

THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF THE CITY OF BOSTON



**Official Minutes of the Remote  
English Language Learners Task Force (ELLTF) Meeting**

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The English Language Learners Task Force (ELLTF) held a meeting on December 8, 2022 at 5–7 p.m. on Zoom. The meeting was in English with simultaneous interpretation in Amharic, Arabic, Caboverdean Creole, and Spanish.

For more information about any of the items listed below, visit <https://www.bostonpublicschools.org/domain/247>, email [jdouglas4@bostonpublicschools.org](mailto:jdouglas4@bostonpublicschools.org), or call the Boston School Committee Office at (617) 635-9014.

### Attendance

#### ELLTF Members

Present: Janet Anderson, Roxanne Harvey, Co-chair Suzanne Lee, John Mudd, Co-chair Rafaela Polanco Garcia, Maria Serpa, Marie St. Fleur, Fabián Torres-Ardila, Rosann Tung

Not present: Angelina Camacho, Paulo De Barros, Geralde Gabeau, Katie Li, Miren Uriarte

### DOCUMENTS PRESENTED

#### *ELL Task Force*

- Minutes of the ELL Task Force Meeting, October 27, 2022

#### *Multistate Association for Bilingual Education (MABE)*

- See Expanding Bilingual Programs in Boston Public School: Presentation for the ELL Task Force, Phyllis Hardy, Marla Pérez-Sellés, and Mary Cazabón, Multistate Association for Bilingual Education (MABE), December 8, 2022.

### CONSOLIDATED FOLLOW-UP LIST

- Send Superintendent Skipper the list of ideas the ELSWD Subcommittee developed for immediately expanding native language access.
- Reach out to OSE and OMME officials to request that the ELSWD Subcommittee be able to contribute to biweekly meetings on plans for MLSWDs.

### Interpretation Introduction

Douglas and each of the interpreters provided instruction for activating the interpretation feature in Zoom. This meeting had interpretation in Spanish, Amharic, Arabic, and Caboverdean Creole.

## **Chairs' Welcome (Suzanne Lee & Rafaela Polanco Garcia)**

Lee welcomed prospective new members to the EL Task Force. She announced the birth of a baby to TF member Katie Li. She reported that Farah Assiraj will be leaving her role at BPS to accept a new position elsewhere.

Polanco Garcia celebrated the linguistic access created by today's multilingual meeting with five languages. She reported that a memorandum of agreement was approved between BPS and the Boston Teacher Union, including clarifying language pertaining to holidays. Last night they talked about changing the name of a couple of schools. The School Committee received information from the Equity Office that they had handled over 2,000 complaints.

St. Fleur spoke about her new role at BPS related to family engagement in the process to create a master plan for BPS.

## **Approve meeting minutes from October 27, 2022**

The Task Force unanimously passed the minutes of the October 27, 2022 meeting. Harvey and Tung abstained due to having been absent at the last meeting.

## **Discussion with Superintendent Skipper**

Superintendent Skipper expressed appreciation for the EL Task Force, and then her appreciation for Assiraj's work to develop the Office of Multilingual and Multicultural Education (OMME) Strategic Plan. She noted the way that decision-making is distributed across the OMME team, as well as the improved compliance numbers related to obligations in the agreement between the district and the US Department of Justice.

Pertaining to OMME's work after Assiraj's departure, she spoke about the district's plan to ensure that OMME staff members can lead buckets of work while a search is done for a new chief of that office, and said that people from the legal team would be brought in to make sure that compliance obligations are met. Working with Dr. Chen, the district will be bringing in outside experts to help with the transition and make sure there's a solid plan as Farah departs.

Pertaining to the hiring process for an OMME Chief as well as those for the Office of Special Education and the Office of Human Capital, she indicated that BPS is working with the Boston Schools Fund and other outside funders. "We will be asking the EL Task Force to assist with that selection when the time comes."

Lee expressed gratitude for the superintendent's remarks and expressed concern about the report from the Council of Great City School that highlight practices that need to be remedied related to services for English learners with disabilities.

Chen joined in the appreciation for Assiraj and concurred that there are strong leaders on the OMME team — especially Faye Karp and Ignacio Chaparro — who need additional support and capacity. Chen said the work has been carefully delineated and will be assigned to clear leads

within OMME. OMME staff will connect with her until a permanent person is hired. There will not be an interim appointment because of all the leadership transition in that office to-date. More details will be shared when they are available, probably later in the month. “The EL Task Force will have a seat at the table” in the search process and she will follow up with the ELTF co-chairs.

Skipper described priorities including increasing native language access, and improving services for multilingual learners (MLLs) with disabilities. The work ahead is to build the central infrastructure, and a big part of that will be teacher qualifications and recruitment and also high quality materials in native languages. She mentioned particular concern for special education students and inclusion in dual language schools. She anticipated that the upcoming budget process would involve a large investment related to bilingual education and carrying out parts of the OMME Strategic Plan.

Mudd asked whether there would be formal search committees. Skipper answered, “yes.” He asked that ELTF members also have representation for the OSE hire. Skipper answered, “100%.”

Skipper said that the concerns of multilingual learners with special needs to be in the forefront of the process in the spring to revise the weighted student formula. She asked Mudd to join. Mudd and Lee clarified that Lee is already representing the TF in that process.

Mudd asked whether there would be the opportunity to make sure that the newly hired Chiefs of OMME and OSE could review and revise the strategic plan with the task force so they are congenial with the plans going forward. Skipper agreed and responded that candidates would receive those plans and could be asked questions about them during interviews.

Mudd asked about the search process. Skipper said they’re working with a couple of “philanthropics that are supporting the process.” They expect to finalize contracts for a search firm in an early January timeframe. She described her optimism to be doing the process at this time of year and her sense that it had been held previously at suboptimal times.

Mudd asked whether members of the ELTF’s English Learners with Disabilities (ELSWD) Subcommittee could meet with district officials from OSE and OMME who are now meeting biweekly on plans for MLSWDs, which would be more frequently than the quarterly meetings around strategic planning. Chen responded that the process to arrange that would be through the co-chairs of the Task Force.

**FOLLOW UP:** Reach out to OSE and OMME officials to request that the ELSWD Subcommittee be able to contribute to biweekly meetings on plans for MLSWDs.

Serpa spoke about ELSWDs and the many alternatives / non-traditional ways of providing language access to students immediately. She asked, is there a possibility of having a committee to focus on all the ways native language access can be provided? She and Lee promised to send Skipper a list of ideas the ELSWD Subcommittee developed.

Anderson stressed the urgency of attending to all the systemic issues that impact education for multilingual learners in addition to the budget piece, including: student enrollment and assignment, the New Green Deal, and program placement.

Skipper described work to create stakeholder groups and bring departments in so they're not siloed. The work has begun and is led by Dr. Chen.

Tung asked about staffing, saying in particular that she is interested in the possibility of converting SEI monolingual classrooms to transitional bilingual education and other kinds of programs that support native language access. Skipper responded that a big focus going forward will be on the educator pipeline, including opportunities to get students into the pipeline after graduation. She mentioned Polanco Garcia's parent mentor program at St. Stephens, and conversations underway with the Office of Human Capital to talk about possibilities for employment for parents and other members of Boston's linguistically diverse communities. She mentioned the Recruitment, Cultivation, and Diversity team as important to that work. "We know that in order to execute that OMME strategic plan we have to have the staffing to do that."

Lee emphasized the importance of implementing that plan and the problem with having lost so much bilingual capacity in the district.

**FOLLOW UP: Send Skipper the list of ideas the ELSWD Subcommittee developed for immediately expanding native language access.**

#### **OMME Presentation / Presentación OMME**

Assiraj thanked the ELTF members for their partnership and support during COVID and for pushing ahead. She expressed her excitement to see the district taking steps toward bilingual education. She affirmed her trust in Karp and Chaparro, and reminded listeners that compliance with the district's obligations to the US Department of Justice (DOJ) is high. She described the OMME Strategic Plan as a community-driven plan, and expressed that she knows Chen and Skipper support the work. She indicated that she is moving to a new position with the Council of Great City Schools. She encouraged TF members to reach out to her in her new role.

Assiraj introduced MABE as the group contracted to lead development of the strategy for increasing bilingual education. The first step is to ensure that the MABE consultants understand the complexities and nuances of the district. She anticipated that by the end of the current school year there should be a strategy developed for program development, and with schools having the necessary data on their students to assess the language program options that would be suitable and to engage in planning for dual language program development. She expressed that it is important for ELTF members to hear directly from the MABE experts about what it takes to create a dual language strategy at the district level while meeting legal requirements to DESE and the USDOJ.

**Multistate Association for Bilingual Education (MABE) / Asociación Multiestatal para la Educación Bilingüe (MABE), Phyllis Hardy and Marla Perez-Selles**

Phyllis Hardy and Marla Perez-Selles were joined by colleague Mary Cazabón. Hardy, Perez, and Cazabón introduced MABE and themselves and described their backgrounds in bilingual education.

*See Expanding Bilingual Programs in Boston Public School: Presentation for the ELL Task Force, Phyllis Hardy, Marla Pérez-Sellés, and Mary Cazabón, Multistate Association for Bilingual Education (MABE), December 8, 2022.*

Hardy explained that MABE's mission is to identify, promote, and disseminate research-based programs, practices, and policies that support bilingual education, through dual language education and other bilingual programs. She reported that research finds dual language programs produce superior outcomes, relative to all other programs for English learners, and gave background on MABE's advocacy for bilingual education policies and programs.

Cazabón presented the array of programs that are permitted by Massachusetts law. [See slide 3.] She gave an overview of what research has found about student outcomes for the different program types. In longitudinal studies, students in dual language programs had scores of 50 and 52, while those in two-way dual language programs had scores of 61. Those in transitional bilingual education had scores of 40.

Tung affirmed her personal enthusiasm for dual language programs, and asked what the MABE team would say about how many immigrant families in Boston do not choose dual language programs, regardless of what the research literature says.

Lee requested clarification for participants present on the distinction between one- and two-way.

Cazabón provided information about one- and two-way programs. In a one-way program all the students speak one language and learn another. In a two-way program students are roughly equal numbers of speakers of each of two languages. A heritage program would typically be just a class or a part-time program, not the intensive content of a dual language program and the resulting biliteracy in both languages. Research shows that English learners (ELs) in dual language programs acquire English proficiency at a faster rate than ELs in other kinds of programs. She described a longitudinal program in Portland, Oregon, where student assignment was randomized, allowing for comparison of a control group (not assigned to dual language) and a test group (assigned to dual language). The findings were that dual language students outperformed peers in English and had other positive outcomes.

Tung by chat: "Could we please receive a PDF of the Portland OR study that Mary Cazabon is referencing?" Bernardino responded by chat, "had this open already!"

[https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_briefs/RB9903.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB9903.html)." Anderson added, "And here is a slide presentation on the same research I believe.

[https://ncela.ed.gov/files/uploads/2016/Michael\\_Bacon\\_and\\_Jennifer\\_Steele\\_Dual\\_Language\\_Education\\_Programs.pdf](https://ncela.ed.gov/files/uploads/2016/Michael_Bacon_and_Jennifer_Steele_Dual_Language_Education_Programs.pdf)."

Tung by chat: “Are there large districts that have successfully implemented dual language for all ELLs? If so, which ones and how?”

Hardy responded to Tung’s earlier question about how MABE would respond to parents who don’t prefer dual language regardless of the research findings. She explained that the message varies by the stakeholder audience. Today they are emphasizing the research with the assumption that this group cares about that information. For a different audience the emphasis might be different.

Perez spoke about how MABE works with districts. In Boston they spoke with 9 key stakeholders so far, including the ELTF co-chairs [see slide 7 in the presentation]. Their approach is to understand that the success of our work depends on establishing clear and transparent communication lines with key inside drivers of the effort — these could be a program director, a school principal, a team with a school principal and superintendent. See Slide 5 in the presentation pertaining to communicating a unified vision, bringing teams together, getting all stakeholders on board, shifting mindsets and behavior, and creating shared stakeholder accountability. “We need to understand that change is a process, not an event.” MABE’s focus in BPS will be at the district level.

Hardy said there are three deliverables that are part of MABE’s contract with Boston [see slide 8 in the presentation]. They will start by creating a bilingual District Leadership Team, working now to identify who should be a core member and who should be an invited member at-large. They will set a calendar of biweekly meetings for this group for the rest of the school year, which MABE will facilitate.

Tung asked in the chat, “What is the composition of the District Leadership Team guided by MABE? Is this team related to the OMME Strategic Priority #1?” Assiraj responded “Yes.”

Hardy explained that MABE has a lot to learn about what is working well and what have been challenges with program implementation in Boston. She said that a language education program is a complex multifaceted and long-term project alignment, between school district and program policies. District support is key to successful programming.

During the 2013–2014 school year, MABE served on an advisory board to BPS to develop a readiness checklist and rubric for schools interested in dual language to apply for a dual language planning grant. A second deliverable is to build on that scope of work to develop a framework and process for schools that want to consider transitioning from an SEI program to a bilingual or dual language program. They will begin by inviting SEI language-specific schools to participate in the process because they are likely to have the student population, staff, curriculum materials, assessments, and other essential resources in place.

Hardy indicated that “It is critical to get understanding and acceptance from the community to successfully sustain implementation of bilingual programs.” She reported that, in their interview with Drew Echelson, he stressed the need for work on communication, and his sense that there isn’t mutual collective agreement that native language programs are good for students. She said, “We need community buy-in. We need to educate stakeholders about what the research

says. We have to work hand in hand to talk about why these programs matter for our students,” concluding “So, as we can see, there's a lot of communication that needs to happen.”

Cazabón shared quotes that stressed that developing dual language programs takes time [see slide 9]. She said, “I do not believe that you can do it in a shorter time frame. . . . It's also important to think about the comprehensive professional development of all stakeholders, not just for the staff, but for everybody who's involved, to build systemic coherence. All of the individuals who are involved need to truly understand the core beliefs about the promise and the realities of what dual language education can do, and buy into them if they can — including the school office staff, custodial staff, parents, families, communities, middle school students and high school students (because they really have tremendous thoughts about education as those closest to the classroom).”

Cazabón continued, “From the very beginning I recommend that we prepare a very comprehensive evaluation, designed longitudinally, to the dual language education programs at each school. . . . When we are thinking about accountability in these dual language programs, it's very important that we look at it with a whole student, multifaceted lens, and we're not just looking at language proficiency, not just looking at MCAS. We're looking at other kinds of dimensions. We build this in right from the beginning.”

Tung expressed both enthusiasm for dual language and skepticism about it. She requested that the presenters share an example of another district that implemented dual language and how long it took, referring to a slide shared with the ELTF earlier this year showing that the approval process through BPS and DESE would take multiple years.

Hardy clarified that she does not know of a district that has dual language for all ELs. She said the first step is to look at enrollment and see which languages have a sufficient number of student speakers of a language to create a program. She described the Windham, Connecticut district that began implementing dual language in the 1980s and now has a program in every elementary school, and in the middle and high school in the district, pre-K–12. “It takes a long time.”

Tung probed for examples of districts that created programs for languages with enough student population to create a strand.

Hardy spoke about the challenges of those programs, posed by the lack of curricular materials in certain languages, as is the case for the Vietnamese and Haitian Kreyol programs in BPS. A district has to make a financial commitment to create those materials.

Hardy described the requirements of the LOOK Act to submit preliminary paperwork in November and final paperwork that is due January 1, and must be submitted in the school year before the program is implemented.

Tung by chat, “So am I understanding correctly that BPS is trying to do something that other large districts have not yet done? Are we also going to implement some TBE programs too?”

Mudd expressed his understanding that dual language is the gold standard. Although the Thomas and Collier chart that everyone uses does show that dual language is best, it also shows

that every bilingual program model using native language is better than General Education with ESL. He looked at numbers showing 4% of students at ELD 1–3 are in dual language and 40% are in general education with ESL pull out. He expressed an urgent plea for a meeting with the planning team, saying there may be intermediate steps that could bring native language to more kids more quickly.

Assiraj spoke about timeline, emphasizing the DESE and DOJ requirements that govern the time needed to develop and implement programs. She underscored the need to start with communities and parents. She emphasized the importance of moving with a district strategy, not just school-by-school, which can result in programs that have challenges around materials, curriculum, and staff, such as what happened with the Vietnamese program at the Mather and the Haitian Kreyol program at the Mattahunt. She spoke again about the legal requirements that have to be met with the state and the USDOJ.

Lee affirmed that staffing and materials have been challenges in the Chinese community for creating a dual language program.

Polanco Garcia added via chat, “To guarantee success, parents must be present throughout the process!!!” Perez, from the public said, “Yes! parents in the process early on”

Hardy said they shared an explanation today of MABE’s work so far, and can return another time to go deeper or update on their deliverables. In the chat, “We are willing to return and share with you the progress with priority #1.”

Chen said via chat, “Parent partnership is critical on every level- not only to start bilingual program but sustainability. It is critical for this group to be very clear on the models and to help guide these community conversations-both formal and informal.” She then voiced the importance of drawing on the knowledge base of schools and communities, acknowledging that the process with its legal requirements can feel bureaucratic but that it is intended to ensure community input. She also shared her personal experience in the past as a principal of a dual language school who met with parents to share the research and encourage them to remain in the program, and also the challenges of staffing and retention. “I also have experience at a systems level, growing dual language programs, and I will tell you it is a mistake to grow them prematurely, too quickly. It is not responsible and not fair to students if we don't develop a program that fully meets their needs. We have to move forward, but we must do it responsibly with the resources, the staffing, and the support for staffing and families that's needed.”

Lee expressed appreciation for district leadership to do this right.

#### **Public Comment / Comentario público (6:50-7:00, 10 min)**

There was no public comment.

#### **Adjourn / Clausura**