

THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF THE CITY OF BOSTON



Minutes of the English Language Learners (ELL) Task Force Meeting April 13, 2017

The English Language Learners Task Force of the Boston School Committee held a meeting on April 13, 2017 at 9:00am 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.

Call to Order:

Task Force Members Present: Miren Uriarte, Suzanne Lee, Janet Anderson, John Mudd, Paulo DeBarros, Bob Hildreth, Samuel Hurtado, Cheng Imm Tan, Maria Serpa, and Michael Berardino - Coordinator. **Other persons and BPS Staff Present:** Frances Esparza, Daphne Germain, Faye Karp, Denise Pagan-Vega, Cindie Neilson, Lemma Jarudi, Lisa Harvey, Kevin Montoya, Emily Qazilbash, Ivonne Borrero, Sarah Faude (Northeastern University), Katrina Brisk (DSNI) **Members Absent:** Alejandra St. Guillen, Kim Janey, Diana Lam, Geralde Gabeau, Abdul Hussein.

Introductions

Miren Uriarte, co-chair of the ELL Task Force began the meeting by offering a few words about the context of the meeting. At this meeting, the Task Force will be hearing about the work of two of the subcommittees: Parent Engagement Subcommittee and ELL-SPED Subcommittee. They will share the work they have been doing throughout the year, largely independent of the larger Task Force. The Task Force must think about how we can bring the work of the subcommittees and the full Task Force together; how to unify everything. There will be a meeting in May with Dr. Karla Estrada to revisit and reorganize the ELL Task Force Goals and Priorities.

Before hearing from the subcommittees we are going to hear from Lisa Harvey regarding the equity analysis of the home-based student assignment plan. There is going to be a committee formed to advise the analysis. Miren has suggested placing Janet Anderson on this committee. This topic of the student assignment plan is the topic that comes up most often in the work of the Task Force and the School Committee. It has tentacles – we need to know if the assignment plan is working and for whom it is working.

Equity Analysis of Home-Based Student Assignment Plan

Dr. Lisa Harvey Deputy Director of Evaluation and Programs from the Office of Engagement (OOE) presented the slide deck titled “Home Based Assignment Plan Equity Analysis”. The purpose of the presentation is to provide the ELL Task Force with the status of the analysis plan and the steps that the Task Force can make to support the analysis.

The Home-Based Assignment plan replaced the previous 3-zone assignment system with the goals of increasing access to quality schools, especially for students with the lowest level of access. The new plan also sought to decrease the average distance a student would travel, protect diverse school communities, and increase the likelihood a child will be in the same grade in the same school as other children in their neighborhood.

OOE is managing the Equity Analysis of the Home-Based Assignment Plan. OOE is forming an Advisory Committee consisting of members from OOE, Office of Equity, OELL, Special Education, as well as members of the ELL Task Force, Opportunity and Achievement Task Force, the School Quality Working Group, and the Executive Cabinet. This Advisory Committee will approve final Requests for Proposals (RFP), oversee the process of hiring a consultant, and oversee the analysis (and subsequent analyses). The full Equity Analysis will begin in SY17-18. In the meantime, OOE will conduct a preliminary Equity Analysis this summer, which they will present to the School Committee in the Fall of 2017. There will be subsequent annual Equity Analyses after the first full Equity Analysis in SY17-18.

Q: [Miren Uriarte] What are the expectations of the preliminary analysis from this summer?

A: [Lisa Harvey] The Advisory Committee will determine this.

Q: [John Mudd] I recommend including the voice of families and the community in the Advisory Committee. Families were at the heart of the push for a new assignment plan. It is important to hear from families how the new plan is working.

Q: [Suzanne Lee] A critical piece of the motivation for the new assignment plan was the transportation costs. Will this be part of the analysis?

A: [Lisa Harvey] Yes, this will be part of the analysis.

Q: [John Mudd] Also, I want to make sure that included in the RFP is the equity analysis not just for those at the bottom, but those at 25% and 50% percentiles when the new assignment plan began.

The RFP for the Equity Analysis will seek proposals from external consultants to perform a formative equity analysis of the BPS Home-Based Assignment Plan, looking at assignment data from 2014-2017 to determine: (1) the plan's impact on school diversity; (2) whether students attend schools closer to home; (3) whether students have access through school choice to high quality schools; and (4) whether students attend high quality schools.

When a student enrolls in BPS they get a home-based list of schools, which includes the 2 closest Tier 1 schools, 4 closest Tier 1 or 2 schools, 6 closest Tier 1, 2, or 3 schools, and 3 closest "Option" schools. The list also includes: all schools within 1 mile, the closest ELC/EEC, citywide schools, sibling schools, and additional programmatic options (ELL, SPED, Middle).

A challenging part of the analysis will be the definition of quality schools. BPS uses a four "Tier" system to categorize schools in the district. On the other hand, DESE assigns each school to one of five "Levels", based on MCAS/PARCC growth and other factors. These two measures both use test scores and other metrics, but are different. Another challenge is that since the beginning of this study, the DESE Levels have changed substantially for BPS schools that have made improvements. The BPS Tiers are based on MCAS/PARCC Tiers (a BPS construct), SQF (BPA construct), DESE Levels, and DESE percentiles and subgroup target ratings. This definition of quality is a critical component of the equity analysis, because "access to quality" is only as good as the definition of quality.

The RFP will use the following Focus Areas: (1) Equity of access to quality (both schools and seats), (2) probability of assignment, (3) proximity to home, (4) actual student enrolment once they are assigned, and (5) preservation of school diversity. The demographics and subgroup analyses portion of the RFP will

look at the schools available to students from their choice list based on the following subgroups: neighborhood, socioeconomic levels, racial/ethnic group, home languages (or other language variable), and subgroup overlays (SPED, ELs, Middle School Pathways).

Q: [Maria Serpa] Is it possible to have a subgroup for the analysis that is both ELL-SPED?

A: [Lisa Harvey] Yes. The advisory committee can discuss this.

Q: [Bob Hildreth] Looking at these subgroups, will you be looking at the subgroup that is the students that did not choose?

A: [Lisa Harvey] Yes. This is one of the “choice” groups that will be analyzed.

Q: [Miren Uriarte] We have seen that the choices of families are often counter-intuitive to what we expected. For instance, we know that families will not always choose a Tier 1 school if it is offered to them. A qualitative study would be really dynamic and important to understand how parents look at school choice.

A: [Lisa Harvey] I agree. This is something they found out with the assignment at the Mattahunt. There are a lot factors that go into the school choice. Lisa Harvey has been working with Sarah Faude, a doctoral student at Northeastern, handing out surveys during the assignment process to better understand choice considerations.

Q: [Samuel Hurtado] Who has the authority to assign an ELL to a program in a school? If you are a newcomer, you need an ELL program. How does this part of the assignment process work? The top school choice doesn't always match the best program choice.

A: [Frances Esparza] All ELLs at ELD Level 1-3 are provided ELL services regardless of their school choice. OELL and the Budget Office did work this year to ensure that all schools were accurately providing the same services outlined/advertised in the choice list in the NACC.

Q: [Janet Anderson] This is at the crux of this discussion. Choice vs. Program. This keeps coming up. The best system may be limiting school options in favor of building strong programs for ELLs. This shows why it is so important to understand the “choice behavior” of parents.

Q: [Miren Uriarte] This is the tension we are working under. DOJ told us that ELLs need the same choice for schools as any other group of students. There have been conversations about creating a pilot to test the possibility of concentrating ELLs by program need. This could start with Cape Verdean ELLs.

Parent Engagement

Cheng Imm Tan, the Chair of the Parent Engagement (PE) Subcommittee shared information on the work of the Parent Engagement Subcommittee over the school year. The PE subcommittee meets every month and has been extremely hardworking. Special thanks to Iria Ruibal Dopazo who has been the volunteer note-taker and organizer for the subcommittee. At the end of 15-16 school year, during the presentation to the School Committee, the PE Subcommittee outlined several recommendations and several planned action items to help carry out these recommendations.

The bulk of the work done this school year focused on Recommendation #1: “District-wide commitment to better train, support, resource, and build school leaders and educators accountable for parent engagement for all students, including ELLs.” The first planned action step to fulfill this recommendation is to “monitor the development of a process to evaluate the quality of family engagement”. As of the meeting, there is no consistent district-wide process in place for evaluating parent engagement. The PE Subcommittee was tasked with developing a rubric for the district to use in measuring parent engagement. A day before the ELL Task Force meeting, the district released the updated School Climate Survey for Parents, which includes several questions which may help with the evaluation of family engagement. All of this is to say that a major finding from this year's work is that there is still no rubric in place to evaluate the quality of the family engagement. There is the Family Friendly Schools Initiative, but only

four schools are currently involved with it. The Task Force inquired whether the rubric involved with the FFSI was useful to their work, but the PE Subcommittee has not evaluated the FFSI rubric yet. Samuel Hurtado added that while there may be positive aspects of FFSI, the truth remains that there isn't one good system in place in the district to evaluate family engagement. Each school does engagement differently. How do we get from these to systems to a clear definition?

Planned Action B from Recommendation 1 states, "Monitor that all schools understand what effective family engagement looks like and that there is an effective metric to measure quality family engagement". The PE Subcommittee is still working on this, but there is still no clear definition of family engagement to work with.

Planned Action Item C is "Monitor and hold principals accountable to family engagement". Based on the site visits that the PE Subcommittee made last year, they confirmed that the actions of principals are critical for active parent engagement. To understand how principals are currently being held accountable for family engagement, the subcommittee looked at the educator evaluation tool used to evaluate principals. The third standard in the evaluation rubric is "Family and Community Engagement". However, through conversations with the district, they found out that principals do not need to be deemed "proficient" in this standard to be evaluated as a "proficient" principal. The district monitors this, but family engagement is currently not part of the determination of principal proficiency. Based on this finding the subcommittee would like for the ELL Task Force to make a recommendation to require proficiency on Standard III: "Family and Community Engagement" for principals to be deemed "proficient".

The Task Force decided it would be beneficial to invite the Instructional Superintendents to a Task Force meeting. Their role comes up in numerous areas. They have power for both school autonomy and central office oversight. It is not clear if this is something will have to be done to prior to the August Principal Retreat.

[Bob Hildreth] Each school has their own definition of parent engagement- some schools offer strong parent engagement for ELL- but there isn't even a beginning of a clear rubric for evaluating parent engagement, especially when compared to all the other evaluations being done in schools. What is the definition of engagement? Parent to school? Parent to child's education? Whatever it is, there needs to be a spark.

[Cheng Imm Tan] There is no clear definition of parent engagement for BPS. That was one of the goals of Iria's literature review last year. When the subcommittee made site visits last year they saw some very strong parent engagement tools in the schools, but have not seen anyone categorizing or cataloguing these tools. Another recommendation is for the district to document the various parent engagement tools being used in the district. What is useful? What has been successful?

The question remains – how can the PE Subcommittee help monitor district-wide parent engagement? The district organizes meetings with parents all the time – they should be able to monitor and collect information on ELL parent engagement.

Q: [Miren Uriarte] What are the priorities of the subcommittee?

A: [Samuel Hurtado] Last year we made a series of recommendations to the school committee as part of the presentation in June. But this year we have not seen any those recommendations included in the work of any district staff. In fact, we had to add those recommendations to the SIP ourselves. The subcommittee understands that OOE is being pulled in many directions and they are under-resourced, but we would like to see some acknowledgment of the recommendations and the work done by the subcommittee.

Q: [Janet Anderson] How does this [the Parent Engagement Subcommittee Work Plan] get implemented? This is an overwhelming topic for the task force. This must be very overwhelming for the school committee.

A: [Dr. Frances Esparza] There is a Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Rubric that Office of Opportunity and Achievement Gap has developed and presented at DELLAC. The presentation was just a high-level overview and there is a need to make the document more accessible for educators and parents. On April 24th there will be a DELLAC Executive Committee meeting and one topic will be how to use current tools to evolve engagement. In terms of principals, this year has been a learning year for OAG, talking to teachers and principals about their practices. Dr. Rose has been brought to DELLAC.

Q: Is the goal of DELLAC to recreate the model of the SPED PAC?

A: [Dr. Esparza] In some ways yes. A DELLAC member serves on the citywide council. DELLAC meetings have been growing. They had a recent Friday night meeting with 150-200 parents to offer information on Countdown to Kindergarten, enrolling students in BPS, and other topics.

Rev. Tan discussed the development of the SIP. In the latest version of the SIP, there is a definition of parent engagement that is looking at broader definitions of this topic. The challenge is to get deeper; working on a level to make sure this is happening on a year-to-year basis.

Q: [Miren Uriarte] Is there a rubric for Parent Engagement in the SIP, as a means to evaluate this?

A: [Denise Pagan-Vega] At this point, no.

Q: [Paulo DeBarros] Apparently there is an issue with defining Family Engagement. Culturally specific parent engagement is different for every ethnic group. For some, parent engagement is defined as having a seat on the Citywide Council. We need to educate families on what we mean by engagement. Before we move forward, we need to have a larger discussion of this.

Q: [Maria Serpa] This is also true for parents of ELL-SWD, where engagement looks different for each case.

Q: [Samuel Hurtado] Do we want someone to be in charge of parent engagement definition and the rubric to evaluate this?

The subcommittee will monitor and help the development of documenting the positive tools used in the district. One idea presented was having a case study of one parent group (e.g. Haitian parents), to better understand parent engagement in the schools serving Haitian students.

ELL-SPED

John Mudd and Maria de Lourdes Serpa, along with Ivonne Borrero, the ELW-SWD Supervisor in OELL, and Cindie Neilson, Assistant Superintendent of Special Education presented the work of the ELL-SPED Subcommittee for this school year. This presentation covered an overview of the ELL-SWD subcommittee goals and related work done this year, a review of the bright spots from the work, and the status of the other goals.

At the end of the 15-16 school year, the ELL-SWD Subcommittee identified the following “next steps” for this school year: 1) review and discuss OHC and SPED-OELL reports identifying # of SPED teachers with specific language competence and estimating current need of teachers or paras which can provide support in the students’ native language; (2) support embedding cultural and linguistic competence (sustaining practices) in recruitment and hiring; and (3) support and focus on cultural and linguistic competence (sustaining practices) of teachers and paras to meet the needs of ELL-SWDs.

Maria Serpa and John Mudd shared some of the bright spots from the work this school year. The composition of the subcommittee itself is a major bright spots, bringing together key leaders from OELL, OHC, Office of Special Education, and district leadership like Dr. Estrada. The hiring and inclusion of

Ivonne Borrero in this work is also of critical importance, as someone who has expertise in this field and can bridge the work of Office of Special Education and OELL. An additional bright spot is that for the first time the conversation around the critical importance of this group is happening across departments, which is creating really powerful and intriguing conversations. This student group cannot slip through the cracks any further. Third, through the work of Denise Pagan Vega, the SIP explicitly mentions EL/SWDs as a critical subgroup to focus on.

The EL/SWD Subcommittee has spent time discussing the needed language capacity in the district, attempting to come to an agreement on what the district policy should be in this area. While there has been great work in this area, there is still work to be done. In the opinion of Maria Serpa and John Mudd, there should be a language requirement for all paras. Language barriers are an additional barrier that these kids must overcome. Therefore, language capacity is a must. There are only 26 SPED-certified teachers with Spanish language capacity in the entire district.

This topic, EL/SWDs, is a historically ignored topic in the district. This is not the case anymore, with the work of these departments. When the subcommittee began the process of trying to achieve the goal of having a para that speaks the language, they had no data. Ivonne has been integral in gathering this data for the first time in the history of the district, which she will present at the meeting.

In terms of recruitment, there has been consistent work with OHC on recoding language capacity for paras and teachers. For the first time, OHC has included language capacity as a requirement in job postings. We are far from understanding exactly how big the gap is. But this data will help provide precision to help target the recruitment based on the actual data.

Q: [Miren Uriarte] This is an issue when we have principals given hiring autonomy, which we think is a good thing.

A: [John Mudd] This needs to be emphasized for the principals through leadership institutes and Probable Org.

A: [Emily Qazilbash] Hiring is the responsibility of principals. OHC is working with principals through the job postings to identify the need with new positions. They are working with the Office of Equity to potentially work with schools and Office of Equity for next year to identify a group of schools that need ELL-SWD support. There is a guidance document draft for this area, which will help the process. As seen in the data, EL/SWDs are dispersed throughout the district. These students are educated in most schools in the district, but the number of EL-SWDs in many schools is very low (under 10), which makes the allocation of paras difficult. The hiring of paras is different than the hiring of teachers and paras are often assigned by central office. Since the paras have a different hiring unit than teachers, there is a potential for the assignment of paras with language capacity based in the need at the schools.

Q: [Miren Uriarte] Principals do not have the power to move paras or teachers as the community serving each school changes. Under the current bargaining units, flexibility of reassigning paras and teachers is not possible. This is an issue they are running into with the union, not being able to reassign paras based on need. This is a mindset that needs to be recommended to the union. Teachers should reflect the community they serve. This is something the ELLTF and the School Committee may want to consider – lobbying the union. Pushing on Dr. Esparza, Dr. Estrada, and Cindie Nielsen is not going to get this done. Then again, the idea of reassigning paras and teachers can be a slippery slope and the union protection is there for a reason. The first priority is identifying that the problem exists and this needs to be framed in its full complexity, but we need to look for solutions to this problem.

There is a clear long-term goal, to work with the union and district leadership to match the student need with the available and appropriate paras/teachers.

Returning to the “next steps” from the presentation to the school committee, “Next Step #2” focused on supporting and embedding cultural and linguistically competence in recruitment and hiring. The Subcommittee and stakeholders need to problem solve to increase capacity. OHC did add language capacity in the recruitment forms, which is a big step.

In terms of Professional Development, the district has made concrete PD steps, but they still don’t have district-wide capacity for this topic. Dr. Esparza added that they are working across departments to develop a PD overview, to understand how the work overlaps and informs the instructions. The goal is to have one “tight” PD that covers all PD being done on ELLs and SWDs in the district.

Ivonne Borrero shared the overview of the work OELL, Office of Special Education, and OHC have done with the subcommittee this year. Their overarching goal is: “BPS is committed to building inclusive practices across the district taking into account the many wonderful diverse backgrounds our students bring. We are committed to ensuring that educators with cultural and linguistic expertise are recruited and provided so that our students in order to proved native language support when feasible and appropriate.” To meet these goals they are taking the following action steps. 1) They are committed to encouraging principals to hire bilingual educators and paras, if and when qualified candidates are available. The job postings reflect this commitment. (2) In addition to making a commitment to encouraging these types of hires, they will be working to continue to develop pipelines for qualified bilingual educators, by recruiting and growing talent through BPS teacher development programs. Examples of this are the EPIC Partnership Innovation Grant in collaboration with BU and Pre-Service Training in partnership with OHC hosting pre-service training. (3) They have made progress in cross training with COSE and LATFs and Professional Development. (4) As discussed with John Mudd and Maria Serpa, conducted an analysis school-by-school of the number of EL/SWD and bilingual teachers in the buildings. (5) Analysis of one school to provide detailed analysis of the qualifications of the educators serving EL/SWDs.

Ivonne Borrero shared information on these last two action steps.

- Through the analysis, OELL found that there are 3,442 SWDs who are ELs in BPS schools. They provided a breakdown by school and there is a wide range in the distribution of these students.
- Next OELL provided the number of EL/SWD by schools, the breakdown of the primary language for these students and the number of bilingual staff at each school. This analysis shows that at the vast majority of schools in the district, there is no bilingual staff to serve the students. In some schools there are bilingual content teachers or bilingual paras, but there are only bilingual SPED/ELL teachers in one school in the entire district. Even in the cases where there is bilingual staff, the number of staff and even the language capacity of the staff do not fit the level of need at the schools.
- Finally, OELL and Office of Special Education shared a detailed analysis of the student body and staff capacity at the Umana Academy. They selected this school because they anticipated that the ELLs would all be Spanish-speakers (the school is a dual language Spanish school). At the Umana, 80% of the student body is Latino. None of the Special Education teaching staff is bilingual (and no one can test in Spanish for the academic piece of the evals). There are 83 EL/WDS in the school. 80% of these students do not have access to a Spanish-speaking teacher, while the remaining 20% have a Spanish-speaking teacher in front of them everyday at some point. Of this 20%:
 - o 8 are in the Two-Way bilingual program (they have a Spanish-speaking teacher in front of them for 72% of their week)
 - o 9 are in a gen ed classroom (they have a Spanish-speaking teacher in front of them for 47% of their week)

The Task Force agreed that this data is a huge step in this work. This type of data should be repeated again for next year to see if there have been any improvements in the matching of paras capacity and

student needs. We also need to see the assessment data for this group, to see how they are performing relative to their ELL, SWD, and gen ed peers.

[The ELL Task Force members unanimously approved the minutes from the February meeting]

June Presentation to School Committee

Miren Uriarte led a discussion on the review of the work of the ELL Task Force for the school year in anticipation of the June presentation to the School Committee. It has been a challenging year for many, but the Task Force and subcommittees have done a great deal of work. We already heard from both the Parent Engagement and ELL-SWD subcommittees, next we need brief updates from the other two subcommittees.

The Data and Student Assignment Subcommittee was separated into two groups, with Michael Berardino leading the Data Subcommittee. This group has met with OELL to review the DOJ reports and has updated the calendar of data requests for the Task Force. The Student Assignment subcommittee was focused on the analysis of the home-based assignment plan, which as we heard earlier has not been conducted yet. Therefore this subcommittee is in a holding pattern.

The Program Quality Subcommittee initiated and led a discussion on the programming available for Cape Verdean ELLs producing some concrete suggestions for work moving forward. They were also active in the budget discussion.

There is a suggestion that the Program Quality and Parent Engagement Subcommittee use the next year as a case study/in-depth analysis of one language group in the district. Haitian Creole students are getting a new dual language program and there has been an increased focus on this group. This could help target the work of the Parent Engagement and Program Quality Subcommittees.

There are currently meetings planned for later in April in May between district leadership and the ELLTF leadership around the alignment of goals. These conversations may shift the focus of the Task Force work for SY17-18. Therefore, the ELLTF agreed to push the presentation date to the School Committee from June 7th to June 21st.

The meeting was adjourned.