OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE BOSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE
OPPORTUNITY AND ACHIEVEMENT GAPS TASK FORCE
VIRTUAL MEETING

October 2, 2025

The Boston School Committee Opportunity and Achievement Gaps (OAG) Task Force held a virtual meeting on Zoom on October 2, 2025 at 4:00 p.m. For more information about any of the items listed below, visit www.bostonpublicschools.org/gaps, email lparvex@bostonpublicschools.org, or call the Boston School Committee Office at (617) 635 - 9014.

ATTENDANCE

Task Force Members Present: Rev. Willie Bodrick; Carline Dr. Pignato; Marinell Rousmaniere; Filiberto Santiago-Lizardi; Co-Chair Jeri Robinson; and Co-Chair Ayele Shakur.

Task Force Members Absent: Dr. Lisa Gonsalves; Dr. Gil Noam.

OAG Policy Director Tamika Estwick Buckmire; BPS Staff: OAG Policy Director Senior Advisor for Strategy and Opportunity Gap Dr. Colin Rose.

DOCUMENTS PRESENTED

Agenda

Meeting Minutes: June 5, 2025

2025 Slate of Nominees

Draft 2025 Policy

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Robinson called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone. Ms. Fernandez called the roll. A quorum of the Task Force was present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approved - On roll call, the Task Force unanimously approved the minutes of the June 5, 2025 OAG Task Force meeting.

Opportunity and Achievement Gaps Task Force Virtual Meeting
October 2, 2025

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

Updates from Dr. Colin Rose, Senior Advisor for Strategy and Opportunity Gaps - Dr. Rose outlined his current role and highlighted three main areas of focus in his work:

- Opportunity Gaps (OAG) Policy: Supporting the updated OAG policy for 2025 and ensuring it is implemented across the district.
- Strategic Planning: Leading efforts around three key district objectives: literacy, holistic student supports, and programming/facilities. He emphasized improving implementation of existing initiatives instead of creating new ones.
- Hub School/Community School Model: Overseeing the 20 hub schools, with the goal of embedding this model into the district's core strategy as a driver of school-level transformation.

Ms. Shakur welcomed Dr. Rose back to the task force,and shared her excitement about his role in both the policy work and the district's strategic planning. She also welcomed new nominees, and reminded the group about the upcoming in-person meeting on October 14.

Ms. Rousmaniere asked about the timeline for the strategic planning work and how it will intersect with the task force. Dr. Rose said they were hoping to have districtwide strategies, and smart goals ready by early December to present before the budget process. The task force will be involved by both individual feedback as well as a formal one on the drafted goals.

Ms. Robinson said she was excited about the work ahead to be aligning the strategic plan with the next steps in the policy steps. She also welcomed the nominees.

Mr. Santiago-Lizardi said he hoped the new year would bring positive energy and boost to tackle upcoming challenges.

Dr. Stephen Alkins said he looks forward to making progress and emphasized the need for clear communication between the strategic plan and the policy actions.

TASK FORCE BUSINESS

Introduction to Task Force Nominees - Ms. Shakur said that the new slate of nominees includes individuals with expertise in areas like multilingual learning, disabilities, literacy, social-emotional learning, and Black student achievement, as well as former BPS students, parents, teachers, and administrators. She invited the members to introduce themselves.

Lea Serena, Vice President of the Boston Teachers Union and a former special education and early childhood teacher, shared her strong ties to BPS as an alumna. She expressed a commitment to supporting multilingual learners and students from similar backgrounds.

Pamela Leins, Executive Director of the Boston Education Fund, a BPS alum, parent, Citywide Parent Council representative, and member of the Governance Board at New Mission School, said she also brings experience as a small business owner and community advocate. She emphasized the importance of investing in young people and that the task force's work expands access to resources which is essential, especially for families facing language or access barriers.

Devin Morris, co-founder and Executive Director of The Teacher's Lounge, which works to recruit and retain educators of color across Massachusetts, is also Vice-Chair of the Commission on Black Men and Boys. He said he brings expertise in marketing and communication and emphasized the need for both internal and external perspectives to help close opportunity gaps in education.

Dr. Ambrizeth Lima, a former English learner, said she is committed to equity in education. She taught in BPS, working with English learners, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students in alternative education. Trained in research and policy, she said she aims to improve access, elevate voices, and ensure accountability in education.

Dr. Harold L. Miller Jr., assistant superintendent at Melvin H. King school has more than 20 years of experience in education. He also supervises aspiring educators at Northeastern University and said he's eager to contribute his dual perspective from both schools and the central office to the task force's work.

Dr. Brandy Brooks, Executive Director of Higher Ground, a community based organization that partners with BPS on extended learning, housing, and mental health. She said she has a background in public health, and focuses on social-emotional learning and literacy, and brings a community-based perspective to the task force.

Ms.Shakur introduced Dr. Alkins, and said he will be taking over the role as Co-Chair as Ms. Robinson steps down.

Dr. Stephen Alkins, Boston native, neuroscientist, Morehouse graduate, and BPS parent said he is focused on expanding STEM access and equity. Inspired by his wife's work as a BPS principal, he joined the school committee to help close opportunity gaps.

Rev. Bodrick said he was excited about new voices joining and he looks forward to working together to strengthen their efforts.

Review and discussion of the revised 2025 Policy To Advance Academic Excellence and Eliminate Opportunity and Achievement Gaps - Ms.Shakur shared that the task force's main role is to monitor and revise the opportunity and achievement gaps policy, originally drafted in 2016. She said after much hard work the updated policy is nearing final review for a November school committee vote, and thanked Dr. Carline Pignato, Dr. Lisa Gonsalves, Reverend Bodrick and Dr. Rose for their effort. Ms. Shakur invited guest speaker, longtime education advocate John Mudd to give remarks about multilingual learners and academics.

Mr. Mudd gave an overview of the history of bilingual education in Massachusetts and questioned the current approach of placing multilingual learners in general education without home language instruction, calling it ineffective. Citing low MCAS scores, he urged BPS to shift toward valuing and expanding bilingual education. He emphasized the importance of building on students' native language as a foundation for academic success and called for evidence-based decision-making to better serve multilingual students.

Mr. Morris asked for clarification on how the policy functions in practice. Ms. Shakur explained that the policy serves as a guiding "North Star" for the district to close performance gaps and

outlines key priorities. Each department creates implementation plans based on it; in this case, supporting multilingual students involves multiple teams, especially the Office of Multilingual Learners. She read aloud the objective: *Advance inclusion and accelerate learning for students with disabilities* and noted that the policy language doesn't fully reflect multilingual learners' needs.

Ms. Robinson said that multilingual education is one of the district's toughest issues, stressing the need for more multilingual educators, and understanding how current staff can better support these students. She emphasized learning from successful programs, and called for hearing directly from district leaders doing this work to hear their successes and challenges. She also expressed concern about potential federal policy changes.

Dr. Alkins emphasized that native language instruction should be the district's gold standard for supporting multilingual learners, regardless of the political climate. He called for clear steps in the policy, such as hiring benchmarks, community engagement, and budget planning, to make that goal achievable, and suggested looking beyond MCAS scores to measure success.

Dr. Brooks asked how the recently passed Protect Education Equity bill, which includes support for multilingual learners and those needing disability services, is reflected in the policy. She explained that the bill has five main categories: training qualified school interpreters, strengthening students' civil rights, affirming high standards for English learners, meeting the needs of English learners with disabilities, and protecting students with disabilities from unfair exclusion. Ms. Shakur said she would invite Diana Santiago from Massachusetts Advocates for Children (MAC), who was in attendance, to share her comments on this topic at the end of the meeting.

Ms. Serena raised concerns about the frequent misidentification of students with disabilities and multilingual learners. She urged clearer language and emphasized recognizing multilingualism through programs like the Seal of Biliteracy and language access for monolingual students. She also clarified that "inclusion" and "least restrictive environment" are special education terms and shouldn't be confused with general support for multilingual learners, as these are related but distinct goals. The members discussed the wording of the policy.

Dr. Miller asked how we are monitoring progress, in addition to the school-level progress, as he hoped this version better connects departmental goals with school-level goals. Ms. Shakur said that progress monitoring is addressed in Goal 1 of the policy, which includes accountability measures like reporting, impact statements, annual monitoring, dashboards, and performance evaluations. She also said that they aimed to strengthen the policy by bringing the focus down to the school level and amplifying that connection more clearly in this version.

Dr. Alkins asked if the policy should specifically monitor the IEP process to help close achievement gaps. Ms.Shakur said this fits under section for students with disabilities. The members discussed the wording of the policy. Ms. Serena emphasized the need for IEP oversight, especially around student identification. She also stressed diversifying not just teachers but also other staff across departments.

Dr. Pignato noted MCAS scores don't fully reflect multilingual learners' progress, as they need more time to fully learn the academic language before being fairly assessed. She called for broader measures that focus on their strengths and unique needs.

Dr. Rose emphasized that native language support should but promote biliteracy and highlighted the need to clearly frame the goal as valuing both languages.

Dr. Lima asked about students in alternative education who don't fit into categories like EL or students with disabilities, and said they deserve recognition as their needs and challenges are different and often overlooked. Ms. Shakur said there was no mention of alternative education and suggested adding language.

Ms. Shakur said that the members must confirm and agree on the policy by the October 14 meeting, so it's ready to send to the Boston School Committee. She said they would re-word the objective regarding multilingual learners and incorporate the feedback.

Ms. Shakur worked on the policy language with the help of the members.

Ms. Robinson highlighted the need to better understand the current workforce in order to identify any obstacles slowing progress. Ms. Serena said there aren't enough trained educators and that educators of color often face burnout due to extra responsibilities. Despite this, she feels the current language gets us closer to the goal. Ms, Shakur suggested partnering with community partners to support native language instruction in addition to the classroom teachers.

Rev. Bodrick reminded the members that the policy is an aspirational "North Star," and that the details will be addressed in the implementation plan. Mr. Morris questioned if past progress was hindered by missing language in the policy, and gave examples of goals that he felt had missing language.

Ms. Shakur confirmed that in 2016, lack of clear policy language was a major issue. This policy now focuses on the "what," while the "how" will be addressed in departmental plans. The implementation items were moved out of the main policy and into a separate task force recommendations section to avoid being overly prescriptive. Dr. Rose said the policy should focus on clear goals, not detailed implementation, which can change over time and be addressed in separate plans. Rev. Bodrick said the document sets lasting goals beyond leadership, with details handled in the implementation plan. It updates every five years to stay clear and actionable.

Ms. Shakur added that the task force monitors progress through Human Capital presentations, with details addressed in implementation plans.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Diana Santiago, Legal Director at Mass Advocates for Children urged better native language support for multilingual learners, especially those with disabilities. She offered to share information on the education equity law.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Robinson thanked everyone and announced the next Task Force meeting will be in-person on Tuesday, October 14.

Approved - The Task Force unanimously approved a motion by roll call to adjourn to the meeting at 5:55 p.m.

Attest:

Kirsys Fernandez

Kirsys Fernandez
Special Projects Manager