

## THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF THE CITY OF BOSTON



### **Minutes of the English Language Learners (ELL) Task Force Meeting June 16, 2016**

The English Language Learners Task Force of the Boston School Committee held a meeting on June 16, 2016 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](mailto:bpselltaskforce@gmail.com).

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

**Task Force Members Present:** Miren Uriarte, Janet Anderson, Bob Hildreth, John Mudd, Kim Janey, Cheng Imm Tan, Paulo De Barros, Michael Berardino - Coordinator. **Other persons and BPS Staff Present:** Frances Esparza, Kim Tsai, Daphne Germain, Cindie Neilsen, Donna Muncey, James Racanelli, Keith Hellmold, Samuel Hurtado, Melissa Colon. **Members Absent:** Suzanne Lee, Maria Serpa, Alejandra St. Guillen, Geralde Gabeau, Abdul Hussein, and Diana Lam.

Michael Berardino opened the meeting in his capacity of Coordinator of the Task Force. The meeting minutes from April 25, 2016 were unanimously approved.

#### **Updates from the Office of English Language Learners**

Dr. Frances Esparza, Assistant Superintendent, Office of English Language Learners (OELL) provided updates on OELL work.

On the June 8<sup>th</sup> Boston School Committee meeting where the ELL Task Force and OELL presented reports to the School Committee, Dr. Esparza was asked about areas that OELL needed support. One area of concern is the struggle to find adequate numbers of teacher leaders. John Mudd asked follow up questions about this topic. Dr. Esparza informed the Task Force that finding Teacher Leaders is a struggle because BTU teachers do not want to leave the union and work at central office, where they lose their benefits. There is a proposal to provide stipends for teachers to work on Professional Development (PD) during vacation time. OELL is also advertising outside of BPS and Massachusetts to find “instructional specialists” and executive PD.

Q: [Dr. Uriarte] Have you talked to BTU about rotating teachers to work on PD.

A: There have been discussions to create a rotation. This is also a factor in the Newcomers Assessment Center, where the testers are also BTU teachers.

Dr. Frances Esparza then discussed the ELL Master Plan. The goal is to create a strong guiding document that all school leaders and teachers can use. This is not just a circular; this will be a strong guidance document that covers assignment, instruction, assessment, parental involvement, and other topics. OELL is working on developing this document, thinking about how they will get this document out and how

they will make the document consistent. OELL will develop the ELL Master Plan along with all stakeholders: principals, teachers, ELL Task Force, CBO, etc. Dr. Esparza provided a working draft of the list of items in the Master Plan, which answers a lot to the successor meeting. Dr. Esparza shared the ELL Master Plan from the LA Unified School District, a large document with chapters covering key aspects of educating ELLs. It was noted that the LA version did not have a chapter on ELL-SWDs, which Dr. Esparza is focusing on for the Boston ELL Master Plan,

Once the Master Plan is created, they will design modules and screencasts so that through 4 PD modules, everyone can understand the goals of the Master Plan. There will be two layers of PD. The first will focus on training principals so that they understand all the aspects of the Master Plan and understand how to facilitate the training of teachers to use and follow the master plan. The second layer of PD will focus on teachers, facilitated by trained principals.

OELL are looking for suggestions on how to get teachers on board and want suggestions from the ELL Task Force and subcommittees.

Q: [Dr. Uriarte] I suggest getting the ELL Task Force involved as early as possible as the arm of the School Committee. Getting a proposed timeline would be very helpful, to help schedule time at ELL Task Force meetings and School Committee meetings.

A: OELL will provide the Task Force with a timeline. The goal is to get the Master Plan approved by the School Committee in June 2017 and rolled out in August 2017 to start training principals. The ELL Master Plan is a document primarily for PD. The document will be very prescriptive.

Q: [Kim Janey] What type of PD? Will it be people talking to teachers or will it be interactive?

A: Both. OELL will develop screen casts, which are people talking, but they are also going to develop interactive PD as well.

Q: Who will be responsible for making changes to the [Master Plan]?

A: OELL will be primarily responsible. They are proposing to update the document every 3-4 years.

Q: Who will be responsible for new hires?

A: It will continue to be principals and the LATFs

Q: Have you talked to DOJ/OCR about the proposed ELL Master Plan?

A: Yes. They are completely on board.

Q: In the LAUSD ELL Master Plan, there is not an explicit focus on ELL-SWDs; will this be a focus of the BPS ELL Master Plan?

A: Yes. The goal is to make this Master Plan better than the one in LA.

Q: [Janet Anderson] How you frame it will be so important to the success of the document with teachers. Is it compliance-based or is it a living breathing document?

A: The training modules will be different for principals than it will be for teachers. For teachers, the focus will be on instructional development, but there will also be a compliance focus as well. The principal training will be compliance-based. All principals will be required to complete the training modules. But the principal led-facilitation of the teacher modules will not focus on compliance.

Q: [Rev. Tan] How will you monitor implementation of the Master Plan and how are you going to ensure that there will be flexibility?

A: The facilitator guide will be created with fidelity and all principals must complete the training.

Q: [Dr. Uriarte] I am hung up on how the ELL TF will interact with the Master Plan. We have seen that there is a difference between what is meant to be and how things work on the ground.

A: Efforts are being made to make a consistent message.

[Kim Tsai, OELL] There is a need to create standards and benchmarks. They are working with teachers to develop these benchmarks. If there is a school that wants their own benchmarks, they can lobby for their own benchmarks, but they must align with the Master Plan goals.

[Donna Muncey] The process will take a year and during that time they would like to work collaboratively with teachers, which will help in the engagement process.

Q: [Dr. Uriarte] Is there a clear direction on how the ELL TF can help with this? With the collaboration?

Q: [John Mudd] How does the ELL Master Plan fit into the BPS Strategic Implementation Plan?

A: [Donna Muncey] This is a large plan, but the BPS Strategic Plan has 5 main areas of focus, instead of organized by department. There are several “milestones” that the district has established for each are of focus. District leaders meet weekly to review the milestones, which are still in draft form and will be presented to the School Committee in June. Dr. Chang will be updated on 30 initiatives and the milestones associated with each initiative.

### **Student Enrollment and Assignment**

Jamie Racanelli, the Director of Operations Management, presented the slide deck titled “Student Assignment Presentation to the ELL Task Force, June 16, 2016”. The document was prepared by James Racanelli, Donna Muncey, Keith Hellmold, and Daphne Germain. James Racanelli took over for Peter Sloan. Mr. Racanelli wanted to emphasize that Operations Management are not experts on ELLs and work closely with OELL for guidance on assignment topics related to ELLs. The presentation addressed several questions posed by the ELL Tsk Force and focused on four general areas: Program Seats and Gaps, overview of ELL participation in SY201617 student assignment rounds, Choice patterns of ELL families, and Likelihood of Receiving Top Choices for ELL Families.

1) **Program Seats and Availability:** to address the question of how does the supply of ELL seats compare to the number of ELL students eligible for them, they first identified the number of eligible ELL students. These students are limited to ELL students in ELD Level 1 through 3 (ELL students in Level 4 and higher are no longer eligible for program seats). Furthermore, the analysis did not include ELL students who are designated as SPED and are in substantially separate or inclusion settings. With these exclusions, the number of ELLs under focus is 7,896 ELLs with 8,498 available ELL program seats. Of the 8,498 program seats, 3,948 are Spanish program sets, 2,130 are Multilingual, 705 are Haitian, 525 are Chinese, 382 are Cape Verdean, and 360 are Vietnamese.

Q: [John Mudd] Does the figure of 7,896 ELL students include in-district charter schools? Does the figure include the Level 5 schools?

A: Yes. This figure includes ELLs in in-district charter schools. However, the ELL seats in the in-district charters do not always indicate that there is an ESL program at the school. There are also issues on the ELL figure depending on which data source is being used. For enrollment, the district has information on all ELLs, but for various achievement data, the charters do not report to the same system.

To analyze the seat availability, they looked at two metrics. The first was the comparison between total number of ELL seats and the total number of eligible ELL students. The second metric is the total ELL sets compared to the number of ELL Students in ELL seats. For the first metric, there is an excess of 602 students, but for the second metric there is an excess of 2,015 ELL program seats. The difference between these two metrics are students in General Education; i.e. ELLs in

schools where there are no ELL program, but are receiving ESL push in/pull out services. This is not the ELL students who opt-out of all ESL services (there are currently only 4 students that are ELD Level 1-3 that opted out of all services).

Q: Can the ELL Task Force get a more detailed break down of the differences in these two measures? How many are students in gen ed settings? How many are from in-district charter schools? Which grades are they in?

Q: [Melissa Colon] The issue of placing ELLs in the proper seats has been an issue tackled by the ELL Task Force since its inception. The wide margin between the number of eligible ELLs and the number of ELLs in ELL seats is critical to look at. Enrollment and assignment should be very clear if this is an issue of programs versus services. Can they ensure that all the students are receiving ESL services?

A: The discussion of programs versus services needs to be clarified in the presentation.

Q: [Dr. Uriarte] Before we go running around and saying that there are 2,000 extra ELL seats, it is critical to get deeper information on the accurate setting for these ELLs.

Mr. Racanelli then provided information on the excess ELL seats by program type (SEI Cape Verdean, SEI Chinese, SEI Haitian, SEI “Multilingual” (students that speak a language other than the 5 major languages), SEI Spanish, and SEI Vietnamese) and by grade level (K0-8 and 9-12). Overall, there are more excess seats in K-8 than there are in Grades 9-12. The program with the most excess seats is the SEI Multilingual program with 414 excess seats in K-8 and 599 excess seats in 9-12. There are 246 excess SEI Spanish seats for K-8, but a deficiency of 402 SEI Spanish seats for 9-12. The most glaring gaps are in SEI Cape Verdean seats, where there are 193 more students than seats in K-8 and 65 more students than seats in 9-12.

Q: [Paolo De Barros] The issue around Cape Verdeans is blatant. What is being done about this?

A: Getting this information together in the first place is an important step. The first step is understanding where the gap is. Then they will look to see where students currently go to school then analyze where the programs should go to best serve the community. Program strands take time to build.

Mr. Racanelli then reported on the ELLs from major language groups that are enrolled in SEI Multilingual programs. There are almost 1000 students from the largest language groups in SEI Multilingual programs including 487 Spanish speakers and 105 Cape Verdean speakers. This shows there is a mismatch between supply and demand in the district.

This work has led Operations Management to ask three important questions

- 1) Is the geographic distribution of ELL program seats appropriate given the demographics of the city?
- 2) How do we properly account for both language-specific and multilingual programs whether we are providing the appropriated number of ELL seats?
- 3) Why are students enrolling in multilingual and general education programs rather than language specific programs? Is it a function of seat availability or a reflection of choice patterns?

2) **ELL Family Participation:** The next portion of the presentation focused on ELL family participation in enrollment rounds. Round 1 includes transition grades only (K0-K2, 6, and 9): subsequent rounds include all other grades as well as transition grades. 12,408 total students participated in Rounds 1 and 2 for SY1617, 8,744 non-ELLs (70%) and 3,664 ELLs (30%). In

grade K0-K1, there are 3,793 total students that participated in Rounds 1 & 2, 51% were ELL (1,927) and 49% were non-ELLs (1,866). For students entering K2, there were 1,966 students, 18% of which were ELLs (355) and 82% are non-ELLs (1,611). For students entering 9th grade, there were 2,149 students, 13% of who were ELLs (282) and 1,867 are non-ELLs (1,867).

3) **ELL Enrollment Decisions:** The next question addressed was: How many ELL families chose ELL program for SY17? This is a challenging question to answer in part because there are not SEI programs in K0/K1. For ELLs enrolling in grades K2-12, 90% ranked any ELL options, 89% ranked an ELL option in their Top 3, and 75% ranked ELL as the Top Choice. There was a request for the ELL program choice broken down by program type.

There were several concerns raised by ELL Task Force members about the issue of “choice” for ELL families. Every parent has a choice, but according to parents it is less an experience of choosing and more of an experience of assignment.

Q: [Paulo De Barros] There is an example of Cape Verdean families at the Dearborn, which has been expanded to a 6-12 school. Technically students entering the 9<sup>th</sup> grade that attended the Dearborn in 8<sup>th</sup> grade had the opportunity to enter the enrollment assignment process. However, parents are not being offered a choice. They are not being informed that there is a choice option.

A: [Donna Muncey] This is a critical issue; thank you for bringing this our attention. Parent engagement is critical to educating parents about their rights and their opportunity for choice. Assignment has used student researcher to identify the issues are the student assignment process. The district currently does not have a comprehensive document about selecting high schools, explaining what are the strengths and weaknesses for each high school. BPS needs to do this. These issues exist for English speakers too.

When ELL parents enroll they are first given language assessment in the NACC. Once the ELLs are assessed, the tester presents the family with a basket of schools. If the schools have an SEI program, they see the program type. Parents also get offers from school in their zone. For students enrolling in grades K2-12 choice occurs at the NACC. OELL have been working with NACC to make sure they have the capacity to test all students and offer educated recommendations to parents. If students are transitioning between grades and they are in ELD Levels 1-3, they get support from LATFs and guidance counselors to make school choices. Training is necessary for all.

The next portion of the presentation looked at the percentage of ELL families that received their top choice. They looked at 2,923 new K1 and K2 families enrolled in SY1516. Among these new families, 2,192 were Non-ELLs and 731 were ELLs. 34% of Non-ELLs and 32% of ELL received their top choice. 61% of Non-ELLs and 53% of ELLs received their first, second, or third choice.

Q: Is there a way to link the discussion of Top Choice to the program type? In other words, do we know if the choices reflect the program availability?

Q: What are the priorities for the ELL Assignment? Is it SEI Language Specific? Is it being close to home? Or is it the school choice?

A: There is clearly an issue with capacity. If they know they need strands, they need to identify where the district has capacity to add these strands. There is also a potential issue as they move towards (attempting to) add more dual-language programs, these programs might pull students from SEI language specific programs. The discussion becomes much more complicated when talking about programming.

Q: [Rev. Tan] Parents are telling us that just pick 1,2,3 based on geography only. There is no nuance around language program and program quality. There are examples to the contrary; specifically around Haitian students where there is an adviser who helps families make choices for school assignment. But there is a massive gap in knowledge among ELL parents.

A: One major gap is ELLs in early education (K0/K1) where there are no SEI programs yet. Families are assigned to schools without consideration for ELL program. When they get to K2 there is a gap in getting information on programs and choices.

Q: [Miren Uriarte] There are a few priorities from this presentation. The first is the disconnect. The entry point into the system, the people that make the choice for enrollment are staff and not the parents. There is a severe lack of understanding among testers in NACC, yet they have great responsibility for assisting parents in making school choice. “Choice” should not be the language, the term used when talking about assignment for ELLs. Parents are not educated on this issue. They might not even be literate in their own language.

Priority #2 relates to the overlays that were supposed to be built into the Home-Based Assignment system, where there was quality and ELL program choice for parents. The goal was to match the linguistic community to the program strands and this could be either dual-language programs or SEI language specific. The assignment system seems to just think of the whole city. Demography drives programs. ELLs have been used to fill the gaps in enrollment throughout the district. For instance, hybrid programs should not exist.

A: There are instances of principals lobbying to keep hybrid models because it alleviates the need to hire SEI endorsed teachers.

Q: [Samuel Hurtado] Has there been a thought of pulling ELLs out of the computer-based assignment plan and making sure they are assigned according to needs and choice? We see that ELLs are disproportionately educated in Level 4 schools. There is this continued tension between choice and program quality.

A: [Donna Muncey] There are still issues in the system. The system is less effective for students that enter during the school year and these students are primarily immigrant students. One idea is to spread the risk so that all schools across the district have to accept students that register throughout the year, not just the under-enrolled schools, which are primarily the Level 4 schools. This process has actually harmed the potential benefits of a choice-based and competitive system that would identify the least desirable schools for change/closure.

Q: [Kim Janey] The students that are coming in late are getting “screwed”. The idea of shifting the responsibility to capacity schools and non-capacity schools is very appealing. The political issue will be critical to advance this idea.

### **Review of the Current Format of the ELL Task Force**

The meeting concluded with a review of the current ELL Task Force format. There has been heavy work by the Subcommittees throughout the year. Rev. Tan, lead of the Parent Engagement Subcommittee advocated for keeping the current structure. The Parent Engagement Subcommittee allowed the Task Force to delve deeper into the issues facing ELL parents by making several site visits and hearing directly from parents. Samuel Hurtado, member of the Parent Engagement subcommittee, said that the site visits were very effective, but it would be helpful to have members of other subcommittees join in on the site visits as well. There is a need for more communication across subcommittees and to effectively communicate the work of the subcommittees to the larger Task Force. John Mudd argued that the subcommittees allow deep probes and create unique opportunities to get deep information.

One idea was to separate the Data and Student Assignment Subcommittee into either two subcommittees or to have Data requests and issues maintained by the ELL Task Force coordinator.

Kim Janey raised the issue around the long meetings with too many agenda items created rushed presentations. She supports having less agenda items to get fuller discussion about the important topics.