

THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF THE CITY OF BOSTON



Minutes of the English Language Learners (ELL) Task Force Meeting April 12, 2018

The English Language Learners Task Force of the Boston School Committee held a meeting on April 12, 2018 at 9:00am at Bruce Bolling Building. For more information about any of the items listed below, contact Michael Berardino, ELL Task Force Coordinator, at bpselltaskforce@gmail.com.

Call to Order:

Task Force Members Present: Miren Uriarte, Janet Anderson, John Mudd, Bob Hildreth, Maria Serpa, Farah Assiraj, Cheng Imm Tan, Diana Lam and Michael Berardino - Coordinator. **Other persons and BPS Staff Present:** Priya Tahiliani, Faye Karp, Nicole Wagner Lam, Renee Robinson-Omolade, Alberto Carrero, Genevieve McDonough, Roger Rice and Alan Jay Rom (META), Michael Loconto **Members Absent:** Suzanne Lee, Alejandra St. Guillen, Geralde Gabeau, Abdul Hussein, Patricia Crain de Galarce, Paulo DeBarros, Andres Alonso.

Introductions

Miren Uriarte, Co-Chair, of the Task Force opened the meeting. Dr. Uriarte provided the Task Force with a number of updates. Karla Estrada Deputy Superintendent of ASSET will be leaving the district. She has done a tremendous job with advancing issues around ELLs, especially ELL-SWDs and the Task Force hopes this work will continue with her replacement. There are also other changes happening. Michael Berardino, the Coordinator of the Task Force will be leaving the position at the end of the school year. Finally, Dr. Uriarte will be leaving the School Committee in December. All this, together with the search for the OELL director will potentially produce a lot of change around ELLs in the district.

Discussion with Michael Loconto

The new Chair of the Boston School Committee, Michael Loconto, introduced himself to the Task Force. The goal of the discussion was to get a handle on how the Task Force operates, ensuring that all the Task Forces and the School Committee are aligned and being efficient, and to make sure there is support from the School Committee for the work being done by the ELL Task Force. Coming out of the budget cycle, the School Committee has a couple of major initiatives. First, they are working on advocacy for the district to the state that Chapter 70 funding is inadequate. They are working closely with the Mayor's office regarding bills at the state level that will benefit the district. Second, Mr. Loconto is looking to organize the School Committee planning in a more coherent way to increase transparency. The School Committee recently had a retreat to lay out the critical topics for the upcoming school years and will continue to have these types of planning meetings, bringing in stakeholders from the Task Forces and other working groups. The goal is to provide the public with ample planning time and the district with time to organize around the important topics.

The leads of the ELL Task Force Subcommittees provided Mr. Loconto with updates on their work and areas where they could use support from the School Committee.

- **Parent Engagement:** Rev. Cheng Imm Tan share her groups four key working recommendations: 1) District-wide recommendation to better train, support, resource, and hold school leaders and educators accountable for family engagement for all students, including ELLs. 2) Build culturally and linguistically welcoming school environments and culturally relevant curriculum that affirms our diverse student body and families. Commitment to better train, resource and hold school leaders and educators accountable to this recommendation. 3) Build language capacity at the district and school levels, both oral and written to communicate with parents in schools. 4) Ensure adequate information and outreach to familiarize new immigrant parents with the school registration process (including the registration timing and schedule) and help parents understand how to pick schools that best their children's needs. They developed these recommendations following site visits and conversations with parents at schools. They discovered that there is a massive gap between how engagement is discussed and planned on the district level and how it is actually implemented. There are two major areas the School Committee could help with: **increasing funding and support** for the engagement efforts in OoE and OELL, who are understaffed in this key area; and **increase accountability** for school leaders to actually implement family engagement plans. The Parent Engagement includes OoE, OELL, and members of CBOs at every meeting and has connections to the Citywide Council
- **SPED-ELL:** Maria Serpa shared updates on the work of the SPED-ELL Subcommittee's work: 1) creating a guidance document for working with SPED-ELL students (DESE has shifted focus more to the LOOK Bill); 2) conducting a pilot study on IEPs for SPED-ELL students and seeing how they are being implemented; 3) analyzing the academic performance of EL-SWDs (which was eye-opening); 4) analyzing the number of staff in the district working with SPED-ELLs and understanding if the staff's certification and languor proficiency matches the needs of SPED-ELLs; and 5) discussing language access concerns – allowing SPED-ELLs to learn content in the least restrictive environment possible.
- **Human Capital:** John Mudd shared the work of the Human Capital Subcommittee: 1) Attempting to identify a baseline for the current staffing in the district, which has been unsuccessful, to identify the level of need for certified teachers who speak the native language of their students; 2) Understanding the match between current teachers and the students in the district (being done by SPED-ELL subcommittee by hand); 3) Monitoring the pipeline, recruitment, and development programs to help increase the number of qualified ELL teachers in the district. The School Committee can help push for interdepartmental cooperation and coordination to address these critical human capital issues. OHC alone cannot solve these issues without help from Academics and the ASSET team.
- **Student Assignment:** Janet Anderson provided updates on the Student Assignment Subcommittee. Both Janet Anderson and Miren Uriarte are working with the district on the equity analysis of the Home-Based Assignment Plan, which is being conducted by BARI. So far, the discussions have been very challenging because ELLs have not been a focus of the equity analysis. The goal of the subcommittee is to link the work looking at program quality and student assignment so that programs are placed and developed in schools where they will provide the most benefit, as opposed to dispersing students across the city.

Michael Loconto said that he wants to have at least annual visits to the ELL Task Force to hear these types of updates and stay involved with the work of the Task Force.

Opportunity Index

Nicole Wagner Lam of ODA and Renee Robinson-Omolade from the Office of Partnerships presented on the Opportunity Index (OI), a new method to increase equitable distribution of funds. The OI is being

developed with the help of BARI. The OI is in the pilot stage and the School Committee still needs to vote on the full use of the OI.

The OI is guided by the “North Star” that BPS graduates be college, career, and life ready. The mission is to close opportunity and achievement gaps and one of priorities to pursue this mission is to allocate funds more equitably. The theory of change underpinning this work is that the school is the unit of change—school leaders with the right supports and systems will propel their schools and communities forward. Part of the motivation for the OI is the measures of student need such as WSF are too “blunt” and there is a lack of a common equity framework that is used for making equity-driven decisions.

The district defines the Opportunity Index as “a tool that serves to more equitably distribute resources to schools. Opportunity Index scores are school-level scores based on the neighborhood, family, and individual characteristics of the school’s students. The score intends to measure variables outside of schools’ control to account for the needs and challenges of their student populations.” The indicators that are part of the OI are in three categories identified through multi-level linear modeling: neighborhood characteristics, family characteristics, and individual student characteristics. The neighborhood characteristics are: academic achievement of adults, socioeconomic status, public safety, physical disorder (condition of structures and spaces, and custodianship (resident efforts to improve spaces). The family characteristics are economic disadvantage. The individual student characteristics are: Math or ELA course performance, Math or ELA MCAS performance, attendance, and suspension. From these three levels of characteristics there is an OI Score for each school between .01 and .99. The score is a weighted composite of the individual, family, and neighborhood characteristics of each school’s student populations. The FY19 Opportunity Index will be recalculated for FY20 to reflect changes in enrollment and refinements to the model.

| Neighborhood Categories | Grades Included | Indicator | Data Source | Definition |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|--|---|
| Academic Attainment | All Grades | Postsecondary attainment | American Community Survey (ACS) | Percent of census tract adults who have earned a Bachelor’s degree or higher |
| Neighborhood Safety | All Grades | Gun Use | Boston Area Research Initiative (BARI) | Rate of events that involve the use of guns (e.g. shooting) |
| | | Private Crime | BARI | Rate of events that reflect interpersonal conflict in the neighborhood (e.g. domestic violence) |
| | | Public Crime | BARI | Rate of events that reflect interpersonal violence that do not involve a gun (e.g. fight) |
| Socioeconomic Status | All Grades | Family Poverty | ACS | Rate of poverty at the Census Tract level |
| | | Median Household Income | ACS | Median household income of Census Tract |
| | | Public Assistance | ACS | Rate of receipt of SNAP benefits at the Census Tract |
| | | Unemployment | ACS | Rate of unemployed individuals 16 years of age and older at the Census Tract |
| Custodianship | Elementary | Custodianship | BARI | The likelihood that residents will use 311 to call in an issue in the public domain (e.g. pothole) |
| Physical Disorder | Elementary | Physical Disorder | BARI | The deterioration to and denigration of neighborhood structures and spaces, a combination of two measures from 311 reports regarding <i>private neglect</i> and <i>public denigration</i> |

| | Elementary | Middle | High |
|-------------------------|------------|--------|------|
| Neighborhood | | | |
| academic attainment | √ | √ | √ |
| custodianship | √ | | |
| physical disorder | √ | | |
| public safety | √ | √ | √ |
| socioeconomic status | √ | √ | √ |
| Individual | | | |
| Econ. Disadvantaged | √ | √ | √ |
| Leading/Risk | | | |
| chronic absenteeism | | √ | √ |
| course failures | | | √ |
| MCAS ELA failures | | | √ |
| MCAS Math failures | | | √ |
| one or more suspensions | | √ | √ |

For FY19, the district applied the OI to the allocation of \$6 million in partnership funds, awarded to schools with an Opportunity Index score less than 0.57. Altogether, 60 schools received FY19 funds. As compared to the FY18 distribution for partnership funding, schools that received FY19 funding had a higher proportion of Economically Disadvantaged (7-point increase), Black students (11-point increase), EL (4-point increase), and SPED (1-point increase). There were lower proportions of Asian and White students and the proportion of Latino students remained the same. Compared to FY18, in FY19 53 schools gained or maintained partnerships funds, 7 lost some partnership funds, 33 lost all partnership funds, and 35 never received partnership funds.

EL Status and SPED Status is not included as family or student characteristics.

The BPS and BARI researchers conducted the multi-level research and included the indicators that were highly predictive of outcomes. The decision to not include ELL and SPED as an individual student characteristic was also related to the WSF, which already provides schools extra funding for ELLs and SPED students.

Q: [Farah Assiraj] Where other factors considered for ELLs or immigrants, such as number of years in the country?

A: [Nicole Wagner] This was not included in the analysis.

Q: [John Mudd] In the November 2015 presentation to the School Committee when the OI was first introduced, the presenters identified ELLs and SPED as key student characteristics. What changed?

A: [Nicole Wagner] The model included the indicators that the analysis showed were highly predictive of outcomes.

Q: [Miren Uriarte] If ELL and SPED were not included because they are represented in the WSF, why is Economically Disadvantaged included as an Indicator in the Opportunity Index?

A: [Nicole Wagner] The decision was a result of the analysis.

Q: [Miren Uriarte] The Economically Disadvantaged measure has many issues related to immigrants. It takes 5 years in the country to qualify for the services and programs that are used to determine this measure and if you are undocumented you cannot qualify for any. The study they conducted on this

variable suggests that immigrants are underreported. This means it is a problematic variable. Additionally, the use of median household income as a measure of neighborhood SES is also problematic. Immigrant households include multiple earners, so the median household income can be somewhat misleading.

Where there any ELL/immigrant experts involved with the research?

A: [Nicole Wagner] The researcher team included BARI researchers, ODA, OAG, Office of Equity, and Instructional Superintendents.

Q: [Farah Assiraj] This is typical of conversations where immigrants and ELs are not adequately represented.

Q: [Miren Uriarte] This cannot go forward without cleaning this up. What can be done to clean this up?

A: [Nicole Wagner] There are community engagement efforts where they will receive feedback and there will be analysis of the FY20 data.

The Task Force agreed that there has been great work by the district with partnerships and increased focused on equity.

META Presentation on SLIFE

Roger Rice and Alan Rom from META shared research on the SLIFE program in the district. The basis for the comments are based on visits to classrooms, interviews with teachers and administrators, and a review of student records and data.

The SLIFE program was originally called the Literacy Program, developed by Haitian teachers at Hyde Park High School in the late 1980s. The program showed success in improving graduation rate increases and college going among Haitian students who came to Boston having missed school. The program became part of the Amended Court Order in Federal court case in 1994. In other words, in Boston the SLIFE program is the law.

The key components set forth in the Court Order are: requirement of two teachers, one native language and one ESL teacher working together; class size will not exceed 25; coordination on thematic units based on knowledge and experience of students; the courses include native language reading development, ESL, basic math, science, social studies, and electives (art or PE). The goal of the program is that after two years students will be able to move into the grade 7 (for upper elementary or middle school) or grade 9 curriculum (for high school). But this two-year goal was the goal of the program, not an explicit requirement.

For high school SLIFE students, the Court Order requires: full credit towards diploma for completion of courses; GED program options; comprehensive support services, e.g. group counseling, peer tutoring, mentor program, individual meeting with guidance counselors who speak the students' language; vocational and/or school-to-work component hands on skills; for students over age 16 combining academic study in morning with job training in afternoon; and equal access to physical education, art, music, and computer.

There are several problems META has identified with the SLIFE program in BPS.

Disappearing students: On May 24, 2017 there were 456 students. On October 27, 2017 there were 286 SLIFE students, nearly a 40% drop. An additional 52 May SLIFE students are no longer found in BPS. There are about 12,500 ELLs in BPS at grades 2-12, but only 286 are SLIFE. As a Reference point in New York 8.7% of ELLs are SLIFE and 10% in New York City.

Why are students leaving the SLIFE program? According to several teacher who were interviewed as part of META's work, they found that schools were exiting students after two years because they thought it was mandatory, even though they knew students were not ready to exit. META believes that "through

misunderstanding, neglect, or intent, students have been pushed out of the program they need and to which they are legally entitled.” As of December, about 55% of SLIFE who exited last Spring had one or more grades of D or F in their SEI classes. A review of SLIFE program files showed that virtually no SLIFE high school students received the services to which they were entitled under the Order, e.g. vocational opportunities, counseling, art, music, PE, etc. There is a lot of confusion at the high school level about course credit (some guidance counselors don’t think students can get credit for SLIFE/HILT Math or Science because it is not in English).

There are critical program needs:

- 1) Stability in leadership at the district level. There has been constant turnover, which means every initiative is restarted again and again without implementation.
- 2) Support for the SLIFE program from School Committee and district leadership is urgently needed.
- 3) Clarity and help in designing and acquiring curriculum. Teachers are placed in classes and have to “wing it”. There are schools where the teachers have to design their own curriculum every year, adjust to new students entering throughout the school year. Some of the SLIFE teachers are the most talented teachers in the district, but they do not have clarity or support in how to design the curriculum. There is guidance from the state, but this is different than the Court Order in Boston. There needs to be clear guidance from the district.
- 4) Ongoing Professional Development and mentoring of teachers required “graduate level courses” in literacy instruction required by Court Order.
- 5) Uniform procedures to identify students for services and identify those who can move on based on grade 7 and grade 9 curricula aligned to Massachusetts curriculum standards.
- 6) Full implementation of supports required for high school students.
- 7) At point of entering SEI there is a need for added services including native language and English tutors for former SLIFE students, training of SEI teachers in how to meet needs of former SLIFEs, training of school level administrators in how to address the needs of former SLIFEs.

There are also attitudinal and institutional barriers to program success. The perception is that the program is too expensive. The perception is that students are too far behind and their presence in a school will drag down accountability levels and make principals, teachers, and BPS look bad. Is it easier to disperse SLIFE students across schools rather than implementing programs?

[Farah Assiraj] is a former SLIFE and SEI teacher. In her SEI classroom, maybe 13 out of 20 students were former SLIFE students. These students have experienced real trauma and there isn’t SEL support for teachers or the students.

[Priya Tahiliani] OELL and META have been working together on the SLIFE program. They are having these tough conversations. There is increased awareness in the district of the SLIFE program - Dr. Chang is teaching a SLIFE class on that day. They are also working to place SLIFE programs in Tier I schools. They have identified the “missing” SLIFE students. The district is working on a clear guidance for schools that there is not a 2-year cap.

This is a topic that the Program Quality Subcommittee will look into. Are there design issues in the program itself? If half the kids fail courses in SEI is this a program design problem? This also sounds like a perfect opportunity for Personalized Learning.

META also provided a brief update on the resolution of Title I funds. The district and META negotiated that there will be \$1 million in funds to compensate for the previous mis-allocation of Title I funds. The funds will be used for ELL investments including an EL expert in OAG and an EL curricular expert. They

will still have to negotiate for SY18. The district is using two new procedures – internal procedures have been tightened and 2) working with META to properly allocate the funds, identified areas to improve.

Updates from School Committee

Miren Uriarte provided some updates from the School Committee.

- The budget was very rosy this year. However, it will be important to pay attention to enrollment projections moving forward.
- There was an additional focus on SEL – ended up an additional \$2.5 million for SEL and part of this will go to building language capacity within SEL.
- There will be a focus of Opportunity Index, especially looking at the increased partnerships. There is only one partner that is a Latino organization.

Minutes were approved unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned.