

THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF THE CITY OF BOSTON



Official Minutes of the Remote English Language Learners Task Force (ELLTF) Meeting

The English Language Learners Task Force (ELLTF) held a meeting on February 9, 2023 at 5–7 p.m. on Zoom. The meeting was in English with simultaneous interpretation in Amharic, Arabic, Caboverdean Creole, and Spanish. For more information about any of the items listed below, visit <https://www.bostonpublicschools.org/domain/247>, email jdouglas4@bostonpublicschools.org, or call the Boston School Committee Office at (617) 635-9014.

ATTENDANCE

ELLTF Members

Present: Janet Anderson, Paulo De Barros, Suzanne Lee, John Mudd, Rafaela Polanco Garcia, Maria Serpa, Marie St. Fleur, Fabián Torres-Ardila (and prospective members Michael Berardino, Ruth Mercado-Zizzo)

Absent: Angelina Camacho, Geralde Gabeau, Roxanne Harvey, Katie Li, Rosann Tung, Miren Uriarte (and prospective members Suguey Scannell, Linh Vu)

DOCUMENTS PRESENTED

- Minutes of the ELL Task Force Meeting, December 8, 2022 (English, Spanish)
- “Office of Multilingual and Multicultural Education (OMME) Update,” Dr. Linda Chen, Senior Deputy Superintendent of Academics and Interim Assistant Superintendent for the Office of Multilingual & Multicultural Education (English, Spanish, Amharic, Arabic, Cabo Verdean Creole)
- “FY24 Budget: Update to the English Learners Task Force,” Nathan Kuder, Chief Financial Officer and Jamie Racanelli, Director of Planning & Analysis (English, Spanish, Amharic, Arabic, Cabo Verdean Creole)

CONSOLIDATED FOLLOW-UP LIST

- Receive link from Monica Hogan for ELLTF members to provide input on the OMME Chief hiring search.

- Make arrangements with Monica Hogan for an ELLTF member to represent the Task Force in the semi-final interviews for the OMME Chief hiring process.
- Follow up with Chen about ELLTF participation in the OSE Chief hiring process.
- Make sure members receive Sarah King’s calendar invites and request the full meeting schedule for the strategic priority committees from King.
- Include a report on actions taken on the follow up items in the previous meeting’s minutes as part of the materials for upcoming meetings.
- Work with Kuder to get clarity on why more English learners were assigned to general education programs in SY21-22, and to what extent that change in assignment accounts for the increase that year in the number of English learners receiving ESL services.
- Track how the Reimagining Budget process takes up the idea of academic weights to account for the concentration of need in schools with large ML populations.
- Gather data to better understand how students are assigned to Gen Ed and to SEI multilingual programs.

CHAIRS’ WELCOME (SUZANNE LEE & RAFAELA POLANCO GARCIA)

Suzanne Lee, ELLTF Co-chair, called the meeting to order. She asked that simultaneous interpretation for the meeting be explained in English, Spanish, Caboverdean Creole, Arabic, and Amharic. Interpretation channels were opened to meeting participants.

Lee explained the purpose of today’s meeting: to learn about what a school budget looks like, in order to better understand how funding for multilingual (ML) students and programs, works in the district. She asked ELLTF members to leave space for the public to ask questions, and announced a new strategy to encourage public participation: attendees are welcomed to type questions into the chat in their own language. If an answer cannot be provided immediately, the ELLTF will aim to answer those questions in future meetings.

Rafaela Polanco Garcia, ELLTF Co-chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

UPDATE ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN FOR MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

Dr. Linda Chen, Senior Deputy Superintendent of Academics and Interim Assistant Superintendent for the Office of Multilingual & Multicultural Education, shared that she is a former English learner and has spent much of her career working with English learners, including as principal for a dual language school. She reminded ELLTF members that the head of the Office of Multilingual Learners has been elevated to a chief-level position that will participate in weekly meetings where decisions are made with the superintendent.

Hiring process for the Chiefs of the Offices of Multilingual Learners (OMME) and Special Education (OSE)

Chen spoke about two objectives: moving quickly to hire the Chief of OMME and implement the OMME strategic plan; and moving deliberately to collaborate with families and communities, to implement with high quality and fidelity to the plan, and to hire a chief who can work closely with OSE. “It's not just about compliance. That's the floor. It is about strong instruction. I'm focused on making sure there's interconnectivity and interdependence” so multilingual learners and students with disabilities are “everyone's responsibility.”

Chen spoke about areas of focus:

- Student and family experiences with the Newcomers Assessment Center and the process of working with family specialists to identify the best type of program for them.
- Monthly professional learning community time where school and district leaders observe classroom practices for multilingual learners — reading and writing using culturally and linguistically responsive texts, sometimes called “equitable literacy strategy,” and whether multilingual learners have access to grade-level content — and develop improvement plans. Scheduled for next month is a collaboration between multilingual instructional coaches and equitable literacy coaches about professional learning for school leaders, to “make sure every principal who supervises teachers and supports their development understands the needs of multilingual learners, and also making sure they're compliant and there's accountability in that.”

Chen explained that in the search for an OMME Chief the district is “looking for a leader who has a level of accountability to do this work” that “is not for the faint hearted” and who can “give 100% to make sure the work is done together, not by one person alone.” She said OMME is working closely with the Systemic Improvement Plan (SIP), of which the Strategic Plan for Multilingual Learners is a part.

Monica Hogan, Assistant Superintendent of Data Strategy and Implementation, shared updates on the hiring process for the OMME chief.

Hogan announced that she is overseeing / project managing the hiring process for the OMME chief. The district has contracted with Edgility, an external search firm, to conduct a national search. The position can be viewed on the Edgility website, at <https://apply.workable.com/edgility-consulting-4/j/B767D0BFBD/>. Previous recent applicants to the OMME position have been notified of the opening. There will be a stakeholder survey that ELLTF members can use to share their preferences and concerns about hiring for the position with the search firm and the district; it will be circulated via a public link. Hogan will work with the ELLTF co-chairs to arrange for an ELLTF member to participate in the semi-finalist round of interviews, with 4–6 candidates.

FOLLOW UP:

- Receive link from Monica Hogan for ELLTF members to provide input on the OMME Chief hiring search.

- Make arrangements with Monica Hogan for an ELLTF member to represent the Task Force in the semi-final interviews for the OMME Chief hiring process.

John Mudd, ELLTF member — referencing the recommendation in the Council of the Great City Schools’s (CGCS) recent report for better collaboration between OMME and the Office of Special Education (OSE), and the fact that one-third of Boston Public Schools (BPS) special education students are English learners — said he had not seen sufficient emphasis on multilingual learner students with disabilities in the draft job descriptions for OMME and OSE chiefs. He requested that ELLTF members be invited to participate in the search for the OSE chief.

FOLLOW UP:

- Follow up with Chen about ELLTF participation in the OSE Chief hiring process.

Polanco Garcia reported that, as a School Committee member, she has been receiving questions about who is driving the ship at OMME in the absence of a permanent leader.

Department of Justice reporting update

Chen informed ELLTF members that she met with the DOJ along with Superintendent Mary Skipper and outgoing OMME Executive Director Faye Karp. She paused for a moment to publicly thank Karp for her work over many years across multiple leadership transitions.

Janet Anderson, ELLTF Member, via chat: Thank you for recognizing Faye. She has been a critical backbone of the OMME office these many years.

Chen reported that, at the meeting with DOJ, Superintendent Skipper shared her vision for supporting multilingual learners, and how the district is continuing to build infrastructure for monitoring and compliance. Chen noted in particular that Hogan, in her former BPS position, had set up cross-functional technology data systems to track needed information.

Chen mentioned training and support for key staff across the district around multilingual learners with disabilities, including sessions with the language access team facilitators (LATFs) and the coordinators of Special Education (COSEs). She referenced improved district oversight of compliance issues and improvements in compliance rates, attributing those changes to the follow up the Schools division has with principals, and mentioned a plan to establish quarterly meetings with regional superintendents so they are able to follow up directly with “principals and schools and the dashboards and the data systems.” She also indicated that systems are being set up for self-monitoring with a performance management framework that will include oversight of supports for multilingual learners.

Implementation of the strategic plan for multilingual learners

Chen introduced Sarah King, Implementation Manager for the Systemic Improvement Plan, whom she described as “key on Hogan’s team in supporting us with the implementation of the Strategic Priority Committees.”

King will be coordinating the strategic priority committees working on the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Multilingual Learners. She described the purpose of those committees as:

- Building a shared understanding of the scope of each of the strategic priorities within the plan
- Informing stakeholders of the knowledge, resources, structures, and partnerships required to achieve the goals in the strategic plan
- Being equipped to advocate for and support implementation.

The strategic priority committees will convene 3 times per year, typically starting in January but for 2023 in late February, early March, and September, from 4 to 7 pm. ELLTF members who signed up to participate in one of the committees will receive invitations for the first meeting sent directly to their calendars. These meetings will be planned by King in collaboration with Chen (for now), the new OMME chief (eventually), and others from OMME and OSE.

FOLLOW UP:

- Make sure members receive Sarah King’s calendar invites and request the full meeting schedule for the strategic priority committees from King.

Chen shared highlights:

- We’ve been working to make sure there are staffing and programmatic needs handled at the school for Harvard language programs.
- We met with MABE (the Multistate Association for Bilingual Education, Northeast) and the BPS dual language principals to “leverage their expertise and further define with clarity the conditions that are necessary to build strong dual language programs.”
- We have data committees and work groups on multilingual students and multilingual students with disabilities happening.
- We contracted with experts from SUNY Buffalo to identify assessments.
- The multilingual instructional coaches have been working intensely, with support from DESE, on a project to make sure we have aligned curriculum for SEI classes.
- We’ve been meeting regularly with DESE to make sure we have what they require from us pertaining to equitable literacy. DESE will be making visits to schools in the spring. We also shared that with the DOJ, who is also planning to make visits (likely virtual).
- We’re building our infrastructure with continuous improvement for self-monitoring.
- We moved the ACCESS testing timeline earlier so multilingual learner families can fully participate in the choice process (previously, testing happened after the process began).
- We are working closely with schools to get 100% completion on ACCESS testing.

Chen shared a note about a proposed new “investment” in the budget to fund additional social worker positions to serve SLIFE students. She also said the district looks forward to engaging in community-based partnerships to strengthen the supports for those students.

APPROVE MEETING MINUTES FROM DECEMBER 8, 2022

The Task Force unanimously passed the minutes of the December 8, 2022 meeting.

Mudd requested that, in future, there be a brief report from the ELLTF Coordinator on actions taken on the follow up items in the previous meeting’s minutes.

FOLLOW UP:

- Include a report on actions taken on the follow up items in the previous meeting’s minutes as part of the materials for upcoming meetings.

PRESENTATION ABOUT BUDGETING, AND HOW SCHOOLS DEVELOP THEIR BUDGETS

Lee introduced Nate Kuder, Chief Financial Officer. Nate explained that he is part of the Planning and Analysis team, P and A, known as “PANDA.” Lee reminded participants that she is the ELLTF representative to the district’s Reimagining Budget process.

Overview of the proposed budget

Kuder shared that the proposed BPS budget for SY23-24 represents an increase of \$65 million over the budget for SY22-23. He described the budget in 3 key categories:

1. Strategic investments in 6 areas identified by the superintendent — including \$6.3 million dollar in programs and supports for English learners, \$9.6 for inclusive education, and \$1.9 million for community engagement
2. Increased costs — salaries and more, including \$16.8 million of ESSR funding targeted towards inclusion per the collective bargaining agreement
3. Long term sustainability — given that federal ESSR funding ends at the end of SY23-24 and that the district has had enrollment decline.

Overview of proposed new spending — “strategic investments” — for multilingual learners

Chen explained that the \$6.3 million for multilingual learners includes money to expand dual language program supports, ESL supports, SLIFE social workers, and family support work. This \$6.3 million is in addition to funds in the regular budget.

Chen described the \$9.6 for inclusive education as benefitting multilingual learners, because a significant number of students with disabilities are multilingual learners. The money is proposed in response to the need to ensure that every student is in the least restrictive environment, as highlighted in the CGCS recent special education report. The \$9.6 million will fund additional intervention and reading specialists and “other multi-tiered systems of support” in schools that offer inclusive education. It will also support “a curriculum upgrade in every school to make sure there are high quality instructional materials at grade level for every student,” plus “training and supports for teachers and coaches.”

Members probed to clarify whether there is increased money for native language programs and services, and noted the increased assignment of ELs/MLs to the General Education (Gen Ed) program in the past year

Lee stated that dual language programs reach a small part of the student population and asked whether the \$6.3 million investment included additional native language supports, possibly through hiring paras.

Chen affirmed that an increase of bilingual paras is a priority in the budget, and that the budget also includes money for heritage language programs.

Kuder explained that there are multiple places to find the expenditures Lee and Chen were discussing. He said the proposed investment for next year is in recognition of the additional costs that dual language schools have. He expressed that each of the schools will use the dollars in slightly different ways, and that the money would replace ESSR dollars in some instances. “It’s in multiple places that those dual language paras may be paid for.”

He said the strategy is to “create the professional development, create the curriculum materials, and then also create this sort of sustainable program design” for dual language programs.

Mudd asked how the \$6.3 million will accomplish the district’s stated priority to expand student access to native language. He shared that the budget detail also describes an expansion of 38 bilingual and ESL positions for a cost of \$6 million. He expressed concern that money is going into expanding English learner general education services and not toward increased access to native language.

Kuder said that the \$6 million increase in ESL positions is partly a correction to last year’s budget, which under-projected the number of English learners receiving ESL services, and partly accounting for anticipated increases in students receiving ESL services next year. He said the ESL positions also would provide more ESL support for English learners with disabilities.

Related to the \$6.3 million strategic investment, he explained that some of it is held in reserve and not yet allocated to specific programs, while about a third is slated for SLIFE social workers.

Anderson said it would be helpful to know what the total budget is for Multilingual and Multicultural programs and services. While \$6.3 additional funding is better than no increase, I'm curious what the percent increase is on the total budget. Also, will these extra resources be allocated through the weighted student formula or allocated centrally?

Mudd expressed a desire to clarify the matter further, because enrollment data from last year indicates that the district has increased the placement of English learners at ELD levels 1–3 in general education programs, with a decline in placements in EL programs.

FOLLOW UP:

- Work with Kuder to get clarity on why a higher percentage of English learners was assigned to general education programs in SY21-22, and to what extent that change in assignment accounts for the increase he mentioned in the number of English learners receiving ESL services that year.

Family engagement strategic investment mentioned

Kuder said that specific targeted supports for family engagement is a huge part of the strategic investments, saying that family liaisons have been critical for insuring families have access to translated materials.

Upcoming budget hearings announced

Kuder announced upcoming budget hearings, including next Thursday, February 16, on Zoom, and encouraged public comment and commentary. All of the budget materials are posted and online and translated into all major BPS languages.

School budget examples presented: understanding how the weighted student formula works at the classroom and school levels

Kuder presented several slides that illustrate the way dollars are allocated to Gen Ed students and to SEI students using the weighted student formula (WSF) for a sample third grade class. He used those examples to explain how schools in the district might build their budgets based on student enrollment projections. SEI classes have a larger per-pupil allowance because they have a smaller class size. See slides 7–1 in his presentation. The information on the slides reflects real funding amounts for a school.

The meeting paused for a moment to work out technical problems with interpretation, and resumed once Caboverdean and Arabic interpretation services were reestablished.

He described the challenge of meeting staffing costs when classes are not fully enrolled, describing the breakeven point as roughly 87% full. Schools cover classes that don't break even with extra revenue generated from other classrooms in the building (which occurs when more

than about 87% of seats are full). When there are total extra dollars schoolwide, those can be used for flexible decision-making about expenditures. Or, if a school's enrollment is insufficient to pay for core compliance expenditures, the district provides a supplement to bring the school into core compliance.

Anderson asked whether, in an SEI classroom, the classroom teacher provides all needed services for a multilingual learner (in contrast to Gen Ed classrooms, where ML students receive ESL services from a different educator than the classroom teacher). Kuder confirmed that SEI teachers provide all multilingual learner services.

Torres-Ardila inquired about where the decision is made about weighted student formula (WSF) allocations — who decides on those amounts? Kuder said the weights are district policy, explaining that mathematically it's based on staffing ratios and class size. The total teacher costs for a classroom, divided by the class size when it is 87% enrolled, yields the per pupil dollar amount the district uses in the WSF. For grade-level SEI and special education, the WSF amounts are higher because of the staffing models of the programs — smaller class sizes or, for special education, increased staffing requirements.

Polanco Garcia clarified whether, when excess dollars are generated in an SEI class (when it has greater than 87% enrollment), if the dollars can be used for any purpose or if they must support multilingual learners specifically. Kuder responded that those funds can be spent for any purpose. Also, because some of the excess money from full classrooms is spent on whole school programs that benefit English learners, it won't necessarily line up that if 40% of your students are ELs then 40% of the budget is coded as an English learner expenditure.

Michael Berardino, prospective ELLTF Member, noted that BPS schools have a wide range of EL enrollment, from 1% at Boston Latin School to 94.7% at the Boston International Newcomers Academy. He wondered whether there is any separate weight given for the overall EL population at a school, since schools with high ML enrollment will feel a bigger impact from declining enrollment.

Kuder appreciated that question. "We recognize that that concentration of need matters." He explained that there are whole school weights for the percentage of students experiencing poverty (as measured by participation in state or federal antipoverty programs) and the percentage of students experiencing homelessness, but there are currently no academic weights used that could account for the percentage of EL program enrollments. He thought an academic weights approach would make sense, because with large or majority EL enrollments in a school there is more differentiation of instruction and planning takes more time. He will bring the idea to his team and to the Reimagining Budget process.

FOLLOW UP:

- Track how the Reimagining Budget process takes up the idea of academic weights to account for the concentration of need in schools with large ML populations.

Anderson via chat: If students living in poverty do not access state or federal programs, then are they not captured in the poverty weight?

School budget examples presented: understanding how per-pupil allocations for ESL services work at the classroom and school levels

Kuder explained the funding model for ESL services to ML students placed in Gen Ed settings, as well as some of the complexities of grouping students in ways that comply with the DOJ rules. See slides 13–15 for an example drawn from the Philbrick School. There, in order to serve 16 students in the correct grouping, it was necessary to use 1.7 FTE of staff time, even though the maximum class size otherwise would be 20 students. Consequently, extra revenue generated from fully enrolled Gen Ed classrooms at the school had to be used for ESL services before they could consider any discretionary spending, and ultimately the school spent more on ESL than they had in revenue. He described the DOJ rules as “an unfunded mandate directly to schools.”

Lee asked about how it came to be that those difficult-to-group students were assigned to a Gen Ed program with ESL in a small school. Do they speak a low-incidence language? Was it the result of the choices of families who preferred that school even though it didn’t have an SEI program? What are the reasons why a group of students would be assigned at a small school in configurations that are known to be difficult to group for service provision?

Kuder did not have data at the ready to answer that question. He speculated that, in addition to the hypothetical explanations Lee offered, it could also be that perhaps students’ first-choice programs had been full.

FOLLOW UP:

- Gather data to better understand how students are assigned to Gen Ed and to SEI multilingual programs.

Members probed: where is the increased money for native language?

Maria Serpa, ELLTF Member, noted that she sees highlighting of everything English and does not see the commitment to supporting access to home language, nor native language support for teacher recruitment and teacher training, nor other strategies to develop capacity to meet the language needs of students, reflected in the budget. “Home language is critical in student achievement and in reducing the achievement gap.” She expressed her disappointment with SEI, because of its connection to poor student outcomes in the research literature. She urged that the district recognize the urgency for students who are facing another year with inadequate access to native language at school.

Lee clarified that, while it is important to develop alternatives to SEI, those programs are not yet planned and therefore would not be reflected in the budget.

Polanco Garcia sought to clarify how much of the \$6.3 million strategic investment in multilingual learners is destined for native language education.

Kuder clarified that the amount in the strategic investment portion of spending that will support native language education is the roughly \$750,000 marked for dual language program expansions. He outlined how the \$6.3 million will be divided:

- Roughly one-third toward social workers for students in the SLIFE program
- A portion toward “native language expansion that includes dual language supports”
- A portion for multilingual family engagement specialists to support families of ELs
- A portion toward expanded ESL services, including for students with disabilities.

In addition to the \$6.3 million, Kuder said, there are ESSER-supported investments for dual language curriculum development, professional development, recruitment, and program modeling and expansion.

Mudd confirmed that \$750,000 is going to expanding dual language programs. Kuder affirmed that number to be roughly accurate.

Berardino via chat: With half the district FLNE and a third EL, I wonder what the budget would look like if the budget started with the assumption that students are MLs instead of monolingual students?

ML Enrollment by program type

Kuder said that the big story is about continued enrollment decline overall, with 2 years of fairly significant decline during the pandemic. In the current school year, the district saw a rebound of the number of English learners, resulting in a higher proportion of multilingual students.

The time allotted for this portion of the meeting expired before all of the enrollment slides were presented. Kuder welcomed meeting participants to ask questions later and shared his email address, nkuder@bostonpublicschools.org, in the chat for that purpose.

Lee expressed an interest in focusing the next meeting on programming.

Mudd observed that the district still doesn't have a model for developing a weighted student formula for multilingual learners with disabilities.

Lee mentioned the need for students' access to native language to be included in their IEPs, and for the costs of meeting those needs to come from the OSE budget.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments.

ADJOURN

It was announced that the next ELLTF meeting will be on Thursday, March 30, 5-7 pm.

The meeting was adjourned.