

# THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF THE CITY OF BOSTON



## English Language Learners (ELL) Task Force Meeting Notes

**VietAID**  
**42 Charles Street, Suite E**  
**Dorchester, MA 02122**

**September 17, 2019**  
**10:00 a.m. – 1:00 pm**

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### Handouts

#### *Office of English Learners*

- “OEL Bright Spots,” Priya Tahiliani, OEL, September 17, 2019
- SY19-20: EL Programs Master Doc (SEI, DL, SLIFE), July 9, 2019

#### *ELL Task Force*

- ELLTF meeting schedule SY2019-20
- “English Language Learners Task Force: Introduction and Planning for SY2019-20,” September 17, 2019
- Minutes of the English Language Learners (ELL) Task Force Meeting, May 20, 2019.

### Attendees

ELLTF Members and Staff: Angelina Camacho, Parent; Paulo A. De Barros, Cape Verdean Association of Boston; Jen Douglas, ELLTF Coordinator; Geralde V. Gabeau, IFSI-USA; Lisette Le, VietAID; Suzanne Lee, ELLTF Co-chair; Katie Li, BTU/BPS; Julia Mejia, CPLAN; John Mudd, Advocate; Lorna Rivera, ELLTF Co-chair, School Committee Member, Gastón Institute; Maria de Lourdes B. Serpa, Lesley University; Fabian Torres-Ardila, Gastón Institute; Rosann Tung, Independent Researcher / Parent

BPS Staff: Dr. Elia Bruggeman; Priya Tahiliani, Assistant Superintendent, Office of English Learners; Genevieve McDonough, Dual Language/English Learner Instructional Specialist, Office of English Learners

## 1. Welcome

## 2. Chairs' Report

**New superintendent.** Superintendent has a vision for ELLs across BPS and for parent engagement. Also there has been some restructuring and new leadership, including four distinguished former principals of dual language programs. Her executive team includes people skilled with EL services and committed to racial equity in the schools. She believes that the whole district owns the issue of EL education, not just one department. Unclear where she stands on the issue of native language support—was asked directly but her response was more about honoring students' cultures and using a whole child approach.

**ELLTF membership for SY2019-20.** There is a nomination of a student (from the Muñiz) to join the ELLTF (awaiting approval from her principal). ELLTF co-chairs sought recommendations from Center to Support Immigrant Organizing, Hyde Square Task Force, perhaps others.

✓ FOLLOW-UP: Paulo has a recommendation of a student and also a teacher who may be interested in serving on the ELLTF.

✓ FOLLOW-UP: Let's ask SPED-PAC if they have a recommendation of a person to serve.

Let's talk at the end about what constituencies and expertise are missing on the ELLTF. Maybe a parent, someone with knowledge of special education, what else. DELAC (District English Learner Advisory Council) has been approached but may not have the capacity due to other requests for their members to serve on different bodies.

## 3. Office of English Learners Director's Report

✓ FOLLOW-UP: Invitation to let OEL know how we would like presentations structured for this year. Should they present the full DOJ report or just give high-level summary and provide the details in print?

EL Summer Symposium – resources for teachers who attend voluntarily / no stipends.

ISEE prep – begins usually in 5<sup>th</sup> grade

✓ FOLLOW-UP: Should the ELLTF take a position on the exam schools / the unfairness of the test? Also: what happens when an EL student actually gets into an exam school?

✓ ADD TO GLOSSARY: Exam School Initiative (ESI)

Tier 1 – instruction for all students, though may still be approached differentially to reach each student holistically

Tier 2 – interventions for some students

Tier 3 – most intensive interventions

Harvard Kent will be piloting Chinese Heritage Language program this fall. It is in Mandarin.

✓ FOLLOW-UP: Can we have a copy of the evaluation framework that will be used for the Chinese Heritage Language program? Yes, evaluation framework can be provided. It's something OEL is working on in general, to align evaluation criteria across the very different various dual language programs within the system.

✓ FOLLOW-UP: Paulo would like to offer a resource to Priya related to Countdown to Kindergarten (CTK) kick-off events.

FOLLOW-UP: Maria is curious to know how kindergarten screening for disabilities works and whether it is integrated into CTK events.

Summer ELL programs, many of them through partnerships with community-based organizations – is there a program for Cape Verdean elementary school-age kids?

✓ FOLLOW-UP: Create LATF Meetings SY1920, and other OEL-led events, calendar entries to share with ELLTF members and OEL staff. Follow up first with Priya/Genevieve to make sure I have the full list of events.

✓ Add to glossary: BCNC=Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center.  
IBA=Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción.

Avoiding silos. As superintendents they have been addressing this issue related to family engagement. "Dr. Cassellius is about systems." "The students are everybody's students. It's not just one division."

Page 12 of this presentation is the most important slide. It shows an outline of a vision for the school year of focal topics related to "Access and Agency for ELs."

Reminder: OEL has a 5-year dual language expansion plan.

OEL would like to align with the ELLTF around the following focus for the year: programs aligned with the LOOK Act.

Gentrification risks of the dual language programs. They get taken over and the focus on services to ELs gets lost. Another option that's out there is a one-way dual language program, where all the enrollees are speakers of the heritage language.

Creating new programs can create new opportunities for teacher language skills. You pull down the job description for an old program and put up a brand new job description that can potentially have a language skill requirement.

Cape Verdean is the second-largest language spoken in BPS and I feel that the community is neglected, overlooked. Transitional bilingual worked for Cape Verdean students. I am a proud graduate, my child is in BPS, my nephew, I coach soccer, I know BPS. I see new programs created for languages that are smaller, I don't know what the advocacy is.

#### 4. Planning for the year ahead

- **ELLTF mission**
- **Goals and priorities for 2019-2020**
- **ELLTF structure / organizing our work**

DOJ oversight, relationship between their compliance focus and the work of the ELLTF.

- DOJ sets a floor that BPS is unlikely to honor in the absence of that oversight
- DOJ imposes constraints that hamper provision of flexible, substantive educational services (they are counting minutes, we are serving kids)

Whatever plan we put in place needs to hold any administration accountable, because we have seen leaders come and go and the same problems still exist for those who stay the same—students, parents.

How can we provide parents with information in a way that better bridges between the cultures they come from and the expectations here in the US? Just translating language won't make that cultural translation.

How do we determine if the ELLTF has been successful? How do we know if we've made progress? I did see a document of things people had done that felt very "list-y." Can we come up with some more precise and tangible markers?

- Suggestion: make a "problem of practice" for our English Learners, look at what is happening in every area that impacts EL services— social emotional, engagement, budget, etc. Then set goals and priorities.
- In the absence of knowing what we are changing we are going through formalities with no expectation of impact. Example given of the school visits to gather data. What do we have power to change?
- The more concrete and the smaller the number of measurable outcomes the better. Developing quality programs, improving teacher practice, gathering data – these are all things that this group cannot do. But we can push for very specific changes to policy. And we will know, come June or September, what we have accomplished.

FOLLOW-UP: Dr. Elia Bruggerman will bring us a problem of practice by the next meeting. We can use it as a foundation. It will be a draft that has been reviewed by Dr. Casselius. She will be working weekends and is available to meet with TF members if desired.

What to do with the hurt of things going unnoticed, things unchanged for so long?

Through the grapevine:

- Student assignment is having a big impact on schools and proving challenging for principals. There is misconception that the ELLTF is influencing some assignment outcomes in ways that schools are finding inconvenient.
- Budget as an area of concern

A cohering concept across our work

- Use of native language
  - If we're looking at native language as a focus, we can't look at ELs as a group. It has to be organized around what age/grade the child is when they join the system. When they enter has a big impact on how their dual language skills develop.
  - Also we have to look at parent priorities. Often when families arrive their first priority is for their children to learn English, and it isn't until much later that they regret loss of native language. We can't assume that they prefer dual language
  - Also the written thing and all the complexities of home language, the colonizer's language, etc.

How does ELLTF work relate to those of the other task forces, for example the Opportunity and Achievement Gap Task Force?

I find that teachers have a deficit perception about their students. They are focused on what the students lack. And they aren't questioning whether teaching content in English is the goal.

Program and program quality. How can we put Cape Verdean students at the forefront?

- How could a group like this impact program quality, say, in a year or two?
  - Advocating for the creation of a pathway for Cape Verdean students.

**FRAMEWORK / PROCESS FOR NEXT STEPS IN PLANNING THE ELLTF'S WORK FOR THE YEAR**

**Think in terms of policy, practice, politics, power, people. Could we ask each subcommittee to come back with an evaluation of their work along the following lines? If they find that what they are doing does not fit in this framework then that will tell us something.**

- What is influence-able?
- What is a policy recommendation? (note: some things already are policy and the problem may lie with implementation)
- What power does the subcommittee have?

**There is no subcommittee charged with working out the above questions vis-à-vis questions of native language.**

Is there a way we can assign priorities out to TF members to represent priority issue with other bodies/committees?

- Lorna can provide information about the other task forces that exist and are being considered to exist as part of the strategic planning

FOLLOW-UP: Ask Lorna for a list of the other BPS task forces that exist and are being considered to exist as part of the strategic planning.

The issue of time and the episodic nature of the meeting schedule and action

- I don't think that the way we are working now that we will see the changes we want to achieve

There is a perception problem. My perception is that the ELLTF is seen as not having the power that it once had, that it is perceived to be making a lot of demands and not having a lot of impact.

- If we pick one thing, maybe it's the Cape Verdean program, and do it well, I'm happy with that.

Request made for operational definition of "monitor" vis-à-vis the ELLTF work. "What does it mean for the Task Force to monitor what BPS is doing?"

FOLLOW-UP: Work with subcommittee chairs to answer the above bolded ELLTF strategic planning questions between now and the next meeting.

Keep in mind that no one is charged to answer the questions with regard to native language, that we would like an answer to the question, "What does it mean for the Task Force to monitor what BPS is doing?", that plans for new LOOK Act-enabled program proposals are due January 1, and look for other possible gaps and omissions.

✓FOLLOW-UP: Plans for new LOOK Act-enabled program proposals are due January 1. Make sure that future agendas include any relevant activities leading up to that time point.

FOLLOW-UP: The focal project of the Cape Verdean strand.

- How does it touch upon each of the priority areas of ELLTF work – engagement, etc.?
- What are the systemic difficulties for such a program?
- How could a group like this impact program quality, say, in a year or two? Would it involve advocating for the creation of a pathway for Cape Verdean students?

How can we bring an assets-based approach to our work? How can we recognize what is working and build from there? Today we have high-level administrators sitting with us. This is a moment. There is strategic planning and new leadership. The passion of everyone in this room is inspiring.

Remember also we are looking for new members.

- Is there a list of characteristics we are seeking? What type of people are we looking for?
- Can we invite parents? Can we invite undocumented parents? Can we open these meetings up in a way that doesn't require the level of English proficiency currently demanded?
- Can we involve someone who works with SLIFE students?

✓ FOLLOW-UP: Make a new list of TF members that includes a synopsis of their expertise. Then we can identify gaps, taking reference to the questions above.

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## **5. Approval of Meeting Minutes from May 20, 2019**

Postponed.

## **6. Public Comment**

None.

## **7. Adjourn**