

# The SLIFE Program in the BPS

Neglect in a Program for Vulnerable Students

Basis for comments, visits to classrooms,  
interviews with teachers and administrators,  
review of student records and data

- Program was originally called the Literacy Program, developed by Haitian teachers at Hyde Park High School in late 1980s
- Program showed success in graduation rate increase and college going among Haitian students who came to Boston having missed school
- Program became part of Amended Court Order in Federal Court case, Civil Action Number 91-11725-Z (August 9, 1994). In Boston IT IS THE LAW

- Key Components as Set forth in Order:
  - Model requires 2 teachers, one Native Language one ESL working together
  - **“ Class size will not exceed 15”**
  - Coordinating on thematic units based on knowledge, experiences of students
  - Native language Reading development
  - ESL, two periods
  - Basic Math
  - Science
  - Social Studies
  - Electives (Art or P.E.)

- Goal 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).

- **GOAL**

- “an aim or purpose” – Cambridge Dictionary
- “an aim or desired result” – Oxford Dictionary
  - *My goal is to lose ten pounds before the summer*

- For High School Students 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
  - Equal access to physical education, art, music, computer

- Major Problems in the SLIFE Program

- #1 – Disappearing Students

On May 24, 2017 there were 456 SLIFE students

On October 27, 2017 there were 286 SLIFE students, nearly a 40% drop, WHY?

An additional 52 May SLIFEs no longer found in BPS, WHERE ARE THEY?

There are about 12,500 ELLs in BPS at grades 2-12, ARE ONLY 286 SLIFE?

## Reference points for Comparison

- New York State – 8.7% of ELLs are SIFE per *New York State Education Department ELL Demographics & Performance 2015-2016*. For New York City, approximately 10%
- “ 20 percent of all LEP students at the high school level and 12 percent of LEP students at the middle school level have missed two or more years of schooling..” Ruz de Velasco and Fix (2000, Urban Institute).

- Why Did Students Leave the SLIFE Program?

- “Those students weren’t ready to leave but I was told by the OELL I had to recommend they exit because of the two year mandatory cap” – BPS teacher
- “Some of them were only in the country for a year and were way behind but I had no choice but to go along with the exit rule” - second BPS teacher
- THROUGH MISUNDERSTANDING, NEGLECT OR INTENT, STUDENTS HAVE BEEN PUSHED OUT OF THE PROGRAM THEY NEED AND TO WHICH THEY ARE LEGALLY ENTITLED. WHY?

- As of December about 55% of SLIFEs 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.
- Confusion at school level about course credit
  - “They can’t get credit for SLIFE/HILT Math or Science because its not in English” – Guidance Counselor

## Critical Program Needs

1. Stability in leadership, can anyone name all the HILT/SIFE directors since 1994? Constant turnover means every initiative is restarted again and again without implementation
2. Support for 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”.
4. Ongoing Professional Development and Mentoring of teachers required “graduate level course” 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 9 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 needs of former SLIFEs

## Attitudinal and Institutional Barriers to Program Success

- \* Perception that program is too expensive

- \* Perception 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 SLIFE dispersal easier than implementing program?

## Final Thought

A Well Known Legal Maxim states that “ A Man Is Presumed To Intend the Natural and Probable Consequences of His Act”. Is the BPS trying to eliminate or let wither the SLIFE program? How does that help SLIFE students?