



**OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE REMOTE
BOSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING**

March 24, 2021

The Boston School Committee held a remote meeting on March 24, 2021 at 4:30 p.m. on Zoom. For more information about any of the items listed below, visit www.bostonpublicschools.org/schoolcommittee, email feedback@bostonpublicschools.org or call the Boston School Committee Office at (617) 635-9014.

ATTENDANCE

School Committee Members Present: Chairperson Alexandra Oliver-Dávila; Vice Chairperson Michael O’Neill (joined the meeting after roll call); Dr. Hardin Coleman; Ernani DeAraujo; Dr. Lorna Rivera; Jeri Robinson; and Quoc Tran (joined the meeting after roll call).

School Committee Member Absent: None.

DOCUMENTS PRESENTED

Agenda

Boston School Committee Meeting Minutes: March 17, 2021 FY22 Budget Hearing and Meeting

Grants for Approval Totaling \$73,243:

Amount	FY	Grant Name	Status	Fund Manager	Representative Relationship to Grant	Focus Area(s)	Sites
\$71,961	2021	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	Increase	Porsche Paulding	Director of Operations	Special Education	Districtwide
\$1,282	2021	Special Education Early Childhood Entitlement Grants	Increase	Porsche Paulding	Director of Operations	Special Education	Districtwide

Boston School Committee Remote Meeting

Zoom

March 24, 2021

Superintendent's Final FY22 Budget Recommendation Letter

Updated FY22 Budget Tables

College, Career, and Life Readiness PowerPoint

College, Career, and Life Readiness Presentation Cover Memo

College, Career, and Life Readiness Equity Impact Statement

BPS Graduation Requirement Policy Recommendation

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Oliver-Dávila called the meeting to order and led the pledge of allegiance. Ms. Sullivan called the roll. All members were present with the exception of Mr. O’Neill, who joined the meeting moments after roll call, and Mr. Tran, who joined the meeting during the Superintendent’s report.

Ms. Oliver-Dávila congratulated Kim Janey who was sworn in as Acting Mayor of Boston earlier today. She congratulated former Boston Mayor Marty Walsh on his appointment as U.S. Secretary of Labor and thanked him for his support of BPS. She made comments condemning recent mass shootings and called for the enactment of common sense gun control legislation. She led a moment of silence in memory of the victims of gun violence.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

Approved – On roll call, the Committee unanimously approved the minutes of the March 17, 2021 FY22 budget hearing and meeting.

SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT

As prepared for delivery.

Thank you, Madam Chair. And good evening everyone. It has been quite an eventful week for the City of Boston! It’s only been a week since our last meeting, so I will try to keep my report brief this evening. I have to start off with some fantastic news.

Last week, the Mass. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), released 2020 graduation data for districts across the state. I am so proud to say that BPS is celebrating its highest four-year graduation rate on record, at 75.4%. I am first and foremost proud of our amazing students, the Class of 2020, who overcame so many obstacles. The district saw increases in four-year graduation rates for multiple student groups, including increases between two and three percentage points for Black, Latinx, and white students. Later this evening members of my team will share additional updates on Career, College, and Life Readiness, and will dive further into this data and the work of our Secondary Schools team.

On Monday, our former Mayor, Marty Walsh, was confirmed as Secretary of Labor by the US Senate. I and the other members of the Cabinet joined Secretary Walsh for a press conference at Faneuil Hall following the Senate's vote and before he resigned as Mayor on Monday night. I have worked closely with former Mayor Walsh since I came to Boston, and I am so grateful for his incredible leadership, his trust in *my* leadership, and his friendship. I said when I came to Boston that the guidance and close collaboration with the Mayor and his team was one of the most appealing aspects of the job. There is so much collaboration across City departments, and that was only amplified as we all came together to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in support of our community. I will never forget these past couple years working with Secretary Walsh and he will remain a dear friend. I am so proud of him and so appreciative of his continued investments in the future of the great City of Boston -- our young people. We will continue to benefit from Secretary Walsh's leadership, including last year's \$100 million commitment and the budget you will vote on tonight is a testament to this commitment. We will see testaments to Secretary Walsh's dedication to Boston youth all across this city for years to come, including Dearborn STEM Academy, the new Boston Arts Academy complex opening next year, numerous BPS school playgrounds, and so much more. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for everything.

With the resignation of Mr. Walsh we welcome our new Mayor, Kim Janey. It was incredible to watch Mayor Janey's swearing-in ceremony earlier today, a truly historic moment. And as a Black woman and having broken the glass ceiling myself as the first African American women Commissioner of Education for Minnesota, I stand proud as Mayor Janey takes her place in history as the first woman and first person of color to serve as Mayor of the City of Boston. This is a tremendous moment in history and I am so happy for and proud of my Roxbury neighbor, a former Boston Public Schools student. I have met with Mayor Janey several times over the last few weeks in transition planning. Mayor Janey spoke today about her passion for education and her mission to provide equitable access to a quality education for all BPS students. We share that goal and we will work together to bridge the opportunity and achievement gaps that have persisted for far too long in our city. I am excited to forge ahead on this new chapter for the City of Boston, and I am already so thankful for Mayor Janey's vision of a more equitable city and the leadership she will bring. It was wonderful to visit the Edwards Middle School with Mayor Janey and Vice Chair O'Neill yesterday. We met with students and were happy to observe a class that was learning about busing and the desegregation of Boston schools in the 1970s -- a painful history that Mayor Janey lived through and spoke with the students about. It's not every day that you get an opportunity to hear directly from those who lived it. I am excited to visit additional schools with Mayor Janey, and roll up our sleeves and get to work. I just want to note, as we were updating our letterhead yesterday, I couldn't help but notice that it now displays the names of three women of color. Alex Oliver-Davila, Brenda Cassellius, and Kim Janey. History making in BPS too! What a wonderful way to mark Women's History Month. Congratulations, Mayor Janey!

Finally, I would like to talk about our ongoing reopening planning. On Monday, BPS submitted our plan to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to begin providing five days a week of in-person learning for all students in grades K0 - 8 starting on Monday, April 26. The State previously mandated that districts begin implementing 5 days of in-person learning for grades K0-5 on April 5 and for grades 6-8 on April 27. We believe shifting students to five

Boston School Committee Remote Meeting
Zoom
March 24, 2021

days a week across these grades at the same time will lead to a smoother transition for students and their families, teachers, and school staff. Monday, April 26 immediately follows our spring recess, or April Vacation. This afternoon, DESE approved our waiver request and within the last hour we notified families in their preferred language about this updated timeline. We continue to process the survey we sent to all families asking them to select five days of in-person learning or five days of remote learning for the remainder of the year. In the letter sent to families today, we ask parents and caregivers who have not yet completed the survey to do so by Monday, March 29th. You'll see here that we have heard from families of more than 38,000 students, representing more than 74% of our students across the district. About 59% of families have selected five days of in-person learning, while 41% prefer fully remote learning. Here you will see the number of shifts in learning model preferences. About 80% of students are staying with their current learning model. The majority of families who previously preferred hybrid learning are now opting for in-person learning, while the majority of families who preferred remote learning are again choosing that option. Starting five days of in-person learning immediately following spring recess provides us the opportunity to communicate updates with families in a timely manner and will ensure most of our teachers and staff have received their vaccines. In addition, this timeline provides our educators time to make adjustments to their instructional approach, in response to the learning model shifts of their students.

We continue to review the updated guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released on Friday, March 19, which states that schools should plan to maintain at least 3 feet of distance between students in classrooms (while maintaining six feet between adults, in shared spaces, and when eating). As mentioned in recent communication with families, once full in-person learning is implemented, classroom sizes and layouts will be adjusted in some cases. For students learning in-person, families can expect educators teaching in classrooms, though staffing assignments may shift. Facility modifications will vary by building. Schools may need to utilize larger rooms in their buildings as well as outdoor spaces. In classrooms, desks will be *at least* three feet apart. Teachers and staff should maintain six feet of distance from students and other staff when feasible. BPS will continue to adhere to the health and cleaning protocols currently in place in all of our schools. More information about our health and safety protocols is available at bostonpublicschools.org/reopening.

As a reminder, in-person learning is currently on a hybrid schedule. The majority of our students learning in-person are in school buildings 2 days a week. Many of our high in-person priority students are in school buildings four days a week. We are so excited to welcome back our students in grades 9-12 who have opted into the hybrid learning model this coming Monday, March 29 and Thursday, April 1. All students will continue in their current learning model until families are notified of the date students may return to school five days a week. I also want to quickly remind everyone that Friday, April 2 is Good Friday and that there will be no in-person or remote learning and BPS employees also have a paid holiday.

Finally, I wanted to let you Madame Chair and the Committee know that my team is working closely with our BSAC students. I have met with them personally, spoken to many of them personally at their request, and will continue to do so as we bring healing and listen to them about the direction forward. *And that is my Superintendent's Report for this evening.*

Mr. DeAraujo shared concerns about families with limited English proficiency and/or email access responding to the learning model survey that was recently sent out to BPS families. He also asked if BPS will be ready to provide five days of in-person instruction on April 26. The Superintendent said that BPS sent 5,600 surveys to families without email using postal mail. Responses are due back on March 29. School leaders and teachers will reach out to families who have not responded. Some schools have a response rate of more than 90 percent requesting in-person five days a week. BPS is working to address challenges related to staffing and space configuration.

Dr. Rivera congratulated Mayor Janey. She requested an update on hybrid learning, pool testing, and transportation. The Superintendent said that hybrid learning is going well, thanks in part to creative scheduling. She thanked the BPS Transportation Department for stepping up. She spoke about the challenges of simultaneous teaching and said that teachers are working through it. The Superintendent said that the district conducted 300 pool tests last week, eight of which showed positive results. Parents must give consent for students to participate in pool testing. Covid testing for teachers is available at 53 sites. Dr. Rivera encouraged the district to conduct additional outreach to families encouraging parental consent for Covid pool testing.

Ms. Robinson congratulated Mayor Janey. She asked about the quality of the hybrid learning experience and expected challenges of transitioning to five days of in-person learning. The Superintendent spoke about various learning models across grade levels. Ms. Robinson asked about food service. The Superintendent said that the district is working to expand on-site preparation of fresh meals.

Mr. O'Neill spoke about his positive experience recently visiting the Ohrenberger and Edwards schools. He said he is glad that the district is returning to providing fresh meals. He congratulated Mayor Janey and noted her experience as an education advocate.

Ms. Oliver-Dávila spoke about her daughter's positive experience with hybrid learning and Covid testing at school. She said that she attended a remote community conversation with the Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC) on March 22 and looks forward to learning their decisions about organizational structure and the next student representative to the School Committee. She congratulated the Superintendent on the increase in graduation rates. She expressed support for the district offering vaccinations for high school students when they become available.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Oliver-Dávila expressed concern about the tone of recent rhetoric at meetings and called for a higher level of civility in public dialogue. She thanked Mr. O'Neill, who serves as chair of the Council of Great City Schools Executive Board, for his role in facilitating the 65th annual Legislative Policy Conference last weekend, which the Superintendent and a number of Committee members attended.

- Arianna Rodriguez, BPS student and member, Sociedad Latina, testified regarding the

importance of ethnic studies.

- Ari Rodriguez, Jason Dias, and Taicha Collado, BPS students and members, Sociedad Latina, testified regarding the importance of school counselors.
- Michael Heichman, member, Boston Education Justice Alliance, testified regarding the importance of student voice.
- Sharon Hinton, founder, Black Teachers Matter Inc., testified regarding exam schools admissions.
- Rachel Young, parent, Sumner Elementary School, testified regarding surround care.
- Ruby Reyes, executive directors, Boston Education Justice Alliance, testified regarding the budget.
- Edith Bazile, advocate, testified regarding the budget.

ACTION ITEMS

Ms. Oliver-Dávila announced that the Committee had postponed the vote on goals and guardrails until April 7th to provide the Committee with more time to meet with stakeholders and incorporate additional feedback.

Approved - On roll call, the Committee unanimously approved grants for approval totaling \$73,243.

The Superintendent thanked her finance team, particularly Budget Director Miriam Rubin and Director of Grants and External Fund Yvonne Macrae, for putting together the student-centered FY22 budget. She said that a budget is a reflection of one's values, and said that the district's task is to return well, recover strong, and reimagine what is possible for students.

Dr. Coleman praised the FY22 budget proposal as a great step forward, adding that we have further to go.

Mr. DeAraujo expressed support for the budget and praised the increase in social workers. He noted that it's the district's largest budget ever, despite declining enrollment. He said he looks forward to tracking outcomes. He encouraged the district to use Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Funds on students who have lost out in the past year, adding that families should know how their children benefited from these additional funds.

Ms. Robinson thanked Superintendent and Mr. Kuder for their work on the budget. She encouraged the district to use the racial equity planning tool with BuildBPS and to reexamine Weighted Student Funding. She expressed support for adequate funding of the Office of Opportunity Gaps.

The Superintendent spoke about the significance of the City's \$100 million funding commitment over three years, above and beyond salary increases. She noted that unlike other districts, BPS is not making layoffs and any major spending reductions despite declining enrollment. She said that ESSER funding is one-time funding that must be spent carefully.

Mr. O'Neill praised the City for honoring its financial commitment to BPS.

Ms. Oliver-Dávila thanked the finance team and school leaders for their work on the budget. She thanked Mayor Walsh for honoring his financial commitment to BPS. She expressed appreciation for the addition of new social worker and family liaison positions. She spoke about the importance of multilingual support. She urged the district to be careful and strategic about spending federal funding.

Approved - On roll call, the Committee unanimously approved the Superintendent's Fiscal Year 2022 general fund budget in the amount of \$1,294,719,861.

REPORT

College, Career, and Life Readiness - Superintendent Cassellius and her team presented a report focused on many areas that impact BPS effectiveness in ensuring that students are College, Career, and Life Ready (CCLR) when they leave BPS. Co-presenters included Dr. Elia Bruggeman, BPS High School Superintendent; Dr. Lindsa McIntyre, BPS High School Superintendent; Monica Hogan, BPS Senior Executive Director, Office of Data and Accountability; Andrea Zayas, BPS Chief Academic Officer; Christine Landry, Superintendent, Office of Academics and Professional Learning; David Bloom, BPS Deputy Chief Financial Officer; Marsha Inniss-Mitchell, BPS Director of PostSecondary Initiatives and Partnerships; Catherine Chiu, BPS Director of Guidance; Phillip Brangiforte, Head of School, East Boston High School; Caitlin Murphy, Head of School, English High School; and Renee McCall, Head of School and Andrew Manning, Excel High School.

The team reviewed recent data around graduation and dropout rates for students attending BPS. The data indicates that the dropout rate has declined while the graduation rate has increased. However, the information on attendance, GPA, access to rigorous coursework, and anytime, anywhere learning indicates that only 43% of recent BPS graduates are prepared for life after graduation. Disaggregating the data by race, shows evidence of an expanding opportunity gap for our historically marginalized students. To improve the CCLR for BPS students, the Superintendent is recommending that the Committee adopt the MassCore course of study as the BPS graduation requirement. By setting MassCore as the bar for graduation, the district will provide transparency for graduation requirements at every BPS high school. MassCore offers the opportunity to ensure that every student has access to rigorous courses. The policy will also close opportunity gaps regarding MassCore completion that are persistent for historically marginalized students. The district will provide support for students to ensure that MassCore is not an unfunded mandate. In addition to MassCore, the high school team presented data on advanced courses, course grades, the impact of Panorama and MyCap and Postsecondary readiness.

School leaders Phillip Brangiforte (East Boston High School), Caitlin Murphy (The English High School), and Renee McCall (Excel High School) spoke about their strategies for success.

Dr. Rivera spoke about the significance of adopting MassCore. She expressed concern that adopting MassCore could lead to an increase in the dropout rate. She requested a visual map depicting which schools are already meeting three of the criteria for CCLR. The Superintendent explained that the district will spend the next year planning the implementation of MassCore to mitigate any unintended consequences.

Ms. Robinson said that the presentation demonstrates that the district is offering many options for access and many individualized opportunities. She asked how MassCore differs from an International Baccalaureate program or exam school rigor. Ms. Zayas explained that MassCore is an overall framework for graduation that provides a guarantee of rigor across the board.

Dr. Coleman applauded the presentation for its academic focus and comprehensive approach. He said that MassCore will bring much needed coherence to the district.

Mr. Tran expressed concern about the current rate of MassCore completion. He suggested revisiting school autonomy and working with the Boston Teachers Union. The Superintendent spoke about the need for common expectations across high schools.

Mr. DeAraujo asked what factors contributed to the increased graduation rate. The Superintendent explained that the district had shifted its graduation policy due to the COVID pandemic, taking a “do no harm” approach and allowing students to demonstrate competency. Mr. DeAraujo asked about the decline in the FAFSA completion rate. Ms. Chiu said that the pandemic has caused many students to delay college and instead focus on working to help support their families. The Superintendent noted that BPS saw a much smaller decline in the number of graduates entering college compared with other districts.

Ms. O’Neill spoke about CCLR being one of the Committee's five goals. He discussed the importance of BPS ensuring that BPS students are academically successful K through 16. He asked the district to create a heat map showing the concerns of school leaders. He expressed support for the expansion of Advanced Placement (AP) and dual enrollment expansion but uncertainty about the expansion of International Baccalaureate (IB). He acknowledged that implementing MassCore has the potential to impact the dropout rate in the short-term, which is why a strong alternative education program is so important. The Superintendent said that career technical education will be part of the district’s high school redesign work. Ms. Hogan spoke about changes to the state’s accountability system with Next Generation MCAS. The Superintendent said that if the state continues to use an exit exam, students will be held to a much higher standard and must be prepared.

Dr. Rivera called for an end to high stakes testing. She expressed concern about disparities in AP access. She responded to Mr. Tran’s earlier comments stating that believes that structural inequalities, not unions, serve as barriers to student achievement.

Mr. DeAraujo expressed concern that the district’s flexibility around the graduation policy has the potential to diminish the preparedness of BPS graduates. He suggested exploring the use of applications to specialized high schools to help students understand the various course options available to them.

The Superintendent respectfully disagreed with the suggestion that graduates would be less prepared, stating that students graduating from BPS have had teachers determining their competency throughout their academic careers. She spoke about her belief that standardized tests are racist in nature and are not a good measure of students overall achievement. She said that requiring applications for high school admissions could serve as a barrier but acknowledged that

Boston School Committee Remote Meeting
Zoom
March 24, 2021

BPS needs to do a better job of educating students about the various opportunities offered across the system.

Mr. Tran clarified that he wants to work with BTU in the best interest of students.

Dr. Coleman said that he looks forward to conversations about the implications of high stakes testing. He suggested that the School Quality Working Group, which he co-chairs, could examine the issue. He suggested introducing MyCap in middle school, so that students can articulate their interests and talents and make more informed high school selections.

Ms. Oliver-Dávila echoed Dr. Coleman’s remarks about MyCap. She thanked the school leaders who presented and praised their innovation, creativity, and relationship building. She spoke about the importance of dedicating a planning year for MassCore and adequately funding it. She spoke about the importance of tracking outcomes for Asian students. Ms. Oliver-Dávila said that the CCLR efforts are aligned with the district’s “campus without walls” approach. She spoke about the importance of collaborating with external partners and the philanthropic community. She requested more information on support that will be offered to English Language Learners, as well as other districts’ experience implementing MassCore.

The Superintendent briefly summarized the Committee’s feedback and offered to present a work plan to the Committee in April.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON REPORTS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

ADJOURN

At approximately 9:42 p.m., the Committee voted unanimously, by roll call, to adjourn the meeting.

Attest:



Elizabeth Sullivan
Executive Secretary