

THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF THE CITY OF BOSTON



**Minutes of the English Language Learners (ELL) Task Force Meeting  
April 11, 2019**

The English Language Learners Task Force of the Boston School Committee held a meeting on April 11, 2019 at 9:00am at Bruce Bolling Building. For more information about any of the items listed below, contact Jen Douglas, ELL Task Force Coordinator, at [bpselltaskforce@gmail.com](mailto:bpselltaskforce@gmail.com).

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**ATTENDEES**

**ELL Task Force (ELLTF) Members present:** Suzanne Lee (co-chair), Janet Anderson, Paulo De Barros, Katie Li, Julia Mejia, John Mudd, Maria Serpa, Rev. Cheng Imm Tan, Jen Douglas (coordinator)

**BPS Staff present:** Priya Tahiliani (Assistant Superintendent, Office of English Learners (OEL)), Faye Karp (Director of Data and Fiscal Accountability, OEL), Cindie Neilson (Assistant Superintendent, Office of Special Education)

**HANDOUTS**

*From ELLTF*

- Minutes of the ELLTF Meeting on February 14, 2019
  - English Learner Students with Disabilities (ELSWD) Subcommittee
    - “ELL Task Force ELSWD Subcommittee 4-11-19 Talking Points,” April 11, 2019
    - “Teaching Staff Qualifications Study: SPEDELL,” April 11, 2019
    - “ELL-SWDs Subcommittee Report on Current Priorities and Action Steps,” November 21, 2014
    - Hoover, J.J. et al. 2018. “Examining IEPs of English Learners with Learning Disabilities for Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness,” *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*. v34, n1, pp. 14–22. DOI: 10.1111/ldrp.12183.
    - *Circulated electronically:* “MCAS Results for English Learners Students,” Mary Dillman, Executive Director, and Elena Lanin, Senior Analyst, Office of Data and Accountability, March 2019.
- Ad Hoc Group on a Multilingual, Multicultural BPS
  - Agenda, Ad Hoc Group on a Multilingual, Multicultural BPS, Thursday, 3/2/19.
  - Meeting Notes, Ad Hoc Group on a Multilingual, Multicultural BPS, Thursday, 3/2/19.

*From Office of English Learners*

- “OEL DOJ Reports Update for EL Task Force,” Priya Tahiliani, Assistant Superintendent. April 11, 2019

*From Office of Special Education*

- “ELSWD Update,” Cindie Neilson, Assistant Superintendent. April 11, 2019
- Untitled chart presenting data disaggregating the number of students in each disability program category by ELD level, race, inclusion, and sub sep, Cindie Neilson, Assistant Superintendent. April 11, 2019.

## CONSOLIDATED LIST OF FOLLOW-UP ITEMS THAT EMERGED IN THE MEETING

1. Cancel 5/16 and 6/13 meetings. Notify members of 5/20 meeting.
2. How should the ELLTF examine the information that is provided to parents and the extent of choice that they have? The full array of issues related to school selection and assignment. What, concretely, could be provided to parents (e.g., videos for parents that showcase the array of available programs)? These are issues we can advocate on, bring something to Dr. Grandson.
3. Share the full ODA report from Mary Dillman on “trend data.”
4. Suzanne has a connection within HC who is focused on ELSWD issues; she will make connections to other TF members.
5. Continue the conversation about the relationship between autonomy of schools and centralized accountability, and move toward action recommendations. Maybe take one example, perhaps the Cape Verdean programming and student needs, and follow it through.
6. Set next steps for identifying the ELLTF’s role vis-à-vis articulating, advocating for, advancing the goal of a multilingual, multicultural BPS. Perhaps including meeting with the mayor.

## DISCUSSION

### 1. Welcome

**Reschedule May and June meetings.** Suzanne is gone 6/3–6/26. OEL team cannot do 5/16, will be at Bilingual Immigrant Refugee event. Proposed: have one final meeting (not both a May and June meeting, as now appears on ELLTF calendar), with the goal to review list of follow-up items and set priorities for the work ahead.

**Decided:** Reschedule for Monday, 5/20.

**FOLLOW-UP.** Cancel 5/16 and 6/13 meetings. Notify members of 5/20 meeting.

**Other changes for next year.** Rev. Tan moving to Malaysia on 6/26/19, for two or more years.

Julia is willing to support the role of subcommittee chair for the Engagement Subcommittee, (hasn't committed to fill the role herself).

## 2. Chairs' Report

Katie has been appointed to the public panel to interview the superintendent. Decided: allocated 10 minutes now to gather TF member input on the questions she will ask — listed below.

- Where in the superintendent's priority would a multicultural, multilingual district be?
  - A vision that gets at the value of native language
  - A vision that demonstrates whether the candidate knows that Boston is comprised of majority ELL students
  - Very concretely, what is their vision for programs that are aligned to the LOOK Act? That could take it from an open-ended question to something concrete.
  - State the question in a way that indicates, "this is a priority" and have the question be "how would you implement it?"
  - Connect it also to the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in which we need to have people who are skilled multi-linguistically and we are wasting the skills that we already have. Everyone in America needs to speak more than English and be skilled multiculturally, and we have a resource we are not building on. How is this new superintendent going to use the resources we already have to promote multilingualism and multiculturalism?
  - Be sure to ask "what have you done?," not just ask questions that are future-oriented. If they haven't faced it in the past, it is less likely to happen in the future. e.g., "Did you really get curriculum change?"
  - Maybe a two-part question: "What are you going to do? What is your experience?"
  - Be aware too that you can get some of this experience information from application materials and you do need the interview to speak to the future.
  - Ask "How." "How are you going to. . . ?" "How would you approach x. . . ?" Then follow up with "Could you give us examples of. . . ?"
  - What is the vision for what students will leave BPS knowing. Right now the district says, "we support bilingualism" but students are leaving BPS monolingual. What will students who graduate from BPS be able to do linguistically and culturally?
- To me it's important to have a superintendent who is going to have the political will to really push things forward.
  - If you were to meet with opposition from school leaders, how will you meet that adversity? — from the mayor, school leaders, parents. How do you get a plan into fruition?
- What role do families and communities play in your vision?
  - How will you build community / work with families?
  - Note that there is a family panel that may take up some of these questions.

- The idea is to get statements to which the person can be held accountable.

Members are encouraged to send additional follow-up ideas to Katie. Note as well that these are open public sessions (the public cannot pose questions but can be present and listen, or watch live on the Internet).

### 3. Approval of Meeting Minutes: February 14, 2019

Next time: Put the follow-up notes in one place at the top of the notes. Put a cross reference to the page in which it is discussed. It's helpful to have the list of handouts provided.

Use the master "follow up" list as a foundation at the final meeting, to look at what we mean to do and want to accomplish.

**Decided:** Minutes from February 14 were approved with no abstentions and no opposition.

### 4. Office of English Language Learners Director's Report

- **DOJ Update**

Flagged that an extension was obtained on the deadline for submitting certain data because data management challenges were identified and required substantial staff time to resolve.

Discussion of data challenges:

OIT, ODA, OHC, OEL (perhaps others?) have a cross-functional group. It's not always clear who is the "owner" of data and how the way they hold it can impact other reports. The reports OEL pulls reference multiple databases, one of which had changes that created impacts for their reports. Working with OIT to create a better governance structure for this report as well as to build in automatic validations that would flag problems. BPS also has a project underway with Gates Foundation money to support a process of aligning data across multiple systems.

What can the Task Force do to advocate for OEL needs to be fronted within data management processes. Perhaps there are ways that a more collaborative mindset can be advanced so that the onus doesn't rest solely with OEL to manage EL-related data.

Question posed: what's the internal vetting process on an OEL report before it goes to DOJ? Where is the leverage here?

Mostly within OEL. Then they go through the whole communication protocol: Kristin Daly (works with Charles, Dir. Of Special Projects), Charles, and then to unknown destinations. The reports are very very long. When it's done we pride ourselves on having it be thorough and correct, but getting to that point is where

the challenges arise. Priya's signature is the final one, she affirms that it's accurate.

Discussion about school assignment (paragraph 32(b)):

Red flag about the Cape Verdean program and the Welcome Center. Parents are being told what to choose, versus providing information about the options available to them to choose among. It verges on families having decisions made for them. Member has talked with people at the Welcome Center and learned how the work is approached. Sometimes it has to do with the school being at capacity, and students get scattered to a multilingual program and not receiving the support. Also has heard that there is only one speaker of Cape Verdean Creole at one of the programs, who teaches math. Yes, speaks to issue of how much access BPS is providing to students for native language supports.

Suggestion to use more visuals on the website, e.g., to have a flag of the relevant country that parents can click, recognizing that not everyone can read.

Let people understand *why* this is the best possibility for them and what other possibilities they have.

Have a system that spits out a full list of programs that would be relevant for the particular student, after asking some basic questions about language, country of origin, experience with English, etc.

**FOLLOW-UP.** How should the ELLTF examine the information that is provided to parents and the extent of choice that they have? The full array of issues related to school selection and assignment. What, concretely, could be provided to parents (e.g., videos for parents that showcase the array of available programs)? These are issues we can advocate on, bring something to Dr. Grandson.

## 5. Program Quality

- **Program Development SY 2019-20**

Conversation somewhat folded into the above section.

- **Subcommittee Updates**

Update from Dr. Grandson. Two issues were flagged for his follow up: getting data from Human Capital and the multilingual/multicultural priority. He is working with the TF on both.

## 6. English Learner Students with Disabilities (ELSWD)

- **Update on ELSWD performance and BPS next steps**

Every time that there is an opening for an assessor the district is looking to hire a bilingual person. There is a shortage of people of color in the special education field.

**FOLLOW-UP.** Share the full ODA report from Mary Dillman on “trend data.”

Emphasis on understand the educational system of the originating countries of immigrant children who arrive at mid-points K–12. Some countries do not begin formal education until age 7. Anecdotal differences were noted in the level of educational preparation between Guatemalan and Salvadoran students arriving in their high school years.

LOOK Act provides parameters/guidelines for services to ELs. Exciting to have those and will be reviewing them for application to ELSWDs.

Right now the projection data does not include ELSWDs. Projections are made for ELs and SWDs, but not the group that falls into both. If we’re not projecting, we’re not planning. We want actual numbers that we can bring to Budget Collabs and Probable Orgs. We are pushing to get this issue engrained into the system.

- **Subcommittee Updates**

System-wide things that impede change: 1. Structural, how programs are set up, e.g., impact of home-based analysis on ELs. 2. Getting the right capacity for native language, unclear extent to which district does value that.

What can we be doing to build the capacity of native language parents who come to this country with skills? For them to fill roles within BPS? To validate what people bring from their home country. I see it as an opportunity to do two thing: increase family engagement, address staffing needs. It’s a win-win.

Update on BPS effort: For new hires, launching in October, for the first time the hiring website will provide a language self-assessment for candidates to complete.

**FOLLOW-UP.** Suzanne has a connection within HC who is focused on ELSWD issues; she will make connections to other TF members.

There is an incentive problem for teachers. If they get dual credentials in ELL and SPED they may be assigned a classroom of students with vastly ranging needs that is impossible to teach. How does the district want to handle this group of students? BPS is actually involved in contract negotiations impacting just this topic.

It is hard to understand the accountability. Who can we hold accountable?

A challenge: the message from the mayor to the superintendent is to support principals in their autonomy. That is a problem for accountability. BPS staff at OEL and SPED do not

supervise principals and cannot hold them accountable. We need to talk about accountability as well as empowerment. What is the central role in a decentralized system? How do you hold people accountable when they are empowered? That needs to be a conversation with the new superintendent.

Suggestion: why don't we (the Task Force) set the standard?

**FOLLOW-UP.** Continue the conversation about the relationship between autonomy of schools and centralized accountability, and move toward action recommendations. Maybe take one example, perhaps the Cape Verdean programming and student needs, and follow it through.

Also: BuildBPS and student assignment are issues with relevance here. And the need to group certain students, esp. ELSWD, based on their learning needs. When the environment is saying "disperse." What do we want to defend? How do we want to deal with the issues of segregation? inclusion?

How can we create a model? A pilot? A place to start and demonstrate what works.

## 7. Gather ELLTF members' input on the "what and why" of moving towards a multicultural, multilingual district

Dr. Grandson's next step is to talk through the "why" and the "how" of moving to embrace a multicultural, multilingual district. They would like the ELLTF to help with that articulation and framing. Ideas:

- 21<sup>st</sup> century needs
- Need for bilingual teachers

Conversation needs to start with the mayor and his advising team (whether or not the position of Chief of Education is retained). If the mayor believes in that it will matter. And another way to push the mayor there is from the community organizing perspective.

Another challenge is now to get the community on board. The community does not have a unified perspective on this issue.

The superintendent is going to get direction from the mayor. That's why they're trying to articulate the "why."

But it *is* articulated. There have been lots of presentations and statements on the value of bilingualism.

We understood from the head of World Languages that there was a plan at one time to have a plan for bilingualism for all students, a plan that went beyond maintaining bilingualism for native language students.

If this is what we really want to do as a Task Force we need to educate the communities to get behind this issue. It is a big change in the Task Force's work, requires a big push. We need an action plan. Do you know how many committees there are within BPS who do work that is connected to this? To reach them is a lot of work. And I'm not sure that I want to put my focus on this because I'm trying to work with kids in the community who are dropping out, who are getting deported.

It seems like everyone is having their own sidebar conversations and working in their silos. How can we streamline and organize?

Basically what you're hearing is that, "There's going to be pushback. Can you tell me how you're going to be able to support me if we try to move the agenda this way?"

I think the pressure needs to be external at this point, especially because we are in a transition period. I think the idea of trying to articulate it is stalling, because it has been done.

**FOLLOW-UP.** Set next steps for identifying the ELLTF's role vis-à-vis articulating, advocating for, advancing the goal of a multilingual, multicultural BPS. Perhaps including meeting with the mayor.

## 8. Public Comment

None.