

To: Boston School Committee  
 From: Monica Hogan, Assistant Superintendent, Data Strategy and Implementation  
 Apryl Clarkson, Senior Executive Director of Data and Accountability  
 CC: Mary Skipper, Superintendent  
 Re: Exam School Admissions Policy  
 Date: November 1, 2023

This memo serves as an update to the School Committee from the October 4 meeting. It includes:

1. A timeline for the public and for the School Committee of the admissions process, including when the School Committee will receive additional updates
2. Responses to specific questions from the October 4 and October 18 meetings from committee members
3. Other considerations for potential recommendations
4. Review of the task force discussions and the stated rationale by task force members as to why particular recommendations, including bonus points based on poverty level of the school attended, were made

**PART ONE: Timeline for Exam School Invitation Distribution**

The following table outlines the approximate timeline for exam school invitations for SY24-25. The invitation cycle begins over a year in advance of students enrolling in exam schools. The School Committee will receive an updated report after each invitation period, likely to be in June. The district continues to consider ways in which the admissions timeline may be accelerated to send invitations out to families sooner.

<b>April 2023</b>	Registration Information Session with translation available for families interested in applying for the new school year.
<b>June 2023</b>	MAP weekend testing for non-BPS students. In-school testing for BPS students.
<b>July 2023</b>	Test results are mailed to BPS and non-BPS families.
<b>September 2023</b>	Documentation collection and verification for the 10-point schools. Collection of 5th and 7th-grade records from the previous school year.
<b>September 2023 - October 2023</b>	Bids for External Auditor contract.
<b>September - November 2023</b>	Creation of materials and letters for families. Updates to the website. Collaborative work with the City on tiers data and updates on the website.
<b>October 10, 2023</b>	City of Boston Residency verification for non-BPS students. This process must be completed to be considered for the applicant pool



November 17, 2023	Residency Verification closes (date set by a previous SC policy).
December 9-10, 2023	MAP testing for both BPS and Non-BPS students.
January 2024	MAP testing results sent to families.
January 4 - February 9th, 2024	BPS families complete School Choice forms and rank Exam Schools in order of preference to be considered for the applicant pool.
February 2024	Grade collections for all applicants.
March 2024	Eligibility notification letters are sent to students meeting the B or higher GPA in ELA, Math, Science, and Social Studies.
March and April 2024	Composite scores calculated. Points are assigned to those who qualify. Tiers verified. The audit was conducted and verified.
April / May 2024	Assignment decisions are released. <u>SY24-25</u> Invitation data available for analysis.
September 2024	First day of school
October 2024	Student outcome data available from <u>SY23-24</u> admissions cycle

**PART TWO: Member Questions**

**Analysis Regarding Invitations to Economically Disadvantaged Students**

This table represents the number of students who applied for a grade 7 exam school seat who were identified as economically disadvantaged and who received 0 bonus points through the application process for SY23-24 admission.

Tier	Did Not Receive an Invite		Received an Invite	
	N	%	N	%
1	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
2	0	0.0%	4	25.0%
3	0	0.0%	3	18.8%
4	1	7.7%	2	12.5%
5	0	0.0%	4	25.0%
6	2	15.4%	0	0.0%
7	5	38.5%	1	6.3%
8	5	38.5%	2	12.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>		<b>16</b>	

**Analysis Regarding Invitations to Non-Economically Disadvantaged Students attending a Title 1 School**

This table represents the number of students who applied for a grade 7 exam school seat who were identified as not economically disadvantaged and who received 10 bonus points through the application process for SY23-24 admission.

Tier	Did Not Receive an Invite		Received an Invite	
	N	%	N	%
1	0	0.0%	22	6.3%
2	0	0.0%	33	9.4%
3	0	0.0%	25	7.1%
4	1	1.8%	45	12.8%
5	0	0.0%	43	12.3%
6	16	28.1%	49	14.0%
7	28	49.1%	76	21.7%
8	12	21.1%	58	16.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>		<b>351</b>	

**Differential of the average composite score by Title 1 schools and Non-Title 1 schools**

The table below shows the average composite score from the SY23-24 admissions cycle for students attending schools that receive 10 points, students attending schools that do not receive 10 points, and overall average composite score. All scores in these averages reflect scores prior to the addition of any points. The difference is approximately 8 points.

Average Composite Score - All students, no points	85.6
Average Composite Score - Students Attending Schools that do not receive points	91.4
Average Composite Score - Students Attending Schools that do receive points (before additional points are added)	83.2
<i>Difference</i>	-8.2

School Committee members requested data to better understand the difference in average composite score for students attending schools that receive 10 points compared to schools that do not receive 10 points. For the SY23-24 admissions cycle,

**Collection of individual income information**

School Committee members have raised several questions regarding the collection of individual income information to be used in the admissions process. This topic was debated by the ESATF, noted in the section above, and ultimately decided to not pursue. For students who are currently enrolled, the district obtains information on economically disadvantaged status through the Executive Office of Health and Human Services' Virtual Gateway. This information is not collected

for students during the registration process, and is only obtained once a student has enrolled. The district has reached out to DESE staff to better understand if it is possible to obtain this information prior to the student enrolling in the district.

The addition of collecting individual income information for students to use in the application process is likely to result in increased barriers to enrollment for the students it is designed to most impact. Past experience in education administration shows a decrease in participation as additional steps and requirements are added to admissions processes. As an example, Hillman and Brueker (2017) note a decrease in the percent of families completing FAFSA application after the direct IRS import tool was removed during the Trump administration. Similarly, the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [noted](#) that one of the primary reasons for moving to the Community Eligibility Provision model for school lunches was to 'increase participation of children in school meal programs'. These examples underscore a move to more inclusive practices by reducing administrative burdens of individual income collection. Members of the ESATF were mindful of this, as well as the additional administrative burden on district staff to manage and process the collection of individual income information.

### **List of schools and their percent of economically disadvantaged students**

The [table linked here](#) shows the percentage of economically disadvantaged students by school used in the SY23-24 admissions cycle. Data is available for all BPS and charter schools from DESE, as well as data for other schools that provided it to the district during the admissions cycle. The five-year average is calculated using data from the following school years: SY17-18, SY18-19, SY19-20, SY20-21, and SY21-22. Applicants from schools where the percentage is highlighted orange will be eligible for the 10 additional points. Please note that it is the school that the applicant attended during the 2021-2022 school year which will be considered for determining eligibility for the additional points. For 7th grade applicants, this would be the school they attended for grade 5. For 9th grade applicants, this is the school they attended for grade 7.

### **PART THREE: Other considerations for potential recommendations**

With respect to potential modifications/ amendments to the current policy, the School Committee Exam Schools Admission Policy states as follows:

*This Policy shall be evaluated and assessed every five years.*

While the language of the policy requires the School Committee to evaluate and assess the exam school admissions policy every five years, it neither prohibits the School Committee from evaluating, assessing, or modifying the policy earlier than five years nor does it require the School Committee to modify the policy every five years.

The School Committee has asked that we consider, evaluate, and understand more about the impact of the 10 points provided to schools with 40% or more economically disadvantaged students. Since this is the first full year of implementation our recommendation continues to be that we should wait for at least one more year of invitation data to understand if there are trends of concern. We also have concerns and hesitations about changing one part of the policy without a deeper understanding of the impact this change would have on other parts of the policy that may be unknown, but we also understand the Committee's desire to understand some possibilities. We have listed below some of the considerations we are evaluating further:

1. Should we add a provision to the policy to ensure students who receive a perfect score get access to their first choice of an exam school?
2. How do we determine the right amount of points to account for differences in performance between different school types? Should we consider the differential of the average composite score by Title 1 schools and Non-Title 1 schools by tier? What is the impact to the socioeconomic diversity if we change the number of points?
3. Should we further explore and consider using individual income information for additional points? How can we ensure all economically disadvantaged students receive additional points, regardless of what school they attend?
4. How do we better understand the impact of the current policy and potential changes specific to increasing representation of Students with Disabilities and Multilingual Learners?

#### **PART FOUR: Exam School Task Force History: Summary of Development of Bonus Points As Part of Exam School Policy Development**

In October 2020, the Boston School Committee voted to approve a one-year interim policy for exam school admissions, developed by a Superintendent's Working Group. As part of that recommendation, the Boston School Committee also voted to create an Exam School Admissions Task Force (ESATF) as a body of the School Committee. The ESATF was charged with recommending a new permanent exam school admissions policy following the one year-interim "zip code" policy.

The ESATF was co-chaired by Tanisha Sullivan, NAACP, and Michael Contompasis. The following individuals were members of the Task Force (roles listed reflect their roles at the time):

- Co-Chair, Michael Contompasis, former Boston Latin School Head of School and former BPS Superintendent
- Co-Chair, Tanisha Sullivan, President, NAACP Boston Branch and former BPS Chief Equity Officer
- Pastor Samuel Acevedo, Co-Chair, Opportunity and Achievement Gaps Task Force
- Acacia Aguirre, parent, John D. O'Bryant School of Math and Science
- Simon Chernow, student, Boston Latin Academy
- Matt Cregor, Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee, Supreme Judicial Court
- Tanya Freeman-Wisdom, Head of School, John D. O'Bryant School of Math and Science
- Katherine Grassa, Principal, Curley K-8 School
- Zena Lum, parent, Boston Latin Academy
- Zoe Nagasawa, student, Boston Latin School
- Rachel Skerritt, Head of School, Boston Latin School
- Rosann Tung, Independent Researcher
- Tamara Waite, parent, Philbrick Elementary School

The ESATF held 27 public meetings between February and June of 2021. Meetings were held virtually and consisted of deliberations between members, four community listening sessions, presentations by exam school admissions experts as well as other urban city school district employees. The ESATF was staffed by Monica Roberts, Chief of Student, Family and Community Advancement; Monica Hogan, Senior Executive Director of Data and Accountability; and Lena

Parvex, School Committee Coordinator. All materials, including recordings, from the ESF can be found on the School Committee's website [here](#).

The following outline is a summary of the ESTAF's deliberations related to the bonus points as part of the approved exam schools admissions process. Due to the number of hours the Task Force spent deliberating, this is not a comprehensive list of all deliberations, but a timeline of the development of bonus points as part of the current exam school admissions policy.

### **March 23, 2021:**

#### **Concept of Bonus Points Based on School Attended Introduced to ESTAF**

- BPS staff presentation to ESATF regarding exam school criteria for Detroit, Chicago and San Francisco Schools.
- Detroit Admissions Policy provides Detroit public school students with 10 bonus points and those who live within 1-2 miles of school bonus points as well.
- Co-Chair Sullivan acknowledges the public comments requesting bonus points for BPS students and proposes that the ESATF consider bonus points for BPS students for exam school admissions.

### **March 30, 2021:**

#### **Review of Chicago and Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District Exam School Policies**

- Reviewed Chicago Public Schools admissions policy which incorporated 4 socioeconomic tiers (by census tract data) for distribution of invitations after a set-aside percentage of merit-based admissions.
- Reviewed Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District data which uses a quasi-lottery admissions system weighted by socioeconomic status that looks at both census tract data and individual data by (optionally) asking families to report parent educational level, number of individuals in household, and household income to supplement census data. Lottery invitations are then distributed by rating based on socioeconomic status in order to distribute socio-economic status for their 67 magnet schools.

### **April 27, 2021:**

#### **Presentation of Detroit Admissions Policy Including Bonus Points**

- Detroit Selective Admissions Director presents on Detroit's six exam high school admissions including Detroit's policy of awarding public school students bonus points.
- Non-Detroit Public Schools students eligible to apply to exam schools but would not be eligible for bonus points.

### **May 18, 2021:**

#### **ESATF Member Discusses Rationale for Awarding Points Based on School Attended**

- Skerritt states interest in the Detroit model where applicants were able to apply as individuals, with additional factors and considerations based on their specific status.
- Skerritt says she would like to look at the school type that a student attends, because some of the inequities around things such as test preparation and resources were often very much connected to the resources and the status of the schools.
- Skerritt said that getting into people's individual income levels is too challenging given the difficulty in getting people to submit other information.
- She suggested looking at school type based on percentages of students who were economically disadvantaged.

## **May 25, 2021:**

### **Proposal to Award Ten Points to Students Attending Schools Where 50% of Students are Economically Disadvantaged, Discussion and Deliberation**

- Members talked about the proposal of giving students points if they came from schools with a verified poverty level of 50% or above and how it would address the socio-economic diversity factor.
- They talked about how that would be addressed for charter, private, and parochial schools students, if they couldn't get the information from individual families.
- Lum asked if they could, as a secondary filter, look at the schools themselves and add the points for those coming from high poverty level schools, regardless of tier they resided in.
- Contompassis explains that his proposal to award 10 points to a student attending a school where 50% - lack of consistency in instruction across the District particularly in K-6 and balance the lack of access to quality schools and instruction.
- Sullivan says that the 10 points spoke to socioeconomics for schools that verified that poverty level was 50% or above which has a higher concentration of poverty which addresses the socioeconomic diversity factor.
- Wanted to find a mechanism that was not private, charter, or BPS "only" and wanted to find a measurement that spanned across all types of schools.
  - Non-BPS Schools would have to verify that 50% of their students are economically disadvantaged
- Contompassis does not believe the District can effectively obtain individual student income information so the high poverty schools point based system is an umbrella to capture economically disadvantaged students.
- Points are not exclusive to BPS, charter and parochial schools could potentially fit into this category
- Contompassis states that the census tracts using median income will have some students placed in tiers whose income does not match that tier and points can compensate for that.
- Tung states that the closer they get to each individual student's socioeconomic circumstances the better, so they should be using geocodes, census tracts and feeder schools.
- Contompassis states that individual student economic income is hard to capture because the District does not have it and they would be forced to ask individual families for it.
- Hogan explains that in 2014/2015 Massachusetts changed from free and reduced lunch forms to school districts with a high enough percentage of students eligible for free lunch. So BPS no longer collects the free and reduced lunch application forms. The replacement measure that the state introduced was based off participation in state funded programs such as SNAP, Mass Health/Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Dependent Children and other state aid programs where the Executive Office of Health and Human Services does a direct certification process where they tell DESE that this student's family is participating in this program and they are therefore deemed to be economically disadvantaged.
  - BPS gets the information from the state but only gets the information for students enrolled in BPS. BPS would not know at the time of application that a non-BPS student would qualify for the direct certification process.

## **June 1, 2021**

### **Continued Discussion Over Obtaining Individual Student Income information Versus Points for Attendance at High Poverty Schools**

- ESATF presented with simulations for various types of admissions models involving tiers
- Cregor suggests looking at individual incomes.

- Grassa responds that it would be difficult to obtain and verify individual student social-economic data and that this would pose a hardship for undocumented families.
- Skerritt suggested that the Task Force look at schools with high concentrations of socio-economically disadvantaged students, so that families wouldn't have to submit their individual information.

### June 14, 2021:

#### **ESATF Arrives At Consensus To Award Ten Points to Students Attending High Poverty Schools**

- Tung said she also wanted to keep sending schools grouped by Opportunity Index (OI) in the discussion, as it touched both requirements for geography and socioeconomic status (SES) diversity. She disagreed with the 20% city wide seat allocation in any mechanism as she believed it to be exclusionary. She added that the non-Boston Public Schools (BPS) should be put in their own grouping.
- Skerritt commented that she didn't think charter schools with a more disadvantaged population should be in the same category as independent schools. She suggested reserving a certain number of seats for students from specifically economically disadvantaged schools. She said a certain percentage would be set aside for socioeconomic factors and the other percentage could continue with the tiers model for those seats and allocate them via ranking by tiers still using the census tracts, or using it in combination with some of the other models proposed.
- Sullivan recites the ESATF's current consensus on options:
  - Option 1: 20% allocated citywide based on straight rank and 80% allocated by tiers straight rank.
  - Option 2: 20% allocated straight rank citywide and 80% allocated within tiers by lottery
  - Option 3: Hybrid model: 20% allocated citywide straight rank, 80% breaking down in tiers, with 70% of the seats allocated straight rank and 30% allocated by lottery.
- Sullivan summarized what the members had consensus on: mechanisms for seat allocation; GPA; and including 10 points to students who attend a high poverty school.

### June 24, 2021

#### **Discussion Of Impact Of Bonus Points Based On Resources Of School Attended**

- Simulations presented to ESATF with 20% merit based and 80% invitations by socio-economic tier with points and 100% invitations by socio-economic tier with bonus points found [here](#).
- Aguirre inquired how the points would affect students in the METCO program, as suburban schools would not qualify as high poverty schools, and the students would not get the points regardless of the family situation.
- Sullivan said that the extra points for high poverty level were based on schools and rationale was that the METCO students would have access to resources due to the schools they were attending.
- Grassa noted that due to the change in 6th grade, some students could attend an economically disadvantaged elementary school, and go to an economically advantaged middle school, or vice versa.
- Skerritt added that it would be more likely that their education would be shaped by their 5th grade experience and not 6th grade. Sullivan said based on these observations, they should be looking at the 5th grade school a student attended, not 6th grade.



- Tung proposed another option which was to use a composite score that included both Grade Point Average (GPA) and assessment with the high poverty indicator. She said they would then distribute the seats proportionally to whatever geographic or socioeconomic grouping they decide on and it would be for 100% of students and not just 80% of students.
- Sullivan asked the members how they felt about using the assessment as a threshold versus using it as part of a composite score. Acevedo, Cregor, Chernow, Aguirre, Skerritt, and Grassa said they were all open to the idea of using the assessment in a composite score.
- Aguirre said she thought they should discuss what percentage of the test and GPA to consider before discussing how they would allocate seats.
- Sullivan asked the members to suggest the percentage of weight they proposed for each component. Cregor suggested using 70% grades and 30% assessment. Dr. Tung suggested 80% grades and 20% assessment. Skerritt suggested 50% for each. Aguirre suggested 60% grades and 40% assessment.
- Sullivan said they would ask Hogan to run these simulations with the 10% high poverty indicator.

### **June 28 and 29, 2021:**

#### **Discussion Of 20% Set Aside And Impact Of Bonus Points**

- Task force deliberations on final policy recommendations to be presented to the School Committee on June 30.
- Skerritt expressed she would be more comfortable with retaining a composite score that had the high poverty advantage and she would support a 50%-50% or 40%-60% split between the assessment and GPA. She said that even though she trusted the integrity of the educators she was aware of the differences between schools and that with a 80%-20% GPA and assessment they might see more subjectivity across different school types and neighborhoods. She said she supported either a 20%-80% split or 100% by tiers for seat allocation.
- Sullivan then suggested discussing the 30% assessment and 70% GPA on eligibility composite score, with the 10% factor for students who attend high poverty schools. Students would be put into socioeconomic tiers and ranked by their composite score, and seats would be allocated accordingly. She suggested they use the same process to allocate the seats as during the interim policy, which was 10 rounds with 10% of the seats allocated each round, and students in the lowest socioeconomic tier choosing first.
- Acevedo said that even if he voted for the 100% seat allocations, he would agree with the 20%-80% split as it was a safe decision.
- Tung agreed that the 20%-80% split moved them towards their goal but that they could do better.
- Sullivan repeated that it was clear what the 20% of seats represented and she was not comfortable knowing that it was really about high income, one neighborhood, and one certain racial demographic. She also said that if they were going to leave the 20% citywide seats for those who wanted to maintain the status quo, she believed the Task Force should mitigate against the harm that it would cause to some of the most vulnerable students.
- Skerritt said that she thought that with the high poverty indicator and the size of the tiers, the highest ranking students would probably get access either way. Contompasis suggested that if they went with the 20%-80%, they should have a poverty indicator of 10 points for every student that attended a school with a poverty rate of 50% or higher. Students that were homeless, in the Department of Children and Families (DCF), or in Boston Housing Authority (BHA) should get an additional five points.

- Acevedo said that even if he voted for the 100% seat allocations, he would agree with the 20%-80% split as it was a safe decision.
- Tung agreed that the 20%-80% split moved them towards their goal but that they could do better.
- Contompasis suggested that if they went with the 20%-80%, they should have a poverty indicator of 10 points for every student that attended a school with a poverty rate of 50% or higher. Students that were homeless, in the Department of Children and Families (DCF), or in Boston Housing Authority (BHA) should get an additional five points.

### June 30, 2021

- ESATF Co-Chairs Sullivan and Contompasis presented a [recommendation](#) to the School Committee and Superintendent. The recommendation included:
  - Student eligibility of B or higher GPA
  - Composite score calculation of 30% Assessment / 70% grades, plus additional points
    - Students attending schools with 50% or more of students identified as economically disadvantaged would receive an additional 10 points in the invitation process.
    - Students experiencing homelessness, students in the care of DCF and students living in BHA housing would receive an additional 15 points in the invitation process
  - 20% of invitations would be distributed city-wide and 80% would be distributed by socioeconomic tier.

### July 14, 2021

- Then-Superintendent Dr. Brenda Cassellius presented her [final policy recommendation](#) to the School Committee for a vote. Based on community feedback, including a SC listening session held July 7, the following changes were made to the initial recommendation:
  - Change the threshold for 10 points to schools with 40% or more of students identified as economically disadvantaged, rather than 50%, to align with the threshold in ESSA legislation for Title 1 school-wide programming
  - Distribute 100% of invitations by socioeconomic tier.