

THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF THE CITY OF BOSTON



Public Meeting Notice and Agenda English Language Learners (ELL) Task Force Meeting

**Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building
2300 Washington Street
School Committee Chambers - 2-01
Roxbury, MA 02119
January 21, 2020
10:00 a.m. – 1:00 pm**

Attendees

ELLTF Members and Staff: Farah Assiraj; Angelina Camacho; Jen Douglas, ELLTF Coordinator; Geralde Gabeau, IFSI; Katie Li; John Mudd, Advocate; Lorna Rivera, ELLTF Co-chair; Fabian Torres-Ardila; Rosann Tung

BPS Staff: Carlene Briner, Interim Chief of Staff; Faye Karp, Director of Data & Fiscal Accountability; Genevieve McDonough, Dual Language/English Learner Instructional Specialist, Office of English Learners; Ellen Kelleher, Office of English Learners/SPED; Tammy Pust, Senior Advisor, Office of the Superintendent; Priya Tahiliani, Assistant Superintendent, Office of English Learners; Andrea Zayas, Chief Academic Officer

Public: Asha Abdullahi, Somali Parents Advocacy Center (SPACE); Jenna Russell, reporter, The Boston Globe

Handouts

Superintendent's Office

- Strategic Planning Update, Dr. Brenda Cassellius, Superintendent and Dr. Charles Grandson, Chief Equity and Strategy Officer, January 15, 2020

Budget Office

- Update to the ELL Taskforce, Nathan Kuder, Chief Financial Officer
- BPS ELD Level Projections FY12–FY21
- FY20 Budget Collaborative and Probable Organization Guidance for English Learners, December 2019
- FY21 Budget Collaborative and Probable Organization Guidance Document, December 10, 2019

Office of English Learners

- Presentation to EL Task Force, Priya Tahiliani, Assistant Superintendent, January 21, 2020

ELL Task Force

- Minutes of the ELL Task Force Meeting, December 17, 2019
- ELLTF Strategic Plan Recommendations, submitted to Superintendent Dr. Cassellius on December 23, 2019

1. Welcome

2. Strategic planning discussion. Taking feedback on behalf of Superintendent Dr. Cassellius will be: Andrea Zayas (Chief Academic Officer), Tammy Pust (Senior Advisor to the Superintendent), and Priya Tahiliani (OEL).

Report from Charlene Briner, with news from the superintendent, and discussion.

- No final decision yet about leadership of OEL as Priya Tahiliani transitions to her new job in Everett. Likely will start with interim leadership. Will do our best to keep ELLTF informed as we move forward and to mitigate the concerns that can arise from ambiguity and uncertainty.
- A lot of the upcoming focus will be on implementation of the LOOK Act.
- Introduce Tammy Pust from Minnesota. She has deep expertise in special education. She will be working with the system to meet compliance and keep the focus in doing so on what is best for the kids, to think critically and creatively and more forward in an intentional way.

Member comments:

- Importance of a dialogue around the future of the Office of English Learners. Hopefully the next time we see the superintendent it won't be with an existing plan but will be to work collaboratively. Would like for ELLTF members to be participants in that discussion.
- We have had a commitment to diversity in the workforce for years. We have talked about adapting practices to the cultural and linguistic needs of students, but we've seen "one size fits all." You see what I'm saying. On February 5 we are expecting a budget and an operational plan (I understand that as the "how"). What will that look like?
- The distance between the goal and the measure is really the rub. That's where there have been issues under many superintendents.

Briner responses:

- What you will see on Feb. 5 when we release the budget to the School Committee, that will be the statement of how we operationalize the plan. The superintendent is also working on articulating strategies that we will be deploying that may not be reflected as clearly in the budget. I think you will see what we are lifting up and elevating in the budget in terms of operationalizing the strategic plan.
- The superintendent wants to maintain transparency but allow an iterative process in terms of plans to evaluate the strategic goals.
- The superintendent is an "iterative visionary".

How to provide input

- What is the deadline for input? We have 30 days from January 16 to February 14. There is a place on the BPS website to provide written comment.
<https://www.bostonpublicschools.org/strategicplan>
- Charles Grandson is the person synthesizing the input, including that received through the website and through meetings like this one. If it gets to Charles it will get to the superintendent.

Intro to superintendent's latest strategic plan presentation by Andrea Zayas, who will share TF member feedback with Dr. Cassellius and Dr. Grandson after the meeting.

See:

- *Strategic Planning Update, Dr. Brenda Cassellius, Superintendent and Dr. Charles Grandson, Chief Equity and Strategy Officer, January 15, 2020,*
- *ELLTF Strategic Plan Recommendations, submitted to Superintendent Dr. Cassellius on December 23, 2019*

Commitment 1: Eliminate Opportunity and Achievement Gaps

Member questions and feedback

- Where is the TF's recommendation for a graduation requirement that each student graduate proficient in two languages reflected?
- Where is the focus on access to native language? What is the specific commitment to access to native language?
- I can see that there is a priority on bi/multilingualism, but what percentage of ELs and what percentage of schools would actually be impacted? Who will be served?
- The specifics here are more than we have seen, but to have the amount of coverage that will actually lift most ELs to this level of programming is a major budget investment. I don't see that spelled out anywhere.
- Is there an opportunity for the anchor goals to have a number, to state, for example, the percentage of ELs that will be part of the anchor goal?
- The anchor goals don't necessarily measure the commitments that are stated.
- We are interested in the structural and systemic numbers attached to the commitments. If you added anchor goals that were directly related to the priorities it would allay some of the concerns. Put some numbers on it.
- The measures given do not hold anyone accountable to the priorities stated. (This observation was also made by School Committee members.)
- The anchor measures are student-centered in the main, not school-centered.
- All these goals are so budget-dependent, and there's no sense of how these goals are going to be operationalized.
- I see that goals regarding training are missing, the training that teachers would need in order to achieve some of the very ambitious goals.

Commitment 2: Accelerate Learning

Member questions and feedback:

- Unclear whether there is a commitment for ELSWDs to have access to native language.

- We have had goals around diversity since 1974 and have been out of compliance with a court decision for the percentage of Black educators at least for the past decade. We are nowhere near that and have had these goals for years. BPS is also nowhere near the School Committee policy that the diversity of (Black and Latino) teachers should match the diversity of the students.
- Related to these goals, what does it mean to accommodate students who have different life circumstances, who are joining BPS late in their school careers, juggling work, etc. Sometimes students need more than 4 years and that means success. When I hear all the focus on 4 years I'm not sure how we're accommodating that.
- Thinking about SLIFE and how we're accommodating. Also voc ed and what those pathways are. And thinking about an anchor goal and reduction of long-term ELs, we know that's a big population of students—what are the goals to move more students out of EL status?
- What about the community partners that are providing pre-K? I don't see them reflected here.
- What supports can we provide for students who are not diagnosed with a disability but need supports related to trauma?
- We have a long history of students not being in language-appropriate placement and not being with teachers who speak their language even though they are in single-language SEI classes or are SWDs. When I see your goals it assumes that everyone is properly placed and that's not the case.

Commitment 3: Amplify All Voices

Member questions and feedback:

- No mention of the appropriateness of the match between the language of family engagement people and the language of the parent community. We are talking about the need to hire a lot of bilingual people and I haven't seen that language in the process.
- There is no data for evaluating family engagement and we have found that out directly from BPS. So I am very concerned about the ability of the system to evaluate the efficacy of engagement efforts.

Zayas response:

- On that one I can share that in the 33 schools that are receiving extra resources this year that we are prioritizing language capacity in that family engagement position. I can't speak to whether that goal exists for other positions.

FOLLOW UP. I'm wondering if we could have a comparative table. Something that lists all the concerns and issues we've been working on for quite some time in one column, with a list of what is included in the strategic plan proposal in the other column.

Jen's summary of issues raised / possible responses from the ELLTF—just placeholder content for the moment:

1. Two columns—what is and isn't included
2. Adding specifics to the commitments—where a new/sought-after

commitment is included, we need a clearer statement of the objectives, with numbers

3. Accountability and evaluation—the anchor goals too often don't measure the commitments that are stated

4. Consequence—what will happen if a goal is not met? What is the next step?

Commitment 4: Expand Opportunity and Commitment 5: Cultivate Trust

Member questions and feedback:

- Here too the measures don't match. There is a lot of distance between your commitments and your measures. In 4 and 5 there are a lot of institutional goals and these are the ones that say how you are going to measure yourselves.
- In terms of accountability I think that's one thing we need to clarify. What does it mean to hold BPS accountable? To hold schools accountable? We see things and report and then nothing happens. You come, you do your report, and nothing happens. What does it mean to hold someone accountable? We need to clearly define what that means. What are the incentives that we are going to provide? That should be in the budget. For example with parent engagement, so we can see how we are going to put that piece into action. We know that parents must be engaged for students to be successful. What are we doing?

FOLLOW UP. Andrea will share her notes with the ELLTF via Jen, as well as with Dr. C and Dr. G.

FOLLOW UP. The public period closes on 2/14. Please submit comments online.

3. Enrollment projections and budget report (Nathan Kuder)

- **New budget procedures, allocations, accountability**
- **EL enrollment last year, this year, next year**
- **Budget proposals for EL programs and services**
- **Student Opportunity Act — what to expect**

See:

- *Update to the ELL Taskforce, Nathan Kuder, Chief Financial Officer*
- *BPS ELD Level Projections FY12–FY21*
- *FY20 Budget Collaborative and Probable Organization Guidance for English Learners, December 2019*
- *FY21 Budget Collaborative and Probable Organization Guidance Document, December 10, 2019*

The big story is that we continue to see enrollment declines throughout the city. Will discuss by grade level, race, and language group.

Note that the presentation included data for Black and Latinx students only.

FOLLOW UP. Request data for Asians. Nate notes that that data is noisier than data for Latinx and Black students, because smaller group size, but can be pulled if there is a request.

Should we request also information by language group?

As a weighted funding district, enrollment declines lead to budget declines lead to decreased parent selection of the school, a cycle that deepens itself. Looking to break that cycle in the coming year for target schools.

Will bring full budget to the SC the first Wednesday in February.

Some grade-level disaggregation:

- The current senior class is the largest one BPS will see for the foreseeable future. It is a trend we are seeing in the city, region, state. Calls it a trend that started 18 years ago of families having fewer children.
- Also BPS has had a pattern of students leaving the system in 4, 5, 6th grades. Looking to change.
- In the elementary grades we are seeing decline in enrollment. As those grades move up that cohort will continue to be smaller than it has been historically. We capture most of our students in K2. We are no longer getting a lot of students moving into the system at later points. We used to have a big jump in first grade, the first compulsory grade. We don't see that any more.

Member question: Have you thought about the impact of immigration laws on student enrollment?

Response:

- We are considering a number of factors. I don't want to overstate our ability to understand trends. We have started to partner with the BPDA (Boston Planning and Development Agency) and they bring a broader context on housing, but that's still in the early stages. We also get feedback from community and school leaders on the ground. I can say what is happening, but I don't want to overstate our confidence in why. We are still trying to improve that.
- Some of the enrollment decline is attributed to charter school expansion.
- Displacement may have to do with immigration trends, but BPS is looking at issues related to housing cost. That's another big factor.

Member question: When students exit the system is there data collected on where they move?

Response:

- We do collect that, it's a requirement for reporting on dropouts and graduation rates for students at the high school level. It's an area that has been flagged for better systems and tracking, it's mostly in the purview of the data accountability team, I know they are looking at that. They are also looking at exits to charter schools. It's not included in any of our modeling yet.

Explanation of Weighted Student Formula (WSF). There are weights for:

- Grade level
- SPED status
- ELD 1–3
- ELD 4–5
- Economic disadvantage
- Academic need
- CTE and inclusion programs
- [one other thing]

In making enrollment projections, goals are: transparent, accurate, smart (e.g., don't want to project 26 kids for a grade when class sizes are capped at 25 and you'd have to create a second classroom).

Student Enrollment Action Team (SEAT) takes responsibility for ensuring that there are enough seats for each student. It's an alternative process to WSF.

Member comment: I think the challenge of the budget collab is the staff that will be hired for the schools. How much are you looking at language match—need of student and teachers that are there—especially for students with disabilities.

Response:

- It's hard for us to do that as part of the budget process. That comes about more during Probable Org, with more participation from Human Capital.

Zayas question: Have you heard of examples where there's a mismatch between teacher's language and their assignment for working with students, and have you heard from school leaders about what the barriers are / do you have hypotheses?

Member response:

- Yes, all the time. Last we looked BPS could substantiate a match in only one-third of instances. We heard that a barrier was in teacher assignment, and heard that there could be some discussion with the union.

OEL:

- We brought that up with the BTU and they absolutely said no to that. We disagree but the union didn't budge. I am happy that you want to actively engage the BTU in that conversation. I suggest you go to the union independently.
- We put that issue on the table to incentivize language capacity for teachers. We put several options on the table. A stipend within the contract, other incentives beyond the contract (and we do understand the BTU's desire to have everything included within the bargained contract), more.
- OEL worked last year with the ELSWD subcommittee to create a self-assessment of language capacity. It is optional but is something that candidates can do when they apply for the job. We are hoping that what will help is the new bilingual endorsement from the state level to demonstrate proficiency.

Members:

- We want to join in that effort of talking with the union. I think it should be part of a larger strategy. I hope we don't just go shooting off on our own.

FOLLOW UP. Figure out how the ELLTF wants to coordinate with the union.

- On the ELSWD I don't think we have even adequate data. I am glad to see some language around recognizing ELSWD students in the budget guidance. But I do see that it refers to "native language clarification" and doesn't speak to instruction or support services. We would benefit from Nate's guidance on how to advocate for this issue in the planning period, not later.
- Technically as the BTU rep on this TF I think there are questions around, if that is true, whether that teacher gets pulled in different directions more than other teachers (responsible for their own teaching duties and for getting pulled in to do all the translation services of the school without compensation). That's the main contention, trying to protect teachers in the ways they are paid and not paid. It's a conversation between Budget and HC.
- Maybe the school should just hire someone who speaks that language and can perform those duties
- To answer the question about barriers we would need to have the historical record of what languages the teachers spoke, and would need to know whether they have academic proficiency.
- I don't want to leave it that it's just a BTU problem. I raised last year the possibility of prioritizing language match in hiring at the school level. There were averted eyes. I'm a big decentralist but you have to hold people accountable for system policies.
- That's the question of accountability. We've heard this story before.

FOLLOW UP. Ask Priya to give Andrea the report prepared by Yvonne about the lack of bilingual Special Education teachers.

Back to Nate:

Statement that the superintendent is interested in what Corey called "the marriage between accountability and autonomy"

Three-year \$100 million to BPS over and above our cost increases. An unprecedented amount we are given to think differently and fuel our strategic plan. We have an investment plan that I think will meet a lot of the needs you have been talking about, but can't talk specifically yet. See themes on slide 16.

English learners and students with disabilities are the core of our district. We need to put our investments there. When they succeed all students will be in a position to succeed.

Member comment: How about community partnership around student achievement? I'm hoping that as you are thinking about student outcomes you will also place a high emphasis on community partnerships.

Statement that BPS is committed to partnerships.

Member comment: SC is looking also to understand partnerships on a school by school basis. It can be an issue of inequity.

Member comment: Concern expressed about the plan to have one-teacher inclusion classrooms with a single ESL licensed teacher.

There is an Inclusion Working Group and I know this issue has come up. Addressing issues like this is a priority for the superintendent. She is looking to provide stipends for teachers willing to do this work, so that it's compensated, and to provide push-in resources. There can be ways to do it so there are a lot of adults in that classroom.

Member comment: I have seen situations where there are not push-in services and everything is left to the teacher. If you look at the experience of an EL or SWD through the day, you will see that those services aren't always there and when they are they are often fragmented. There are teachers trying to create magic every day and it's often around the funding.

Member question: Slide 15. Will the extra resources grow to be \$100 million in year 3?

Kuder response: Yes. \$28 million year one (FY21), \$28+36 million year two, then \$28+36+36 year three (comes out to \$192 million in total). It is in addition to the standard cost increases that BPS must pay, and separate from the \$1 billion over 10 years that is dedicated to BuildBPS. These dollars are a downpayment on the state's commitment through the Student Opportunity Act, which is projected to be about \$80 million. It is not extra beyond that. And it is banking on the state following through on those outlays, which it has not always done where Boston is concerned.

Member question: That funding that will support new staff and services largely at the high schools. That funding is guaranteed for how long?

Kuder response: We will be evaluating how well these changes are working, what allocations we may need to rethink, how well the services are aligned to enrollments. But we are committed to the idea that we are saying "every school should be able to have these resources."

Member: Yes but are you guaranteeing that for FY24?

Kuder: It is unique that we have a three-year commitment. We don't know what comes after that. A strong tax base, multiple years of strong fiscal management on the city side, the state coming forward to say there are additional resources, and a strong commitment from the superintendent. I do think we are establishing a new baseline commitment to our schools.

Member: I'm asking because some of these positions are non-union. People are being asked to move from a union to a non-union position and that has tremendous consequences.

Kuder: The family liaison position is being budgeted as a non-union position. Makes the distinction between "being asked" to move to a non-union position and having the opportunity to apply for such a position. In the past CFCs were all funded through WSF.

Now it is money above the WSF, and focused on schools with high percentages of ELs and high percentages of students speaking the same language.

Member question: What we've seen working on Engagement, is that some principals are more intentional and have the know-how. Others take more of a backseat and are not forthcoming about meeting the needs of the school. Do we have any recommendations as a TF around helping them to identify engagement needs? If we have money and make changes but don't see any change to meet the needs of the students in those schools, what then? How is that tracked by Budget?

Kuder: We ask our principals to do a lot. The marriage of accountability and autonomy is carried out through a number of collaborative steps with school leaders. Some of that will include making sure that the duties of the family engagement coordinator go beyond hall duty. Every school leader comes with areas of talent and some gaps, because we are asking a lot of them. Also, we start our budget process with enrollment projections because we need to know, "who are the students that we are serving?" It doesn't start with "who are the adults in your building and who are you trying to keep?" That was the way it was done seven years ago, but not now.

Member question: Slide 17. Re: BTU contract changes. How is this different than previous years?

Kuder: Now that there is a full-time para in K2 classrooms, there is an higher max class size there. We are now holding schools accountable financially for purchasing ESL services if their predictions about staff licensure in the school don't come to pass. That is new. I'm seeing a more explicit conversation around ELSWDs in the budget collab conversations.

FOLLOW UP. TF members can email additional questions and input to Jen, who can gather/compile and submit to Nate.

FOLLOW UP. Nate will send follow-up materials to Jen.

Nate encourages everyone to come to the budget hearings. Thinks you'll like what you see.

4. Office of English Learners Director's Report (Priya Tahiliani)

- **Share follow-up program and compliance data requested at last meeting**

See:

- *Presentation to EL Task Force, Priya Tahiliani, Assistant Superintendent, January 21, 2020*

Priya's last day at BPS will be February 7, 2020.

Please assume best intentions of those working hard in OEL. We are on the front lines every day for meeting the goals of many stakeholders. We are also concerned about the direction of OEL. The narrative that comes out of the TF becomes part of the perception of OEL. It is a tough line to straddle. I think we have made a lot of strides over the past few years that often go unnoticed. OEL is a very difficult place to work and this actually

contributes to greater turnover. We are nobody's best friend. This is a system that we are in, and we are advocating for English learners from the inside.

Please be thoughtful about data requests, make sure they are attached to actionable plans (not just for information). Completing 50% of our last data request took four days of FTE time.

Turned in on December 31: submitted application for heritage and dual language programming. Next steps if approved: placing programs, funding programs, enrolling.

Member question: What is the relationship between DELAC, ELAC, the ELLTF? I recently met with DELAC parents and heard that they want a) English language classes for parents at convenient times with childcare provided; b) technology training for parents; c) quality free programming for vacation weeks in summer.

Tahiliani: We had asked a DELAC member to sit on the ELLTF and it didn't work out. It may make sense for an ELLTF member to attend the meetings of their executive committee.

FOLLOW UP. Establish a working relationship with DELAC.

Member question: How is native language access dealt with in the ILPs?

Tahiliani: Native language access is something we see on IEPs under Type of Instruction. The native language issue we are talking about is in-house instructions to make sure students are receiving the required number of minutes. Any materials, support by a para, anything that has to do with native language, would be on the IEP. I am only one person but I do get out to IEP meetings, and the bilingual psychologists, speech therapists, OTs, etc., all understand that native language is important and I encourage them "Put it on the IEP. If it's on the IEP it has to be done."

We wish Priya the best and thank her for her decades of service in the BPS system!

- Thank you for your responsiveness. We have seen her always reply to email and show up to meet with the Haitian community.
- I hear you saying that all of a sudden this task force only relates to the OEL. That was never the case. It's falling to you all and not to the district and I think that is the error. That's something we need to take up. I know that for the OAG everybody shows up, all the powers that be. We need that all around the table so it doesn't become only the OEL. I'm sorry that that has had a consequence for OEL and is something new need to figure out.
- Thank you for your commitment, your passion, and your listening.

FOLLOW UP. A celebration for Priya.

I make a motion that the TF communicate to the super a desire to see an open, national search and a screening committee. We don't want to get left with a transitional appointment that gets validated. Seconded. Unanimously approved.

FOLLOW UP. Send a recommendation to the superintendent that we want to see an open search and a screening committee for the OEL leader.

5. Chairs' Report (Lorna Rivera)

- **Congrats and thank you to Julia. Appoint new member?**
- **SC report**

We are taking recommendations of more folks to join us on the ELL Task Force.

In attendance was Asha Abdullahi, who expressed interested in serving.

FOLLOW UP. Communicate with members about a replacement for Mejia.

6. Establish ELLTF community norms/expectations for meetings (Rosann Tung)

Postponed until subsequent meeting.

7. Approval of Meeting Minutes from December 17, 2019

Postponed until subsequent meeting.

8. Public Comment

None.

9. Adjourn

- **Custodial staff arrives at 1 pm to set up for a 1:30 meeting**