



## **Additional Background Information and Data Reviewed by the Boston Public Schools Exam Schools Admissions Criteria Working Group**

In July 2020, Superintendent Cassellius convened an Exam Schools Admissions Working Group to develop and submit a recommendation made to her on revising the exam school admissions criteria for entrance during the 2021-2022 school year. The revisions are in direct response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on applicants during the latter half of School Year (SY) 2019-2020.

The Working Group was tasked with recommending a temporary, one-year approach to the process for admissions to the district's three exam schools: Boston Latin Academy, Boston Latin School, and John D. O'Bryant School of Mathematics and Science. The policy will be in place for one year as the City of Boston and Boston Public Schools (BPS) collaborate on a focused response to the global pandemic.

The members comprising the working group were:

- Samuel Acevedo, Opportunity and Achievement Gap Task Force Co-Chair
- Acacia Aguirre, John D. O'Bryant parent
- Michael Contompasis, Former Boston Latin School Headmaster and Former BPS Superintendent
- Matt Cregor, on behalf of NAACP
- Tanya Freeman-Wisdom, John D. O'Bryant, Head of School
- Katherine Grassa, Curley K-8, Principal
- Zena Lum, Boston Latin Academy parent
- Rachel Skerritt, Boston Latin School, Head of School
- Tanisha Sullivan, President, NAACP Boston

The Working Group met weekly in August 2020 and twice weekly in September 2020, for a total of 12 meetings. The group reviewed a wide range of data throughout the course of their meetings. Topics covered included: student grades, admissions criteria in other school districts, and enrollment trends in the exam schools compared to overall BPS enrollment.

They presented their recommendations to the Superintendent on September 29, 2020. Dr. Cassellius presented the recommendation to the School Committee on October 8, 2020. The School Committee voted unanimously to approve the recommendation on October 21, 2020.

We are providing the following information publicly so that all interested stakeholders can develop a deeper understanding of the Working Group's recommendation in advance of the



upcoming application and admissions process. The following details the recommendation and data used to support the decision:

## **The Recommendation**

### Building the pool of qualified applicants

According to the policy unanimously adopted by the School Committee, the Exam School entrance exam is suspended for one year, and BPS will use the following criteria to identify students who qualify for admittance under the one-year policy:

Students will need to demonstrate that they have:

1. Scored Met or Exceeded Expectations on the 2019 English Language Arts (ELA) and Math MCAS

**OR**

2. Earned a B or higher average grade point average (GPA) during the first two terms of School Year SY2019-2020

### Generating invitations from that pool of qualified applicants

The first 20% of seats at each exam school will be reserved for the top-ranking students citywide, based on GPA.

The remaining 80% of invitations will be distributed using a combination of GPA and student home zip code. The breakdown is as follows:

- Each zip code in the city will be allocated a certain number of seats that are proportionate to the percentage of school-aged children living in that zip code
- Students in each zip code will be invited based on their GPA ranking, starting with the highest GPA

The Working Group arrived at this recommendation based on their assertion that it would be more equitable in the current environment to ensure that each exam school educates a student population that more closely reflects the overall enrollment demographics of all BPS schools.

The Working Group also recommended that BPS provide appropriate support – both before and during the school year - for SY21-22 exam school admittees who are deemed academically prepared for exam school content but may require more time to get acclimated to the pace of exam school study.



The Working Group also suggested that the district expand the Exam School Initiative (ESI), beginning as early as 4th grade and running through October of the students' 6th-grade year. This would provide a greater focus on academic acceleration in both ELA and math.

Finally, the Working Group recommended that they continue convening to advise on permanent efforts to expand the applicant pool, making use of the new [NWEA test](#) and other factors. This rationale is based on what can be learned from applying the recommendations to this year's admissions and incorporating what the working group has learned in reviewing practices from other districts.

### **Simulations**

The Working Group requested multiple simulations to understand the impacts of the proposal. There is no way to run a full simulation using historical years or current year data, mainly due to missing information from non-BPS students and school ranking preferences from current students, which can not be predicted.

- What was available to simulate:
  - Changes to SY20-21 invitations for all SY19-20 actual applicants (BPS and non-BPS) using GPA (last year spring + 1st two terms of the current year) and ISEE scores (the district's previous exam provider)
  - Changes to SY20-21 invitations for all BPS students using other available data sources (e.g., grades prior to COVID)
  - Potential invitations for SY21-22 for BPS students only
  
- What was not available to simulate:
  - Changes to SY20-21 invitations for non-BPS students using data outside of GPA and ISEE scores
  - Exam scores if an exam was administered in Fall 2020
  - Student preferences for SY21-22

The continued goal of the Working Group was to identify opportunities to ensure more equitable access to the three exam schools, so each school's enrollment would more closely reflect the district's overall enrollment.

Their ultimate recommendation of the 20% - 80% split was based on the goal to increase the number of expected seats for traditionally underrepresented neighborhoods across the city.

The table below shows the actual number of invitations to exam schools - by neighborhood - for the current academic year and the projected number of invitations for next year using the 20% - 80% approach.



Zip Code	Neighborhood	% of School-Aged Children	SY20-21 Actual		Seats under Simulations
			# Applicants	# Invitations	Average # Invitations
02108	Beacon Hill	0.3%	<6	<6	4.0
02109	Downtown	0.1%	8	7	5.7
02110	Downtown	0.3%	7	7	2.7
02111	Chinatown	0.8%	43	24	10.0
02113	North End	0.3%	7	7	7.7
02114	Beacon Hill/West End	0.7%	22	19	13.0
02115	Fenway	1.4%	33	15	15.3
02116	Back Bay	1.3%	44	27	19.7
02199	Back Bay	0.1%	<6	<6	0.3
02118	South End	3.3%	105	36	32.0
02119	Roxbury	6.1%	136	27	56.0
02120	Roxbury	1.5%	46	17	15.3
02121	Roxbury	8.2%	218	27	78.0
02122	Dorchester	4.6%	186	62	53.7
02124	Dorchester	12.4%	335	84	123.0
02125	Dorchester	6.3%	174	47	66.0
02126	Mattapan	6.3%	131	20	58.0
02127	South Boston	4.2%	108	35	42.3
02128	East Boston	9.0%	252	57	80.7
02129	Charlestown	3.0%	107	56	39.0
02130	Jamaica Plain	5.1%	120	77	61.0
02131	Roslindale	6.5%	180	94	69.7
02132	West Roxbury	4.8%	190	133	76.0
02134	Allston	1.2%	36	17	13.0
02163	Allston	0.1%	<6	<6	0.0
02135	Brighton	3.7%	97	52	35.7
02136	Hyde Park	7.8%	214	68	80.3
02210	Seaport	0.1%	<6	<6	2.7
02215	Fenway/Kenmore	0.4%	14	8	4.7

There are predicted changes in neighborhoods across the city, with some seeing an increase in enrollment, while others will see a decline. The Working Group made its recommendation for this model after reviewing other simulations.

While there has been a discussion of adding priority for current BPS students, the School Committee ultimately decided that all Boston students - from BPS or other schools - should be considered equally for the next round of admissions.

### Next Steps

Students attending BPS schools will be contacted by the district in January 2021 to apply for the exam schools based on their eligibility. Students currently not attending BPS schools can apply by visiting [www.bostonpublicschools.org/exam](http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/exam). The deadline for non-BPS students to apply is **Friday, January 15**. BPS has taken the following steps to ensure the public is



informed of the application and deadline process:

- [Social media promotion on BPS accounts](#)
- Informational letter to families, translated into 9 languages sent to BPS families along with non-BPS schools for distribution
- Information sessions for school leaders from both BPS and non-BPS schools
- Mentions from Dr. Cassellius during her Superintendent's Report in School Committee meetings, in tandem with mentions during relevant media appearances
- Virtual information sessions with interpretation services in multiple languages ([visit here to view the videos](#))
- Mentions in the [BPS Weekly Update](#) newsletter

On **Wednesday, January 13, 2021**, the School Committee will receive a recommendation at their bi-weekly meeting regarding continuance of the Working Group, suggested to become a permanent Task Force of the Committee.