ✓ The weighted lottery application should include the following statement (or something similar) – “No specific information from your weighted lottery application will be obtained beyond eligibility status, and the information will not be retained.”
- ✓ If a family is selected for enrollment through a weighted lottery, they must provide supporting documentation of eligibility during the school’s regular enrollment process. If a family is unable to provide the supporting documentation necessary to qualify for the weighted lottery, the family should be contacted to offer assistance. If the family is still unable to provide the documentation, the applicant should be returned to the general waiting list.
- ✓ If the school holds a separate weighted lottery, prior to a general lottery, and an applicant qualifies for the weighted lottery, but is not chosen, the application should be placed in the general enrollment application pool.⁵

Monitoring and Support

Please reach out to the Office of Charter Schools for support and guidance in developing your school’s weighted lottery policy. Following weighted lottery implementation, schools should have data regarding weighted lottery applications and acceptances available upon request by the Office of Charter Schools. Schools should save detailed lottery records, including but not limited to printed and electronic documentation of the process, inputs, and results for a period of no less than three (3) years after the date of the lottery.

⁵ There are multiple approaches a school can take to run a weighted lottery and this should be specified in the policy. A school could give weighted chances (2x, 3x, etc.) to a weighted lottery applicant and only hold one lottery. In that case, this provision will not apply because the applicant is already in the general applicant pool.