

## THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF THE CITY OF BOSTON



### **Minutes of the English Language Learners (ELL) Task Force Meeting December 14, 2017**

The English Language Learners Task Force of the Boston School Committee held a meeting on December 14, 2017 at 9:30am at Bruce Bolling Building. For more information about any of the items listed below, contact Michael Berardino, ELL Task Force Coordinator, at [bpselltaskforce@gmail.com](mailto:bpselltaskforce@gmail.com).

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#### **Call to Order:**

**Task Force Members Present:** Suzanne Lee, John Mudd, Cheng Imm Tan, Diana Lam, Maria Serpa, Kim Janey, Bob Hildreth, Paulo DeBarros, Farah Assiraj, Andres Alonso, and Michael Berardino - Coordinator. **Other persons and BPS Staff Present:** Priya Tahiliani, Faye Karp, Nicole Wagner Lam, Elena Lanin, Roger Rice and Alan Jay Rom (META) **Members Absent:** Miren Uriarte, Janet Anderson, Samuel Hurtado, Alejandra St. Guillen, Geralde Gabeau, Abdul Hussein, Patricia Crain de Galarce.

#### **Introductions**

Suzanne Lee, Co-Chair, of the Task Force opened the meeting.

Minutes with two edits were approved unanimously.

#### **FY19 Budget Discussion**

Suzanne Lee provided an overview of a meeting with the Budget Office earlier in December. The Budget Office shared 3 pieces of information:

- They are anticipating an increase in the FY19 ELL budget. This is in part due to higher actual ELL enrollment than they projected. The WIDA Consortium changed the ACCESS scoring system, which resulted in more students remaining in ELD Levels 1-3. With substantial differences in the projected versus actual enrollment, schools for the first time went through a reconciliation process where they had to give back money if the school had lower enrollment and other schools got additional funds if they ended up with more students than projected.
- There will be a "major" investment in translation and interpretation services.
- There has been positive feedback for the Mattapan Dual Language program.

[John Mudd] Increased funding is positive, but there are a number of topics that the Task Force posed to the Budget Office that we have not heard about. We understand how the Weighted Student Formula works, but has there been any evaluation of the adequacy of WSF? How can we use the data from Probable Org to help inform the hiring needs in the district? Encourage the use of data by the district. We have been asking for the Budget Office to provide an overall ELL program budget rather than just providing line item budget information. This will help us understand if OELL and the district overall have enough funding for what they are asked to do.

[Andres Alonso] It is also important to look at the guidance that goes along with the money. What are the expectations for the principals? Do schools get information on what goes along with the money?

[Cheng Imm Tan] It is important for the FY19 budget to account for the inadequate funding for parent engagement, especially for parents of ELLs. This was one of the weaknesses in the superintendent's evaluation.

The Task Force agreed that the Finance Subcommittee should try to meet with the Budget Office before the February 8<sup>th</sup> Task Force meeting.

### **ODA – MCAS Presentation**

Nicole Wagner Lam and Elena Lanin from the Office of Data and Accountability presented Spring 2017 MCAS Results for ELs and Former ELs. The presentation focused on the MCAS performance for Grades 3-8 and the Grade 10 MCAS.

*Grade 3-8 “Next-Gen” MCAS Results:* ODA provided detailed analysis of the MCAS results for ELs, former ELS and Never ELs in BPS for the new MCAS tests. These new tests use 4 scoring categories: Not Meeting Expectations, Partially Meeting Expectations, Meeting Expectations, and Exceeding Expectations. ODA reported all categories but focused on the percentage of students scoring “Meeting Expectations” or higher.

- For 2017, 31% of all BPS students scored “Meeting Expectations” or higher on the MCAS ELA tests – 14% of ELs, 51% of former ELs, and 35% of never ELs.
- For the MCAS Math, 32% of all students scored “Meeting Expectations” or higher – 18% of ELs, 49% of Former ELs, and 33% of never ELs.
- ELs had a SGP of 43 in ELA and 39 in Math in 2017 – these are lower SGPs than in 2016 (with the PARCC tests) and lower SGPs than Former ELs and Never ELs.
- When disaggregating ELs by ELD Level, there is a clear pattern between ELD Level and MCAS performance. On the ELA test, only 0.5% of ELD 1 scored “Meeting expectations” or higher, 2% of ELD 2, 7.3% of ELD 3, 11.4% of ELD 4, and 23% of ELD 5 (as compared to 51% of Former ELs and 35% of Never ELs)
- For the Math tests, 3% of ELD 1 students scored “Meeting Expectations” or higher, 10.4% of ELD 2, 13% for ELD 3, 17% for ELD 4, and 25% of ELD 5 (as compared to 49% of Former ELs and 33% of Never ELs).
- **Results for EL-SWDs:**
  - o ELA: 3% of EL SWDs scored “Meeting Expectations” or higher on the 2017 MCAS ELA in Grades 3-8 as compared to 8.3% of SWDs who are not ELs, 17% of ELs who are not SWDs, and 45% of students who are not ELs nor SWDs.
  - o Math: 4% of EL SWDs scored “Meeting Expectations” or higher on the 2017 MCAS Math in Grades 3-8 as compared to 10% of SWDs who are not ELs, 22% of ELs who are not SWDs, and 42% of students who are not ELs nor SWDs.
- **MCAS Results by Grade:** While the MCAS 2.0 are vertically aligned, meaning there should be no drastic differences in performance by grade, the percentage of students “Meeting Expectations” or higher is highest in Grade 3 and decreases in each subsequent grade.
- **ELs by Racial Category:** 13.6% of all ELs met expectations or higher on the ELA tests: 33% of Asian ELs, 8.3% of Black ELs, 11.2 % of Hispanic ELs, and 20% of White ELs. 18% of all ELs met expectations or higher on the Grade 3-8 Math tests: 60% of Asian ELs, 11.5% of Black ELs, 12.3% of Hispanic ELs, and 26% of White ELs.
- **ELs by Language Group:** Similarly there are differences in performance by first language, with Chinese speakers and Vietnamese speakers having the best MCAS results while Cape Verdean and Haitian Creole speakers had the lowest performance rates amongst ELs.

- **MCAS performance by Years in Massachusetts:** ODA reported percentage of students “Meeting Expectations” or higher based on the number years in the MA public school system.
  - o For Grade 3-8 ELA, 10% of ELs in their first year (higher because the only ELs that would take ELA in their first year likely have high ACCESS scores) scored “Meeting Expectations” or higher, 4.2% of ELs in their 2<sup>nd</sup> year in MA, 8% of ELs in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year in MA, 19.2% of ELs in their 4<sup>th</sup> year in MA, and 13.4% of ELs who have been in MA for 5 years or longer.
  - o For Grade 3-8 Math, 12% of ELs in their first year scored “Meeting Expectations” or higher, as compared to 14% of ELs in their 2<sup>nd</sup> year in MA, 18% of ELs in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year in MA, 26% of ELs in their 4<sup>th</sup> year in MA, and 17% of ELs who have been in MA for 5 years or longer.
  - o In other words, the students that have not been reclassified by their 5<sup>th</sup> year have lower MCAS scores.
- There was not enough time to review the Grade 10 MCAS results.

Q: [Andres Alonso] What is the behavior in response to these performance outcomes? Is there any response if ELs do well on the MCAS? Are they reclassified? One of the clear pieces of positive information from this report is the high performance of Former ELs and the relative positive performance of ELs in ELD Level 4. Since there are scarce resources in the district, perhaps the district should provide guidance for schools on how to best use the available resources.

A: [Faye Karp] At the end of the year, school-based teams meet to determine if an EL should be reclassified. ACCESS scores are the foundation of the recommendations, but they also use MCAS if the decision is close. However, these MCAS scores are from the previous year (results do not get sent out until the start of the next school year). They have always allowed schools flexibility in their reclassification decisions.

A: [Priya Tahiliani] OELL provides schools clear guidance on reclassification criteria, but it is the decision of the school-based teams to make the reclassification decisions. OELL has to work with schools regarding the reclassification decisions and there can be a lag in the reporting.

Q: [Farah Assiraj] Has there been any analysis of the ACCESS 2.0 test, especially because the assessments are done online?

Q: [John Mudd] The number of EL-SWDs reported in the MCAS results seems low.

A: [Nicole Wagner Lam] These are just students in Grade 3-8 that took the MCAS and this does not include students who took the MCAS Alt.

Q: [Farah Assiraj] Is there a similar racial gap in the never EL population as is seen in the ELL population?

Q: [Kim Janey] It would be interesting to see the Former EL population broken down by race/language group. The high performance of Former ELs could be driven by high performance of certain racial groups. Are there language groups who are acquiring English proficiency more quickly than other language groups?

Q: [Andres Alonso] Is there any research on the outcomes of Never ELs based on the language spoken at home? This would be helpful to understand the factors that leading to MCAS outcomes.

### **EL Longitudinal study**

Nicole Wagner Lam and Elena Lanin of ODA and Faye Karp of OELL shared findings from the EL Longitudinal Study. The study stems from the DOJ injunction and is the final of three reports mandated by the DOJ. This study uses 5 years of data to track the progress and outcomes of ELLs and Former ELs compared to never ELs. Specifically the study looked at two research questions: 1) What is the progress and achievement of EL students (overall and by specific language program) and Former EL students over time (SY10-11 to SY14-15) as compared to “Never EL” students? 2) Are EL and Former EL students able to meaningfully and equally participate in BPS educational programs as compared to “Never EL”

students? To answer these questions the study analyzes four different grade-based cohorts of ELD 1-2 students enrolled in K2 (n=2910), 3-5 (n=1379), 6-8 (n=1516), and 9-10 (n=1851).

Nicole Wagner Lam stressed some shortcomings of the study. First, because of the strict definition of the cohorts in this study, the results are not meant to be generalizable to all ELs in the district. Second, this was just a quantitative study with no qualitative component. Therefore, the study is unable to answer any “how” or “why” questions. Third, there are concerns about the ELL program fidelity during this study period. Over 5,000 students who had been misidentified as never LEPs, who had been denied services, were designated as ELs requiring services in 2010. Between SY11 and SY15, 12 SEI programs were shuttered, reconfigured, or the schools within which they operated were closed, creating inconsistent instructional experiences for students assigned to the program. Furthermore, there are concerns about the inconsistencies in the implementation of SEI programs across the district during this time period.

#### Study highlights:

- Reclassification Rates:
  - o The majority of students in the cohorts did not reach ELD 5 or reclassification by SY14-15, with around 1/3rd of those starting at ELD 1 reaching this level and less than half of those starting in ELD 2 reaching this level of proficiency
  - o Using logistic regression, the study found that Asian and White ELs were more likely to be reclassified than Latino ELs.
  - o There was either no difference or a small difference in the likelihood of being reclassified between EL program types.
- MCAS ELA:
  - o Compared to Black ELs, the study estimated that Hispanic, White, and Asian ELs have higher MCAS ELA scores.
  - o For the 3-5, 6-8, and 9-10 cohorts, ELs in SEI Language specific, SEI multilingual, and SLIFE programs had lower MCAS ELA scores than ELs in a General Ed setting.
  - o Students who were able to reclassify during the study period scored significantly higher than those that remained ELs throughout.
  - o EL-SWDs scored significantly lower than ELs with no diagnosed disability.
- Special Education Identification
  - o Male ELs were more likely to be identified as SPED as compared to Female ELs across all cohorts
  - o Asian ELs were less likely to be identified as SPED than Hispanic ELs across all cohorts, but no other racial patterns.
  - o No significant differences in Special Education identification between EL programs type.
  - o The SPED identification was significantly less likely for students that were able to reclassify during this period
- Graduation: 9-10 cohort only.
  - o Male ELs less likely to graduate than female ELs.
  - o Black, White, and Asian ELs were more likely to graduate than Hispanic ELs.
  - o ELs that were reclassified during the study were significantly more likely to graduate than those unable to be reclassified.
  - o EL-SWDs were significantly less likely to graduate than ELs without disabilities.
  - o There was no estimated difference in the likelihood of graduating between ELs in SEI programs and those receiving services in Gen Ed, but ELs in SLIFE programs had a lower likelihood of graduating than ELs in Gen Ed settings.

#### Key takeaways:

1. It generally takes ELD Level 1 students more than 5 years to reach ELD Level 5 or reclassify.
2. Reclassification is a strong/consistent predictor of academic success.
3. MCAS performance showed gaps between ELD 1 and 2 students and the Never EL population.

4. There are no programmatic differences in likelihood of student participation in special programs such as AWC, honors/AP courses, or even special education identification. This finding shows that regardless of language program, students are able to equitably participate in BPS programming.
5. Generally speaking, in terms of student achievement, the type of EL program was either not statistically significant or where it was, the magnitude of the differences compared to general education was not sizable.
6. Though the aim of the study was to examine differences in outcomes for ELs, the district's gaps along racial/ethnic and disability status were evident. These gaps persisted even when controlling for being in the study group or for the type of EL program.

Kim Janey announced that this would be her last ELL Task Force meeting. As parting words, she implored the Task Force to keep the subgroups in the forefront and keep pushing for the expansion of Dual Language programs. The positive outcomes for Former ELs show the power of bilingualism/multilingualism.

Q: [Maria Serpa] What is the intervention plan emerging from this study?

A: [Priya Tahiliani] With the LOOK Bill there should be a close review of all programs in the district. Find out where the quality is, in any form. The goal is to not wait for DESE guidance on the LOOK Bill, but to work with BTU and the ELLTF to develop a vision and program design. Beyond this, OELL and the district are expanding the Vision of instruction to help put BPS on the forefront of ELL instruction.

There were concerns about how this study would be received by the public and how the results could be used to push for more ELs receiving services in Gen Ed settings. Everyone agreed this was critical to monitor and to push back against if the study was misread.

### **Subcommittee Updates**

**Program Quality Subcommittee:** the subcommittee has compiled a number of questions to address the issue of program quality in the district. The questions aim to understand the nature of the guidance OELL and central office provide for schools or the interaction between schools and OELL to offer guidance in running a successful/effective program.

**Parent Engagement Subcommittee:** The subcommittee is meeting bimonthly with each meeting covering one subcommittee priority. January will be a heavy meeting with lots of data. At the last meeting Colin Rose had to cancel at the last moment because of the student demonstration around Madison Park.

**Human Capital Subcommittee:** The subcommittee met once to outline the goals for the year, focusing on data needs and the cross-departmental collaboration needed to achieve the goals, especially the data goals. Suzanne Lee led a focus group with principals to understand the human capital needs from the schools' perspective. Are schools getting the right type of teachers? Who actually does the recruitment? And what should be the role of central office to support the HC needs of schools. Finally, the subcommittee is exploring the possibility of using the data from Probable Org to inform the discussion of staffing needs.

### **Public Comments**

Roger Rice and Alan Jay Rom of META provided comments for the Task Force

Dear ELL Task Force Members,

Please consider this communication as an introduction to issues which may be of mutual concern in terms of the education of ELLs in the Boston schools. Given the full agenda of today's meeting and the infeasibility of having deep conversations through the vehicle of Public Comment, our purpose today is to raise issues for further discussion. What will become apparent, is that META and the Task Force have been, at least in part, proceeding to an extent in separate information silos. That strikes us as dysfunctional.

For those who may not know of META (Multicultural Education, Training & Advocacy Inc.), we are a public interest law firm that has specialized on legal issues of immigrant and ELL students for more than 30 years, in Boston, in the Commonwealth and nationally. Part of our work in Boston concerns monitoring of a federal court order for equity of services for ELLs and SLIFE students.

Areas of current concern include:

1. Lack of native language services for ELLs with disabilities. Last school year we reviewed more than 50 student records at a dozen schools and, with the exception of some students who received some limited Spanish speech and language therapy (usually 3 times weekly), there was no evidence of native language assistance for ELL students with disabilities and no evidence that such assistance was considered by IEP teams or discussed with parents as a possibility.

2. Lack of actual native language assistance in many language specific SEI classes. More than 2,000 Spanish speaking students have been assigned to schools that are called Spanish SEI program schools with smaller numbers of Chinese, Haitian and Cape Verdean students assigned to language specific programs in their own languages. Most often parents were counseled that this choice would be best for their students and accordingly selected such schools. However, we have seen many instances of language specific SEI classes where the teacher was monolingual in English and did not speak the language of his/her students. Even more concerning, we have seen instances of teachers who do speak Spanish but were forbidden from assisting Spanish speaking students in their language because a supposed Spanish SEI class was, in fact, a Multilingual SEI class. In other words, the fact if not the intent, is that it is better for all students to not receive native language assistance and understandable instruction so that there can be an equality of shared confusion between language groups. We have asked for the number of native language speaking teachers in SEI classes but it appears that BPS doesn't keep this information centrally. This raises a further question with any attempt to do meaningful longitudinal analysis of programs when the label carried by the program does match with the services being provided.

3. Title 1 funding equity. A primary purpose of the federal court order we monitor is to ensure that federal Title 1 resources are equitably spent on the particular needs of ELL students. Long standing provisions of federal law, and the order itself, make clear that federal money is supplemental to and not a substitute for local funds expected to be spent to fulfill civil rights requirements. Our review of more than 100 school Checklists (required by the court order), visits to approximately 20 schools, interviews with principals and teachers and classroom visits showed that in 2016-17:

\* Taking the Checklist information at face value, BPS was short \$ 544,238 of equitable spending for ELLs;

\* The Checklists also listed an additional \$163,439 of what we believe is clearly inappropriate use of Title 1 money;

\* The BPS spent \$1,810,426 appropriately under the court order for ELLs;

\* The BPS did not document that it appropriately spent an additional \$3,661,458 for ELLs.

Given the information available it is not possible to know how much was appropriate, and how much constituted improper supplanting

We wrote to Supt. Chang on November 20, provided school level details and suggested that he propose a new meaningful and robust ELL initiative funded out of 100 Account funds for FY19 to address the problems in FY17. He has not responded to our suggestion. Instead the OEL Department has proposed a series of new audit measures and procedures mostly concentrating on FY18 and FY19 that would, if implemented, be useful in getting things on the right track in the future. That said, it can't be that denial of equitable Title 1 resources in FY17 is simply ignored or swept under the rug.

4. The SIFE program. Also required by the federal court order is a program to address the needs of SIFE students. BPS has been working to develop appropriate instruments and standards for determining when students should be assigned to SIFE classes and when they may be redesignated. The court order links those standards to 9<sup>th</sup> grade performance for high school students and 7<sup>th</sup> grade for middle school students. This is ongoing work and we appreciate the continued dialogue. We note, however, that in the absence of agreed upon instruments and standards, nearly 40% of SIFE students were removed from the program at the end of last school year and we are endeavoring to understand the basis for those removals and whether the needs of particularly vulnerable students are currently being met.

5. Protecting immigrant students in the BPS. Both the Mayor and the Superintendent have been vocal in their support of diversity and immigrants in our schools. We appreciate those comments. Unfortunately, there is a rather pronounced gap between the BPS' actual protocols in dealing with protecting undocumented students and those supportive public statements. In October a number of prominent Latino organizations, legal groups, parents, the BTU and others wrote to the Mayor and Superintendent. Two meetings were held prior to the Mayoral election and we had expected to see a willingness by Boston to bring its practices in line with progressive school districts nationwide in terms of protecting its students. Since the election, however, there has been silence from the Superintendent, the Mayor and their advisors. We are concerned.

We thank you for the opportunity to share these concerns and are hopeful that we can have a real conversation going forward.

The meeting was adjourned.