

THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF THE CITY OF BOSTON



English Language Learners (ELL) Task Force Remote Meeting

May 21, 2021
4:00 pm – 5:30 pm

NOTES

ATTENDEES

ELLTF Members and Staff: Janet Anderson, Farah Assiraj, Angelina Camacho, Paulo De Barros, Suzanne Lee (Co-chair), Katie Li, John Mudd, Maria Serpa, Marie St. Fleur, J.D., Fabián Torres-Ardila, Rosann Tung, Miren Uriarte, Jen Douglas (Coordinator)

BPS Staff: Dr. Brenda Cassellius (Superintendent), Peggy Chu (Equity & Accountability Program Manager, Office of English Learners), Daphne Germain (Assistant Superintendent, Office of English Learners), Vera Johnson (Director, Newcomer Assessment and Counseling Center), Faye Karp (Executive Director, Office of English Learners), Ellen Kelleher (Director, Office of English Learners / Special Education), Genevieve McDonough (Dual Language/English Learner Instructional Specialist, Office of English Learners), Chi Nguyen (Director of Equity & Accountability, Office of English Learners), Ahmed Noor (Director of EL Community Outreach), Massielle Pimentel (Office of English Learners), Silvia Romero-Johnson, Eleni Saridis (English Learner Instructional and Support Specialist), Claudia Willis (English Learner Instructional and Support Specialist, Office of English Learners), Dunja Ždero (English Learner Instructional and Support Specialist)

Public: Megan Costello, Roxanne Harvey (Chair, SpEdPAC, and prospective ELLTF member), Alan Jay Rom, Roger Rice, Bianca Vázquez Toness (Reporter, *Boston Globe*)

HANDOUTS

Office of English Learners

- “Response to the Questions on the Roadmap,” Office of English Learners, May 21, 2021

DISCUSSION

1. Welcome

Roll call

First	Last	Present?
Janet	Anderson	y
Farah	Assiraj	n
Angelina	Camacho	y
Paulo	De Barros	y
Geralde	Gabeau	n
Lisette	Le	n
Suzanne	Lee, Co-chair	y
Katie	Li	y

First	Last	Present?
John	Mudd	y
Lorna	Rivera, Co-chair	n
Maria	Serpa	y
Marie	St. Fleur, J.D.	y
Fabián	Torres-Ardila	y
Rosann	Tung	y
Miren	Uriarte	y

Goals and framing for today's meeting

Goal of today's meeting clarified by Lee and Germain, in response to questions from Torres-Ardila and Tung: to collect feedback from the ELLTF on the latest draft of OEL's Roadmap. (Note: The Roadmap will be in draft form still when it goes to the School Committee on 5/26/21. There are additional listening sessions scheduled as well. Feedback from the SC will be added to the other feedback to create a revised Roadmap.)

Tung: Does the draft we received earlier this week, in your opinion, answer the questions the ELLTF posed in our April 5 memo?

Germain: Some of them. We heard loud and clear that dual language is great, but to shift BPS to dual language in five years is the superman task—so what will we offer to students and families? And what about low-incidence language languages, how will they be served? Those are the questions we answered.

The plan appears impossible

Tung: It's helpful to see the tables for the roll-out of out-of-school and in-school PD, as well as greater explanation of what CLA would entail. It sounds like the "meat on the bones" would come after the SC approves the general direction, but for me it's hard to approve of the general direction without the numbers we've requested.

I think you know that I think this plan is impossible, and that most ELs, especially low-incidence ELs, will be in English-only, with monolingual teachers. We don't know the difference between CLA and SEI. I don't know the number of kids by language, or the number of teachers that you need by language and by program. I just don't see, especially with teacher mobility, how this will work.

Extent of community review

Uriarte: How much discussion has there been about schools with EL programs? I'm getting emails urging ELLTF members to be loud at the SC meeting. Have you talked with people about this?

Germain: We went through a series of conversations with principals and teachers, collected feedback, had a listening session with the BTU, two listening sessions with LATFs at schools, and met again today with the BTU. Stakeholder engagement has been happening since February. The draft that the ELLTF received was shared with others. A couple schools reached out to us and asked for their school to be a lab site. Central office, senior leadership, school superintendents, principals, teachers, BTU, and students on Monday as well. We've done a lot of engagement. The notes for each are open so that you can see what other people are saying.

Lack of clarity about developmental bilingual education (DBE) and services for ELSWDs

Mudd: I see two big gaps. One is around what you are calling DBE, developmental bilingual education, and other is around ELSWDs. On the first, it seems that the bulk of students will be in CLA, English immersion. And it looks like you're saying that 60% of students will be in dual language, we now have 7%. What happens to the remainder of students? What happens with language-specific SEI, or kids who could benefit from it and are now in multilingual SEI or gen ed? I see an inconsistency between the charts on page 24 and the charts on page 80 (developmental bilingual). The other is that there is almost nothing other than rhetorical mention of services for ELSWDs. The cohering programmatic approach, CLA, we've asked for evidence of its success somewhere and we don't see any evidence that you have brought forth. It sounds as though it is English immersion under fancy rhetoric—it may be valuable for teachers in general education but I'm not sure about the rest.

Applaud aspiration. Concern about distance between aspiration and what's possible

Torres-Ardila: Three things. One, the specific idea about multilingual learning is a step forward, the fact that teachers need to understand that they have a role in the development of language and that kids are not empty vessels, they have culture and language. Despite that I see a mismatch between aspirations and the programs that are being offered. Of the 5 programs offered, 4 have the purpose to become English speaking, and only dual language/DBE has the purpose to develop literacy in both languages. Is it about offering services for multilingual speakers to learn English, or something more? It's

not clear to me. For this reason, I don't feel I can really endorse this as the best education for ELs. On page 32 where you mention dual language it is the only one that is really shown to reduce the gaps between ELs and English speakers.

Tung: Another way to think about it is to look at the evaluation sections of the plan. They don't really prioritize native language access. There is one line. For me, the questions we posed weeks ago still stand—we need those numbers about how far away we are, especially for staffing.

Define multilingual

Lee: What is meant by multilingual?

Germain: Referencing the opportunity to open the door for heritage speakers and English-dominant speakers to learn a second language. One of the things we are offering is the opportunity to learn a world language. Come to a dual language program and become bilingual bicultural. Other, in partnership with world language, to work with schools that don't have the high preponderance of students to offer consistent world language supports for students to become bilingual and bicultural, whether students who already speak a language to grow.

Serpa: It seems to me that multilingual is an administrative label, because we are not committed yet to making every student bilingual.

Germain: The state recently released standards calling for all high school graduates to be proficient in another language, not just English. There is an opportunity to leverage that to make language available for all students across the district.

At this point, Germain presented "Response to the Questions on the Roadmap," Office of English Learners, May 21, 2021. See those slides for the information they contain.

ELSWD access to native language

Kelleher: Revealed that native language is still not regularly included in students' IEPs.

Germain: Clarified that slide 5 regarding ELSWDs includes ELDs 1–5.

Others are raising questions about whether the numbers make sense and whether it might actually be showing ELDs 1–3.

Staff language skills, staffing gaps

Li: Flags that the gap will be larger once the district can parse the difference between whether a person speaks a native language enough to provide students a bit of support and

communicate a little with families, or speaks it enough to actually teach in that language. The gap is more than just training paras to be teachers.

Germain: There has never been a formal test that the district implements to certify teacher language skills, even at the Hernandez. It has always been up to principals. “How do we officially qualify someone for language proficiency?” is a question the district is wrestling with (named a few options). Named various examples of teachers who come from another country and are working as paras in BPS, “there’s a pool”; “resources are here for us to be able to build up those capacities.”

Achievement gap

Serpa: Three things. 1. The achievement gap of bilingual ELL students. It’s documented. We have the data. It would be great to have that in the Roadmap.

Early childhood EL education

Serpa: 2. How does the Roadmap intend to address early childhood education for families who do not speak English, addressing developmental needs of early childhood?

Native language access, vision for native language access

Serpa: 3. Access to native language—how does BPS intend to promote and support outcomes related to native language, not just to access it, but a vision saying that kids have access to learning in a language they understand? Kids cannot learn language and content all at the same time and being asked to achieve at grade level how in the world can we do that. We need to be realistic about how we promote native language access.

Germain: In terms of setting expectations for students in a second language, the adoption of the AAPPL (ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages). Right now, the state doesn’t offer math in Spanish at the elementary level. We can use the AAPPL standard to set goal for proficiency in other language.

Serpa: There was a law that passed in 1997 in Massachusetts that was supposed to provide access to MCAS in other languages. It has been ignored. Learning English is necessary but it is not enough.

ELSWD access to native language

St. Fleur: If people are providing the assessment, whoever is part of the assessment team, are not lifting up the need for a language accommodation, it is necessary. Also, in the old days we were classifying students who didn’t speak English with disabilities because we didn’t understand their language.

Kelleher: Assessments are part of our DOJ reporting; we have been flagged on that. ELDs 1–3 have native language assessors and continue with those until it is determined that they can be assessed in English. Those are done by a bilingual person or an English person with an interpreter.

Lee: If the IEPs do not have language listed as a means of learning, then aren't we guessing as far as the numbers? If you list it in the IEP itself then by law, we have to provide that service, yes?

St. Fleur: Too many kids get left behind as a result of these practical things, and we have to raise it.

Kelleher: Feels confident that they are doing solid assessments for ELDs 1–3. They have received instruction that they do not need to put native language on IEPs; she knows that that needs to change.

Making a mindset change to align the district with the global communities of the city

Germain: When we look at the communities that are around us in Boston, we really have the opportunity to shift. Will it be perfect? No. But if we don't make the shift now it is a disservice to students. There was a stance, a mindset in the past, that resulted in the sorts of practices Kelleher was describing. Families are leaving Boston for the suburbs to get access to dual language / language immersion programs. Families are looking for those opportunities in Boston, whether through dual language, DBE, more. Your feedback is needed to make the plan better.

Lee: The way it is written now, it is not clear that we would get to that.

Coordinating across all impacted offices and functions

Anderson: I am concerned that the Roadmap misses out on the points of intersection with other district offices. That first question about learning English, we also have a new robust system around literacy for native English speakers. How are those two programs coming together? The most clear I see is around recruitment of staff, so some alignment with that office. What's missing for me is how this Roadmap weaves with other departments, the strategic plan, and how students come into the system and how it may change the student assignment system. We know to be successful it has to be a systemic weaving of programs that touch all parts of students' lives. In a very comprehensive Roadmap, I see that not being articulated.

Concern about distance between aspiration and what's possible

Lee: It seems like you want the whole district to be a language learning district. That's a heavy lift. It's almost like the whole plan rests on that. Can we get to that point?

Cassellius: Our district is already over 50% students who are multilingual. It's all the rest of us adults who need to adjust. That's what we're trying to do with this Roadmap, and put in some rigor.

Lee: That's the aspirational part. There are pieces missing. This is not a five-year plan.

Audit of current practices in schools?

Anderson: You mentioned that there are some schools already moving down this road. Is there any plan for an audit, a way of assessing what may be already happening in schools?

Coordinating across all impacted offices and functions

Germain: We could not have done this plan without the collaboration with other offices: OSC, OEL, Budget, Planning & Analysis (inc. BuildBPS), OHC. We've been looking at what's being said to us, programmatic changes and shifts that would need to occur, practices and policies, and things we do in the day-to-day functioning of BPS that need to change. There are two big policies that impact our ability to do programming specifically for grades K-6. How does a family opt in if they are caught between the Home-based Assignment Policy and the ELL Overlay? It requires conversation with community stakeholders. In the Roadmap you'll see a section called Student Assignment that spells out the vision around assignment—it still needs to go through the workgroups that have been helping us think through the shifts that need to occur. Then we will be in a position to set out the workplan with the next steps.

Putting numbers to program plans, for students and for teachers

Mudd: In order for parents to get the real choice you are talking about, you need to develop DBE more thoroughly, for those kids who are caught between dual language and gen ed. How many students do you anticipate in each program? What are the staffing needs? It's going to be a huge gap. We'd like you to identify "the roadblocks in the roadmap." How do we deal with teacher assignment? I've heard for years that unless we address that we're not going to meet the needs of dual language or SEI-language specific, must less fully developed DBE program.

Roadmap timeline

Lee: What is the timeline for this Roadmap?

Cassellius: Daphne and Silvia have the timeline in terms of the engagement process. We are going to take the time to get it right. We are going to be sure to develop the piece around special education. We want the academic piece to drive this program. We have a history around multilingualism where English-only was the law—there is work to do with moving

the organization forward. We have the DOJ agreement that has constraints around how to serve ELs. I'm very proud of the collaborative work Daphne and Silvia have done to move the district to this point. It's a heavy lift and will take many years. We have work to do around special education too – getting them right and getting it right together is a lot of work. We are working to put family liaisons in buildings. There is a real reality about getting bilingual teachers, matching them to programs, laying all of that out is critical to the vision. Knowing it is going to take time to get to the aspirational parts because we are coming from a history of an English-only state. We have a whole culture shift around valuing the assets that children bring to the classroom and the community.

We are not bringing it to the SC for a vote. We are using the guidance of the ELLTF from your presentation a year ago. We've developed a pretty solid plan in terms of a vision. If it needs more work and more operationalizing, we are happy to work to get it right. There is a point of trying to push the system to start some of it and phase in some pieces.

The ethnic studies curriculum, the seal of biliteracy, these are other pieces.

Lee: On Wednesday when this goes to the SC, it is just for approval to move forward? Not for approval of the plan?

Cassellius: I'm not sure what we're going to do on Wednesday. We want to move forward with full consensus. We need to make sure we socialize this with everybody. It's a big shift and a big vision and the right vision. We should value the assets that children bring and their capacities.

Concern about distance between aspiration and what's possible

Lee: Nobody disagrees with that. It's about how we get there. We want to see good work done with our students.

Mudd: One of the things that was difficult for us when we read through the long Roadmap. It reads as teaching English in English-speaking classrooms. It does not seem to value language as an asset not a deficit. That was a little hard to get around. The company that did the proposal did graining in Boston and it was Question 2 training, primarily for gen ed teachers who were dealing with ELs. So, there's an underlying orientation that doesn't seem to be post-LOOK Act, which is access to native language. That's been one of the difficulties of us engaging as fully as we would like in shared work to improve things for ELs and ELSWDs.