

June 30, 2021

Simon Chernow and Rosann Tung Dissent

Thank you, Co-chairs and School Committee members and Superintendent, for this opportunity to speak. Simon Chernow and I present this dissenting opinion tonight based on the Task Force recommendation agreed to in a supermajority on Monday 6/28, which was 100% of seats allocated by rank in socio-economic groupings. We wrote this dissent in anticipation of tonight's meeting **before** the Tuesday 6/29 Task Force meeting. We appreciate the opportunity to share our rationale and will return to more recent events at the end of our statement.

Members of the Task Force have vastly different positionalities and philosophies about education and meritocracy, but we have wrangled respectfully and transparently with options that will increase equity for families. We all agree that our recommended changes will increase the likelihood that students who attend our selective schools will benefit from increased diversity.

However, by dissenting, Simon and I urge Boston Public Schools to go further, and faster. BPS will not achieve justice until we eliminate the structures that uphold White supremacy and capitalism – structures like the tracking that is Advanced Work and like the three tiers that our high schools still represent (exam, application, and open enrollment). Permanent ranking and sorting are a major root cause of the fact that forty percent of our schools require [assistance or intervention](#) for poor outcomes. Many scholars have shown that children who attend truly [diverse schools](#) benefit both academically and socio-emotionally. The segregation of students by race, socioeconomic status, learning style, language, and special needs leads to our most vulnerable students receiving inadequate resources and support.

Another structure that upholds power and privilege is standardized testing. Every standardized test ever created shows group mean differences, because standardized tests measure more than just academic content; in fact, they cement unequal opportunities.

An oft-leveled critique has been that the human, financial, and political capital poured into this admissions process is misguided and should be put into improving the other 120+ BPS schools. Actually, we believe that when the admissions of the three schools become **test-blind** and **lottery-based**, and when all of the students who test well attend *more* than just three schools, system-wide improvement will accelerate.

We envision multiple secondary schools that families can choose from based on curriculum and learning style match, as Chair Robinson suggested at the last School Committee meeting. A lottery mechanism for all secondary schools reduces the harm inflicted when some students are labeled “winners” and “harder working” and others are labeled “losers” or “less deserving.” A lottery mechanism also reduces pressure on teachers from the most entitled parents. When all families have access to all schools, and school supply follows family demand, then the path to a truly high quality school district that is both equitable and excellent will be clearer.

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We also want to make two other suggestions that align well with the BPS definition of “rigor.” One is a system-wide **performance assessment** initiative that encourages inquiry-based learning, collaborative research, and community service projects, all of which support higher order thinking, depth over breadth, and relevance beyond the classroom. Another is an [ethnic studies](#) sequence, which uses curriculum and pedagogy that are culturally responsive, decolonizing, and focused on fighting oppression. We know that pockets of this work are happening in BPS. To make them more accessible system-wide, let’s put in *at least* the same amount of expertise, thought, research, and effort that this admissions process has taken.

All three of our recommendations stem from the fact that our current school system is fueled by oppression, so that those with privilege remain privileged and everyone else is pushed down. This system will not be fixed on its own. Purposeful changes must be made and anti-racist policies must be enacted in order to break this cycle. If every BPS student chose their high school through lottery, engaged in authentic project based learning, and strengthened their own identity in relation to power, we wouldn’t need this divisive conversation about three schools at all.

Equity and justice are not mutually exclusive, and they are both necessary. It is more difficult and messy to eliminate exclusive structures (which would be justice) than to create new programs (which address equity).

But in the long run, equity will be elusive without justice.

We also feel the need to address the backroom deal that resulted in a return to a 20% citywide set-aside for those who want to maintain the status quo. The data is unequivocal that reserving seats for the privileged goes against our charge.

When we left Monday’s meeting, many Task Force members felt we had made progress and were close to a recommendation.

But last night, as we struggled to make sense of the dramatic shift in our co-chairs’ tone, we became deeply disturbed by the political pressure to reverse Monday’s progress. We were asked to ignore data, to ignore our painstaking process, to ignore Monday night’s conclusion. We were asked to throw democracy and open meeting rules out the window. We weren’t even given the chance to vote.

Behind closed doors, powerful people forced a recommendation that undid hundreds of hours of Task Force members’ work. It is an insult to the many people who bravely gave public comment, to see live that their voices will never be prioritized and that elite and powerful Bostonians reign above them. It negates the strides that BPS has made. It reinforces incremental change. What happened last night will go down in history as a step in the wrong direction.

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We feel angry and demoralized at this last ditch effort to maintain the status quo. The people who are responsible for this underhanded tactic should be held accountable. The politicians' names behind these shenanigans should be publicized, because they are the ones cowardly taking advantage of Boston's families and children, while hiding from the public eye. Then the voters can decide.

We want to note that when you ask citizens to serve for this many months and hours, and then ignore their recommendation, it can lead to disenfranchisement. The next time some of us are asked to serve, we will be asking ourselves, can I really make a contribution? Does it really matter if forces beyond my control, who disagree with me, will prevail?

One way to remedy this particular injustice is to put back on the table Monday night's recommendation with 100% of seats allocated by rank in SES grouping, which resulted from a fair and transparent process. We request that the School Committee respect the Task Force's Monday night conclusion and consider it in your deliberations.