

THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF THE CITY OF BOSTON



MEMORANDUM

TO: Boston School Committee

CC: Brenda Cassellius, Superintendent
Monica Roberts, Chief of Student, Family & Community Advancement

FROM: Alex Oliver-Dávila, Chairperson, Boston School Committee

SUBJECT: Exam Schools Admissions Task Force Proposed Charge and Membership

DATE: January 13, 2021

In October 2020, the Boston School Committee approved the Exam Schools Admissions Criteria for SY 2021-22, as well as a resolution supporting the additional recommendations put forth by the Superintendent's Exam School Admissions Working Group. Among those recommendations was the establishment of a School Committee Task Force to continue the work initiated by the Working Group to advise on permanent efforts to expand the exam school applicant pool and an exam school admissions criteria for future years. As a Task Force of the School Committee, this group will be subject to MA Open Meeting Laws, ensuring transparency and providing opportunities for community engagement and input throughout the process.

At our January 13th meeting, I will formally present for the Committee's consideration the membership and charge of the Exam Schools Admissions Task Force. The proposed 13 members represent a broad and diverse set of constituencies from across the City that reflects the strength of Boston. I'm grateful that all of the members of the Superintendent's Exam School Admissions Working Group have agreed to continue this critical work as the Working Group is elevated to the Task Force level. In accordance with the recommendations made by Committee members last fall, the proposed membership includes additional parent and student representation, as well as an academic researcher. As is always our goal, the proposed membership is reflective of the Committee's commitment to racial, ethnic, and gender diversity. The complete list of recommended members for the Task Force, including brief biographical sketches, is included below.

Boston School Committee Exam Schools Admissions Task Force Membership:

Co-Chair, Michael Contompasis, former Boston Latin School Head of School and former BPS Superintendent

Michael G. Contompasis began a distinguished, more than 50-year career in education in 1966 as a biology teacher at East Boston High School. He also taught both biology and chemistry at his alma mater Boston Latin School (BLS). Mr. Contompasis later served as BLS head of school from 1976 to 1998, during which time he earned the prestigious Milken Educator Award. From 1996 to 1998, Mr. Contompasis also served as a cluster leader for Boston Public Schools (BPS), which included overseeing and mentoring the principals and heads of school at ten K-12 schools in the district. In 1998, he was appointed as the first chief operating officer for Boston Public Schools before becoming superintendent of the district from 2005 to 2007. He served in the non-profit sector for eight years with Mass Insight Education & Research, in roles including executive chairman and senior field consultant. In 2018, the Commonwealth appointed Mr. Contompasis as receiver for Boston's Dever Elementary School, a Level 5 turnaround school. A recipient of the Council of Great City Schools Distinguished Service Award, he has earned degrees from Boston University (B.A., biology); Boston State College (M.Ed., administration); and Harvard University (M.Ed., administration, planning, and social policy).

Co-Chair, Tanisha Sullivan, President, NAACP Boston Branch and former BPS Chief Equity Officer

With over 20 years of experience in the life sciences and pharmaceutical industry, Tanisha M. Sullivan is Associate General Counsel for a leading biotech company in Massachusetts, and in October 2020 she was appointed as a CEO Action for Racial Equity Fellow. Prior to joining the company, Ms. Sullivan practiced with large firms and major corporations in Greater Boston and New York City. Committed to public service, from 2013- 2015 Ms. Sullivan left corporate practice to serve in a senior policy role with the Boston Public Schools as the district's Chief Equity Officer.

A dedicated public servant and community leader, Ms. Sullivan is serving her third term as president of the NAACP Boston Branch. The NAACP is the oldest civil rights organization in the country committed to the elimination of systemic racism and discrimination. Locally, branches are operated by volunteers, making the NAACP Boston Branch one of the largest volunteer operated organizations in Massachusetts. The NAACP Boston Branch is a leading community voice on issues of racial justice, equity and inclusion in education, economic

opportunity, health, public safety and voting rights. Data driven and solutions oriented, Ms. Sullivan is a well-respected and sought after thought leader on racial equity who frequently comments for major media outlets including: The Boston Globe, NPR Boston, GBH, WCVB, NECN, CBS Boston and FXT25.

Ms. Sullivan earned a B.A. in Government from the University of Virginia, a J.D. from Boston College Law School and an M.B.A. from the Boston College Carroll School of Management. Ms. Sullivan serves on a number of non-profit boards and advisory committees, including the March of Dimes, the Rappaport Center for Law and Public Policy, the GBH Board of Advisors, the Massachusetts Governor's Black Advisory Commission, and Massachusetts Attorney General's Racial Justice Task Force. During the 2020 COVID-19 public health pandemic and in response to the demonstrations against systemic racism, Ms. Sullivan was appointed to serve on several state and city task forces including, the Massachusetts Health Equity Task Force, City of Boston Health Equity Task Force, and City of Boston Policing Reform Task Force.

Ms. Sullivan is the recipient of several prestigious civic and professional recognitions, including the Boston Magazine Power listing (2019 and 2020), Boston Business Journal Power 50 (2019), Girl Scouts of Eastern MA Leading Woman (2018), MLK Legacy Award (2018), Boston Business Journal 40 Under 40 (2013), and Next Generation Leadership, NAACP (2011). A member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. and The Links, Inc., Ms. Sullivan lives in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Boston.

The proposed members of the search committee are (in alphabetical order):

Pastor Samuel Acevedo, Co-Chair, Opportunity and Achievement Gaps Task Force

Pastor Acevedo is the founding executive director of the Boston Higher Education Resource Center (HERC), which provides high school students with out-of-school academic enrichment, career advising, and support to help them graduate from high school and college. He is co-chair of the Boston School Committee's Opportunity and Achievement Gaps Task Force and previously served as a member of the 2014 BPS superintendent search committee. Pastor Acevedo serves on the boards of the Ten Point Coalition, Boston Trinity Academy, and the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary's Center for Urban Ministry and Education (CUME). He holds a Bachelor's Degree from Stetson University and a J.D., cum laude, from Boston College Law School.

Acacia Aguirre, parent, John D. O'Bryant School of Math and Science

Maria Acacia Aguirre was born and raised in Spain, where she obtained her MD and worked as Assistant teacher at the Universidad de Valladolid. She moved to Paris, France to complete her

research training. In Paris, she conducted research on circadian rhythms and sleep regulation, leading to her PhD in Neuroscience. In 1993, she moved to Boston and joined CIRCADIAN, a consulting and research company specialized in shift work. In CIRCADIAN, she managed field research studies and consulting projects in a wide variety of industrial and transportation operations, and wrote technical reports, scientific papers, and educational materials for shift workers. In 2014, she changed careers, and obtained her teaching license. She currently teaches science in an elementary school in BPS. She has a daughter who attends the O’Bryant school.

Matt Cregor, Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee, Supreme Judicial Court

Matt Cregor is a civil rights attorney who has spent his career focusing on education issues with the Southern Poverty Law Center, NAACP Legal Defense Fund, Lawyers for Civil Rights, and now the Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee of the Supreme Judicial Court. Matt was a member of the Exam School Admission Criteria Working Group in 2020 and has served in a similar capacity for Boston Public Schools in years prior. Matt was the primary author of *A Broken Mirror: Exam School Admissions Fail to Reflect Boston's Diversity*, a report by Lawyers for Civil Rights, the NAACP - Boston Branch, and a coalition of Boston civil rights groups. He has served on task forces for the Council of State Governments and the New York State Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children. He is a 2006 graduate of the Georgetown University Law Center and the 2018 recipient of the Boston Bar Association's John G. Brooks Legal Services Award.

Tanya Freeman-Wisdom, Head of School, John D. O’Bryant School of Math and Science

A resident of Hyde Park, Dr. Freeman-Wisdom began her BPS career as an English Language Arts teacher at Hyde Park High School. She also served as assistant headmaster of the school for two years before being named director of curriculum, assessment, and placement at the Community Academy of Science and Health (CASH). In 2009, she became the headmaster of CASH, and in April of 2017, Dr. Freeman-Wisdom was appointed as the permanent headmaster of her alma mater, the John D. O’Bryant School of Mathematics and Science.

A lifelong learner, Dr. Freeman-Wisdom earned her doctorate from the Boston College Lynch School of Education's Professional School Administrator Program. She earned a master's degree in educational leadership from Simmons College, where she has taught as an adjunct professor, and holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Dr. Freeman-Wisdom and her husband, Richard Wisdom, are the proud parents of two BPS students. Their daughter, Nya, is a junior at Boston Latin School and their son, Richard Wisdom Jr., graduated from Boston Latin Academy in 2017.

Katherine Grassa, Principal, Curley K-8 School

Katie Grassa is in her eighth year as principal of the Curley K-8 School in Jamaica Plain. She is working to develop teacher leadership, implement inclusive practices across the school as well as creating a positive school climate. She previously worked as an administrator at the Dever-McCormack K-8 School where she concentrated on turnaround initiatives such as extended learning time and early warning indicators. She began her teaching career in Boston at the Richard J. Murphy K-8 School in Dorchester where she served as a teacher leader. Ms. Grassa attended the University of Massachusetts Amherst where she earned a BS in Elementary Education and received the Dean's Recognition Award for the School of Education. She explored leadership on a broader level first with a Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction with a focus on literacy from Lesley University, then as a Conant Fellow at the Harvard Graduate School of Education where she earned a Master of Education in School Leadership. Ms. Grassa is a lifelong resident of Dorchester and graduate of Boston Public Schools.

Zena Lum, parent, Boston Latin Academy

Zena Lum serves as the Executive Director of Boston Latin Academy Association, the independent non-profit organization raising support for Boston Latin Academy (BLA). Additionally, she is retained as a Senior Director for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Lindauer Global, a retained executive search firm focused on the non-profit and mission-driven sector.

With more than 25 years dedicated to mission-driven organizations, Ms. Lum has directly raised tens of millions of dollars for leading organizations in Boston such as WGBH, Jumpstart for Young Children, New England Aquarium, and Boston Public Schools. Since joining Lindauer more than 9 years ago, she has placed development leaders across the country and across the sector that collectively have raised hundreds of millions more to advance education, the arts, health care, and social and environmental justice.

Ms. Lum is the parent to a BLA sophomore and resides in the South End with her family. She holds a bachelor's degree in Business Administration from Georgetown University.

Danyael Morales, student, Boston Latin Academy

Danyael Morales is a BPS student at Boston Latin Academy. He is currently a freshman and resides in the Hyde Park area. Mr. Morales recently joined the Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC) as a representative. He is currently a part of the Student Designer Team with BPS Office of Equity and Strategy and sits as one of the BSAC representatives on the Massachusetts

Educational Justice Alliance Organizing Committee. Mr. Morales aims to aid the cause towards a more equitable and fruitful public educational school system and will continue to identify systemic disparities and proceed forward to find resolve. In addition to his passion to ensure educational justice, Mr. Morales also enjoys dancing, writing, and playing music.

Zoe Nagasawa, student, Boston Latin School

Zoe Nagasawa is a senior at Boston Latin School and a lifelong resident of Dorchester. She co-authored a report about Boston's exam schools with the Center for Collaborative Education last summer, recommending changes both in the admission process and in school culture. Ms. Nagasawa is also involved with BLS YouthCAN and the MA Youth Climate Coalition, and is passionate about the intersection of environmentalism and social justice. She's a joyful member of the BLS Gospel Choir.

Rachel Skerritt, Head of School, Boston Latin School

Rachel Skerritt's appointment in 2017 as the 28th Head of Boston Latin School (BLS) marked a homecoming to the school where she earned her high school diploma in 1995. She began her career at alma mater in 1999, where she taught English Literature for seven years. Ms. Skerritt assumed leadership of BLS after most recently serving as Deputy Chief of Leadership Development for District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), assisting the district's principals and aspiring administrators in their professional learning. Before this, she successfully led one of the district's turnaround schools, Eastern Senior High School, for five years. During this time, Eastern raised its graduation rate to the highest in the school's history and added the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program to its course offerings. Prior to her move to Washington, DC, Ms. Skerritt was Chief of Staff for Boston Public Schools, supporting Superintendent Carol Johnson. Her first experience as a school leader was at Another Course to College.

A Dorchester native and current Roslindale resident, Ms. Skerritt holds a Bachelor's degree in English and a Master's degree in Secondary Education from the University of Pennsylvania, a Master's Degree in Education Administration from the University of Massachusetts Boston, and a Master's Degree in Leadership from McDonough School of Business at Georgetown University.

Rosann Tung, Independent Researcher

Rosann Tung is the daughter of immigrants from China and mother of a 2019 BPS graduate who attended five BPS schools.

She was Director of Policy, Research, and Evaluation at New York University's Metro Center. Guided by critical race theory, she led a team conducting federal-, state-, and foundation-funded anti-racist and feminist research. The team's mission is to inform district level reform and community organizing, and to amplify the voices of students, families, and communities historically marginalized by systemic inequalities.

Tung was founding Director of Research and Policy at Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University and founding Director of Research and Evaluation at the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) in Boston. In those roles, she led studies to inform autonomous small schools policy, English learner education, district patterns of enrollment and outcomes, and community organizing for education justice. She was lead author of *Promising Practices, Unfinished Business* and *Learning from Consistently High Performing and Improving Schools for ELLs* and co-lead author of a chapter in *Forbidden Language: English Learners and Restrictive Language Policies*.

Tung currently serves on the BPS English Language Learner Task Force and the board of TERC. She earned a BA from Cornell University and a PhD from Harvard University.

Tamara Waite, parent, Philbrick Elementary School

Tamara Waite holds an Associates Degree in Finance and Accounting from Bunker Hill Community College. She has served as the Head Account Clerk in the Health Benefits and Insurance Division at Boston City Hall for close to five years. In her position, she assists roughly 18,000 active employees and 12,000 retired employees with health insurance and life insurance matters. These employees include members from Boston Police, Boston Fire, and Boston Public Schools just to name a few. She also assists a number of employees needing service with MassHealth premium assistance, a state funded program. Prior to working for the City, she worked as a medical assistant for Brigham & Women's Hospital.

Ms. Waite is the proud parent of two Boston Public School students in grades 3 and 5 at the John D. Philbrick Elementary school in Roslindale.

Lastly, the proposed charge is as follows:

Building upon the work initiated by the Superintendent's Exam Schools Admissions Criteria Working Group, the Boston School Committee Exam Schools Admissions Task Force shall develop a set of recommendations for the admissions policy for Boston Public Schools exam schools. The desired outcome is to expand the applicant pool, and create an admissions process that will support student enrollment at each of the exam schools such that rigor is maintained and

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the student body better reflects the racial, socioeconomic, and geographic diversity of all students (K-12) in the city of Boston. The Task Force shall consider use of the new NWEA assessment and other factors, and leverage learning from a full review of the implementation of the SY 21-22 admissions criteria, as well as a thorough review of practices in other districts.

It is desired that the Task Force report back to the Boston School Committee by May 26, 2021. This will allow for the Committee to consider the recommendations, provide feedback, and take action prior to the start of SY 2021-22 and the next admissions cycle.

In closing, my sincere thanks to the proposed Task Force members for their willingness to serve in this critical effort to expand opportunities for excellence and equity for students. I look forward to discussing this matter with you and having a rich discussion at our January 13th meeting, followed by a vote on January 27th.