

April 28, 2015

To: Dr. Tommy Chang

From: Boston School Committee's English Language Learners Task Force

Re: Time Sensitive Action Items for the New Superintendent

The ELL Task Force offers this memo to highlight the issues that need to be addressed in order for BPS to deliver high quality services to ELL students and ensure high academic achievement for all students. This document takes a high level view of the areas that require immediate action and is not intended to be a comprehensive set of recommendations. We look forward to the opportunity to engage with you and your leadership team to undertake a complete assessment of BPS's accomplishments and challenges in this important area of work.

Introduction

BPS is a multicultural school district. Boston is 29% ELL/LEP and 46% of BPS students speak a language other than English as their first language. ELL students speak 84 different languages as their home language. BPS students' families are from 142 different countries.

We believe that to actively participate in a democratic society, as well as to be a competitive participant in a global economy, students must speak a second language fluently and understand their own, and one another's, cultures deeply. In order for the Boston Public Schools (BPS) to foster this atmosphere for students it must undergo a cultural shift that leads to acknowledgement, acceptance and pride in becoming a multilingual and multicultural school system. The BPS needs to place a high value on the culture and language of all of its students, and it should stress the benefits of language acquisition for all.

The goal of education of bilingual learners should be quality education. Practices may have to be different to achieve quality education but no practice and policy should be acceptable if it does not result in quality education. The changes in practice to achieve this goal must begin at the top of the District and be reflected in the upper layers of BPS instructional leadership; including the selection of school leaders who make each building a welcoming place for families and students. Buildings should be full of culturally proficient and diverse staff that possesses the requisite training, and culturally relevant artwork, books and resources. All of the adults in the building must model the use of strong academic English; all teachers and staff should know the developmental path of how and when students acquire language. This proposed learning environment will benefit all BPS students including those with disabilities or interrupted schooling. It will also help prepare all students to live, work, and succeed in a 21st century multicultural democracy.

Time Sensitive Action Items

While there ongoing issues related to ELL students that need attention, as the transition team gets underway and you create a plan for the first 100 days, we wanted to flag for you those that are most urgent and time sensitive:

1) Leadership and Structure

One of the ongoing barriers to the success of ELL students in BPS is the isolation of the office charged with oversight of services for ELL from the rest of BPS departments. This "siloeffect," results in the development of programs and services in a closed loop that doesn't engage all pertinent school leaders, families, and departments. Communication among BPS departments has

improved in recent years, but there is still a lack of coordinated problem-solving and program development. The new Superintendent needs to create a BPS structure that delivers coordinated services and ensures high-quality services and programs for ELL students. This will be accomplished by hiring leaders with the right skills and vision to produce a culture shift around collaboration and mutual accountability. Leadership in all departments, particularly the Academic, OELL, and OSESS departments, that combines education vision with management skills will be critically important in developing and implementing new approaches.

2) Data and Accountability

We have significant concern around the need for accurate student-level data and, more importantly, the gap in services for ELL students identified in the recent report to the Department of Justice. It is critical that BPS create a plan to improve data collection and analysis systems in order to satisfy Department of Justice reporting requirements and to develop more effective data-informed policies to support the academic success of ELL students. See Appendix 4 attached to this memo.

3) Quality of Programs and Services for all ELL Students

In spite of the advances of the last years in the education of ELLs in Boston, some critical areas of concern remain in regards to program and service quality.

- **Inconsistent Student Assessment:** Program quality begins with a student assessment system that produces consistent and accurate language proficiency testing using validated and standardized instruments for assessment and assignment.
- **Uneven distribution of Program Offerings:** The bulk of the programs offered by BPS are multilingual SEI programs that, although prioritized by state law, offer students the least opportunity for positive outcomes, according to outcome studies. Seats in programs where ELL students have shown better outcomes are not evenly distributed through the city or located consistently in close proximity where language minority communities reside. For example:
 - Lack of SEI language-specific program seats in some neighborhoods force some students to go to school outside their neighborhood. The student assignment policy, including distribution of programs for ELL students by language, grade level, and cluster, should reflect Boston's neighborhood compositions and give parents greater choice.
 - To date, BPS has not placed high performing dual language programs in every cluster, as provided by the new student assignment plan. BPS needs an action plan to expand the number of seats in Dual Language programs, where ELL students excel. There should be dual language program options in each Cluster.
 - BPS should analyze the data and prepare a report back on the academic outcomes for students in language-specific programs compared to multi-lingual SEI programs, and if there are any differences in the time it takes to become English-proficient.
- **A Narrative of Achievement:** ELD Level 4 and 5 students are meeting or exceeding BPS average MCAS scores in ELA and Math/Science, with lower dropout rates than BPS average. Need to create new narrative throughout district about academic achievement of ELL students to inform BPS staff, parents, and community.
- **Recruitment and Retention of Bilingual, Bicultural staff.** BPS needs action plan with concrete goals for recruitment and retention of a diverse pool of teachers and school leaders, especially bilingual and bicultural staff and those with expertise in working with English learners.
- **Cultural competency as a key factor in academic success.** BPS needs to embed

cultural competency into all trainings, including new teacher orientation. Cultural competency best practices need to be scaled up and operationalized across district.

- **Improving Professional Development of teachers.** Understanding that basic ESL training and certification are not enough to ensure improved academic outcomes for ELL students, BPS should invest in high-quality, relevant professional development for all teachers.

4) Support ELL Students with Disabilities

A complete set of recommendations and action steps regarding ELL students with disabilities is attached to this memo in Appendix 1. Among the priorities cited in that report are:

- IEPs which provide for linguistically and culturally appropriate education in the least restrictive program environment specific to ELL-SWDs
- Increased availability of dually certified teachers to ensure that Special Education teachers who are hired must hold both a Special Education as well as an ESL or bilingual licensures by language groups.
- Need to build capacity to ensure appropriate culturally and linguistically responsive professional development that increases Teacher Quality in ELL Special Education and Inclusion that addresses the needs of ELL-SWDs from the start.
- Need for written guidance procedures that clearly indicate what is different about implementation of Special Education services for ELL students.
- Proper assessment and identification of ELL students with special needs to avoid either over or under-representation.

5) Improve Family/Community Engagement

Engaging newcomer families into an engaged presence in the education of their children is an important element of success for ELL students. Families of ELL students come from a multitude of nations with very diverse languages and with many perspectives on the meaning of “engagement” and of the specific role of parents in the education of their children. BPS should (1) Increase collaboration with community partners representing the diversity of language groups across the District; (2) Provide outreach and information in multiple languages to ensure that all BPS families are aware of their choices and are able to advocate for their child’s success. (3) Address lack of centralized interpretation services and improve quality of translation services by instituting clear BPS standards; (4) Institute better coordination of the different BPS departments responsible for outreach to parents and students to assure accessibility. In addition, we find that special outreach to high school ELLs students is necessary to better inform them.

Additional Questions

- How does BPS ensure that ELL students are being adequately served by Commonwealth Charter Schools, in-district Charter Schools, BPS schools under contract management, and schools where the State has taken control?
- Does the Weighted Student Budget give the necessary allocation to schools so that they can fulfill their responsibilities for educating ELL students?
- Is BPS’s strategy for Professional Development adequate to meet the needs for teacher development in reducing the Achievement and Opportunity Gaps, promoting inclusion for Students with Disabilities, and expanding Dual Language programs for ELL students?

- What strategies and investment of resources will be necessary to deal effectively with the lack of progress in recruiting, hiring, and retention of bilingual and bicultural teachers, school leaders, and central staff?

Background on ELL Task Force

In October, 2009, the Boston School Committee voted to authorize the creation of the English Language Learners Task Force for the following purpose:

- To provide guidance to BPS in the development of a plan of action that responds to the new demographics of the BPS for students whose home language is not English;
- To identify mechanisms to address the needs of our increasing multi-cultural and multilingual district and its students.
- To support and monitor BPS efforts to negotiate and implement a settlement agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice regarding programs and services for ELL students.

The ELL Task Force presented its report to the Boston School Committee in March 2011. The School Committee endorsed the recommendations in June 2011 and approved the reconstitution of the ELL Task Force into a monitoring body that would meet to review the progress made towards implementing the recommendations and to address new issues as they arise, including monitoring BPS progress in implementing the changes agreed to in the DOJ settlement agreement. The reconstituted Task Force has monitored progress in the following areas:

- Recognize and Promote BPS as Multilingual, Multicultural District: A new vision for all BPS students
- Improve Student Assessment and Assignment
- Expand Program Quantity and Quality
- Improve Family/Community Engagement
- Support ELL Students with Special Needs
- Improve Data Systems and Use of Technology
- Ensure Accountability and Monitoring

The last report (December 2014) of the ELL Task Force to the School Committee is attached to this memo (Appendix 3) together with additional reports from the Task Force on ELL students with disabilities (Appendix 1), ELL students and the BPS Student Assignment Plan (Appendix 2) and a discussion of compliance and accountability issues related required to be submitted by the district as part of its agreement with the Departments of Justice and Education (Appendix 4).

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS TASK FORCE MEMBERS, SY2014-15

- Co-Chair, Miren Uriarte, Boston School Committee member, Professor of Human Services and Latino Studies, UMass Boston
- Co-Chair, Abdul Hussein, CEO, African Community Education Development of New England (ACEDONE)
- Janet Anderson, Executive Vice-President, EdVestors
- Diana Lam, Head of School, Conservatory Lab Charter School
- Suzanne Lee, former principal, Josiah Quincy Elementary School
- Theresa Perry, Professor, Departments of Africana Studies and Education, Simmons College
- Wilmer Quiñones, Sociedad Latina
- Bob Hildreth, President, Families United in Educational Leadership
- Rev. Cheng Imm Tan, former Director, Mayor's Office of New Bostonians

- Dr. Maria de Lourdes Serpa, Professor, Lesley University School of Education
- Paolo De Barros, Program Director, Catholic Charities Teen Center at St. Peter's
- Vanessa Snow, Hyde Square Task Force
- John Mudd, advocate
- Kim Janey, Senior Project Director, Massachusetts Advocates for Children
- Achly Esparra, Student, Greater Egleston Community High School