The district’s Choice Committee held its biannual meeting on Tuesday, September 2nd in the Mellon Administrative Center. Initial item for discussion was an update on the marketing efforts for the since November, 2013. Stephanie Stuart, Director of Public Relations, shared that many aspects of the marketing efforts from the past continued such as radio ads, bus ads, Community Forums, Schools visits both during the day and at night. Additional efforts to engage families in the Choice process included offering a Welcome to Kindergarten brochure, Choice Chats, a Choice Liaison for families not able to tour at the assigned times, and yard signs. Some new ideas brainstormed by the group included audio messaging on the MTD busses as well as the use of school messenger to a targeted audience.

The next topic for discussion was a review of the current Choice Policy, 705.09. Many group members were a part of the effort last year to revisit several aspects of the policy as a part of the committee’s work in 2013-2014. Members affirmed that changing registration to a three month time span, January-March, allowed families a broader window in which to register. This also seemed to benefit the Choice office as they were able to provide more support to families given the longer registration time period. Other aspects of the updated policy the committee affirmed was the new language explaining proximity and clarity on unassigned students.

The group then discussed having all elementary schools be assigned a feeder school. Currently, BTW STEM Academy, International Prep Academy and Stratton do not have a feeder middle school. Dr. Zola will work with Choice staff to review capacities and implications for having these schools be assigned one of our three middle schools.

The committee reviewed current enrollment numbers K-8 and compared this data to last year’s Fall Benchmark Report. The current number of Kindergarten students is 811. The pattern of enrollments at or above 800 for our entry level grade continues. This will be the fourth year of that trend. The group notes a growth in first grade students as well. Last year’s kindergarten class was 848 and this year’s first grade class is 884. Similar enrollment patterns continue through middle school. Currently there are 2174 students assigned to the middle schools. Last Fall there were 2004, an increase of 174 students. Dr. Zola and Ms. Smith continue to monitor numbers as classes in some sections are exceeding 30 students.

Mr. Hohman provided an update on the new Choice software developed by Codagami. Mr. Hohman shared the initial run from the first year using this software went very well. The Codagami staff were easy to work with and responsive in providing on site support and regular meetings during the set up and implementation phases. Moving forward, the district will be saving $100,000 as the district owns the Choice software and will not need to contract out the service to run Kindergarten and transfer assignments.

Stephanie Stuart closed the meeting by highlighting some initial conversation on how to support families how are moving in outside the regular assignment periods. For example, a new Kindergarten family who moves in July may have a different experience of the Choice process versus a family that is applying between January and March. Stephanie will be taking the lead to revisit and review all aspects of the customer service work offered through the Choice experience. She will be meeting regularly with Choice staff to discuss various situations that may arise throughout the year and how best to respond so the family feels that their experience to enroll their child has been a positive one.

The group determined they will reconvene in the Spring following next year’s kindergarten assignment period. The meeting was adjourned at 6:41 p.m.