

THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF THE CITY OF BOSTON



**Minutes of the English Language Learners (ELL) Task Force Meeting  
December 20, 2018**

The English Language Learners Task Force of the Boston School Committee held a meeting on December 20, 2018 at 9:00am at Bruce Bolling Building. For more information about any of the items listed below, contact Jen Douglas, ELL Task Force Coordinator, at [bpselltaskforce@gmail.com](mailto:bpselltaskforce@gmail.com).

---

**ATTENDEES**

**ELL Task Force Members present:** Janet Anderson, Jen Douglas (coordinator), Suzanne Lee, Julia Mejia, John Mudd, Ana Solano-Campos, Alexander St. Guillen, Rev. Cheng Imm Tan, Miren Uriarte, Katie Li, Alex Oliver-Dávila, Farah Assiraj, Paulo De Barros, Geralde Gabeau

**BPS Staff present:** Mary Dillman (Director of Data Inquiry, Office of Data & Accountability), Priya Tahiliani (Assistant Superintendent, Office of English Learners (OEL)), Kim Tsai (Director of Legal Compliance, OEL), Dr. Charles Grandson (Chief Academic Officer), Alberto Carrero (Instruction Specialist, OEL)

**Other attendees:** Roger Rice (Multicultural Education, Training & Advocacy, Inc. (META))

**Handouts**

*From ELLTF*

- Minutes of the ELLTF Meeting on November 8, 2018
- Program Quality Subcommittee Packet

*From Office of English Learners*

- "OEL Update for ELL Task Force," Priya Tahiliani, December 20, 2018.
- "Boston Public Schools English Learner Program Models Preliminary Proposal for Dual Language Programming Expansion," Priya Tahiliani, November 15, 2018.
- "Boston Public Schools English Learner Program Models Preliminary Proposal for Developmental Bilingual Programming," Priya Tahiliani, November 15, 2018.
- "Boston Public Schools English Learner Program Models Preliminary Proposal for Dual Language Programming at the Horace Mann School," Priya Tahiliani, November 15, 2018.
- "Boston Public Schools English Learner Program Models Preliminary Proposal for High Intensity Literacy Training (HILT) for Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) Programming Expansion," Priya Tahiliani, November 15, 2018.

*From Office of Data & Accountability*

- “Spring MCAS Results for ELs and Former ELs,” Mary Dillman and Elena Lanin, December 20, 2018.

*From School Committee*

- Update from the Superintendent Search Committee on the Superintendent Search Process

## **1. Welcome and approval of meeting minutes from November 8, 2018**

Decided to push the passage of this to the next minutes.

## **2. Chairs’ Report**

Update from the SC meeting last night: pushed back on making sure that the ELL students could move in cohorts, that they have that option. The entire SC pushed back on making sure that students have first priority before lottery, which also includes ELLs. Suggested that district meet with families together, so they know they have the choice to move together or individually, to know that they have other supports. Even though it was a heartbreaking vote to close two communities, we pushed back on those two pieces.

## **3. 2018 English Language Learner Outcomes (Mary Dillman, Office of Data and Accountability)**

- **Outcome data disaggregated by: program, ELD level, language group, grade, ELL/FELL**

Mejia: Slide 18: Are kids dropping out? Where do they go? Is this information being shared with families, so they understand their child’s MCAS results in the context of the bigger picture? I think it would be a collaboration between OEL, OE, DA.

Mudd: **Do you have trend data? This is a snapshot, but are we improving or not?** Both absolutely and also the gaps. One data point that struck me – grade 8 performance 4% were proficient and by grade 10 it goes to 55%. What happened?

Dillman: Are there particular slides that you’d love to see trend data on?

Mudd: I don’t want to do that on the spur of the moment, but I am happy to think about it. Over the last 5 years.

**FOLLOW UP Prepare and submit MCAS 5-year trend data request to Mary Dillman.**

Dillman: For the 10th grade data we can do a longer trend line, because they’ve been taking the legacy MCAS for a longer period of time. When we switched to the next gen MCAS for the younger grades, it has a higher cognitive rigor, that’s one of the reasons you see a difference between 3–8 and 10. The state knows it is a more challenging assessment and they have a transition plan for determining competency (will likely move passing competency down into the “partially meeting requirements” plan).

Li: 3<sup>rd</sup> grade ELs aren't the same as 10<sup>th</sup> grade ELs. The ones that were ELs in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade won't be in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. If you just got to the country and don't speak English you aren't going to do well on the 10<sup>th</sup> grade MCAS. Schools are struggling to balance that reality with the demands to achieve a 4-year graduation rate. Those two things influence these numbers.

Mudd: Do you trust the fact that this says that a certain percentage of ELs are passing the MCAS?

Dillman: Yes.

Assiraj: Slides 24 and 14. Are first-year ELs excluded because they were exempt? This is showing first year ELs not first year in US.

Dillman: We don't have the student growth percentile (SGP) for 10<sup>th</sup> grade. It's also important to highlight that we're looking at different groups of students.

Assiraj: **I also would like to see this disaggregated for long-term ELs versus others.** Also, for the lowest performing group, what's the percentage of ELs and what's the percentage of ELSWD's in that subgroup?

Dillman: The state looks at prior year performance and rank orders all students by score, then takes the bottom 25% in 2017. Then the next year they look at the same for comparison. This is based just on outcomes, not what categories or programs students fall in.

**FOLLOW UP Prepare and submit request to Mary Dillman for MCAS data disaggregated by long-term EL/other.**

Oliver-Dávila: I was curious about the 4 to 5 years. I also see that alt results are not included. What does that mean?

Dillman: That's for students who aren't taking the MCAS, they are submitting an alternate portfolio of work. Regardless of how they perform on their alt submission they are placed in the lowest performing category for MCAS.

Oliver-Dávila: **I am also curious to see this data by school** so we can see where the gaps are and who needs the most support. **Also the AWC.** I'm not a fan of AWC but would be curious to know more about how high expectations play a role, **and with Excellence for All as well.**

Dillman: There are some ways we might pull rigor out of the gen ed group and see how that lines up.

Oliver-Dávila: Going back to schools, I'm also curious about what practices are making a difference, like we have a Saturday program with Wentworth as an external partner, **we could look more strategically at the value of partnerships.**

Dillman: We could tie that with other data and do a bit of a root cause analysis.

**FOLLOW UP Prepare and submit request to Mary Dillman for MCAS data disaggregated by school, by Advanced Work and Excellence for All, and by external partners.**

Rice: The program labels are just labels but they have nothing to do with what goes on in the classroom or in the school. If you were to walk into an SEI-Spanish classroom you might find nothing in Spanish and a teacher who doesn't speak Spanish. Or you might walk into a Haitian-SEI class room and find a teacher that speaks Haitian Creole but has been forbidden to speak it. It also doesn't tell us anything about the students. If you have a student who just arrived in the US and doesn't speak English, we already know that, save the ink. What matters is growth. I've seen terrific teachers using native language and getting great results and I've also seen the opposite, so you can't get there from this data alone.

Solano-Campos: All of this data is concerning to me because of all the students who need improvement or are in the failing category. If you look at slide 15, where so many students at ELD-5 are failing in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. I'm curious about the students who were exited over the prior 4 years, who they are and what programs they came through, so we can understand what happens.

Tahiliani: Could you define for us, for example slide 10, how you identify the different categories.

Dillman: What their program code is in ASPEN.

Lee: Keep this information in the back.

Dillman: I'll look forward to some guidance on the best way to convey some of this analysis, or how to come back.

Assiraj: **I would be interested in being part of a revived Data Subcommittee.**

**FOLLOW UP** with Farah about re-starting the Data Subcommittee

Tahiliani: When we enter students into dual language programs we assign 50% native speakers of English and 50% native speakers of the other language. Look at slide 10, programs. Two-way English and two-way Spanish. The way those English learners are different, two-way ELs are at ELD levels 4 and 5. Two-way Spanish are ELDs 1–3. **In the future I think I would ask Mary to put the English learners who are in dual language programs all together, not separate them in this way, because it's a coding change not an instructional change.** The reason I'm clarifying this is because if you put all these students together the data might more clearly show that that the dual language model is working. If you look at the data the way it appears it may appear that dual language performs worse than SEI.

#### **4. Office of English Learners Director's Report (Priya Tahiliani)**

- **Department of Justice (DOJ) Update**
- **Brainstorming and Planning for Opportunities offered by the LOOK Bill**

Mudd: It's exciting to see this laid out. Developmental bilingual is exciting. Questions: What are the challenges you see in moving that – teacher assignment, budget? Where should we be weighing in as a TF (as precisely as you can say)? Do you have projections? And I assume a lot of students will be left in SEI—are there innovations there?

Tahiliani: We talked last year about how we put a huge investment in native language resources. We went back and forth on whether this needed to be a proposal to DESE since we're not taking the SEI label off and we can't require teachers to become bilingual. We are working on that.

As far as barriers there are many and we need your support. We are working with the BTU right now to ensure that we can collect data on and assess native language capacity. There are also things we can do internally to support this process. Continue your advocacy with the HC subcommittee. **The biggest barrier we have right now is in shifting mindsets toward bilingual education. Once we have that—the outcomes are there—the resources will follow.** We've got places like Utah where they don't have ELs doing innovative programming. **We need to get the message out that this is important. Messaging that out should be the top priority in the district.**

**FOLLOW UP Determine how the ELLTF will participate in addressing the need for messaging about the importance and success of bilingual education.**

Anderson: I appreciate your enthusiasm and your vision. What's missing for me is that none of that is here. What do you mean by developmental bilingual? I can't tell. We need data to say that this model is effective—are we reinventing the wheel, getting best practices that have been effective somewhere else? People have their own construct for understanding these words, we have a history of unsuccessful models in the district. For me to be out in the community talking this up I need more evidence at my fingertips. You're also talking about a really fast implementation timeline, and we know that the plan is one thing but implementing it well is important.

Tahiliani: We'd like more time on the agenda to talk about such things with the TF. We can provide you that information. Maybe the program quality subcommittee is the place for that.

**FOLLOW UP Make time on a future agenda to talk more about OEL's vision for bilingual education programming.**

Uriarte: This needs to be beefed up in a way that presents the advantages and disadvantages. The history in Boston for TBE is not a good one. People have that image and that perception and people are going to crawl out of the woodwork. What I would add to Janet's statement are the politics on this, politics that have to be won here at Bolling. People here at Bolling are going to put all kinds of stones in front of this. They are going to see it as a zero-sum game in which one group gets something and another does not. You have to say "This is not just for Latino kids. This is not just for Chinese kids." What most people in BPS see is the outcomes after kids leave bilingual programs and they'll say "They're going to be fine." You need a wise way of approaching this process.

Solano-Campos: **The Center for Applied Linguistics has standards for bilingual education.** I will send that to Jen so people can read that on their own time, they have a lot of information on the logistics of rolling out a dual language program. That's document that is important for everybody here to be familiar with. Also you could also frame this as a World Language Program, that it's for everybody. People will say, "Why would you put all the Spanish kids here? They will never learn English." We also have to confront the challenges of teachers needing to be certified in content areas, not just language (math, etc.)

**FOLLOW UP Circulate the Center for Applied Linguistics's standards for bilingual education.**

Also translation of curriculum materials. **We recommend that you look into authentic materials, not just translated materials. And finally authentic assessments. Will students who learn in Spanish be tested in English? That doesn't make any sense. They need authentic, not translated, assessments.**

Carrero: We are asking, "What is the cultural part of this? What do I do with the Level 1?" For example I am from Columbia, I have a bachelors degree from Columbia, so I feel like I can assess materials in Spanish.

Gabeau: Thinking in terms of dual language Haitian like at the Mattahunt, how do we strengthen those before we go to the wider community and add more? Once you do something and do it well and it is well received and you can see results, it is easier to expand. Strengthening and making the successes well-known to get the buy-in easier. The other piece is the cultural component. **What have you done so far to address the cultural component, it's not just speaking two languages, it's the songs, the storytelling, more.**

De Barros: My concern with the Cape Verdean community. I'm a product of BPS and I was educated well. **My concern is how can we do this expansion in a way that we're not making more confusion for families. Cape Verdeans don't even have a strand yet, everything is a mess within BPS. We need to focus on what we're doing and doing it well.** We have a high drop-out rate, it creates a lot of problems—homelessness, violence, more. It's sad what's going on with the Cape Verdean community in terms of education. And they do believe in BPS, there are not that many private programs. I would say slow down with the dual language a little bit. Also within your department you need to educate your own staff, the way they promote bilingualism outside they're not the best at it, the community is confused. As you know Cape Verdeans are still coming.

Grandson: Coming off of last night's SC meeting and thinking about trust and how we build it. We have silos within silos. It's something we are excited about and that we hope addresses the gaps for students that we saw on the data presentation with these dismal and depressing outcomes. We need to look at the list of students and then also visit the classrooms. Sometimes these are 3 or 4 students, I'm very curious about these classrooms. **I'd like to invite you all to join me in visiting these classrooms and seeing what is going on.**

**FOLLOW UP Invitation from Dr. Grandon to visit SEI and other classrooms for observation.**

Assiraj: I appreciate the forward thinking. What I would appreciate is more thinking about how we address the limitations. **One of the key aspects goes back to the spoken versus the high literacy languages.** We often lose the academic literature when it comes to teaching those languages and we need to think about that. How do we actually expand it so it's highly rigorous in the upper grades. **The other aspect is who is it available for? White families are the ones pushing to get into dual language programs. What about all the resources and the inequities for Black students, actually having an opportunity to enter the Hernandez?** And going back to the history of the dual language schools, if it is actually working how do we leverage that.

Li: In terms of marketing and bringing this out to folks who don't agree with us, there are many parents especially in the Chinese community who think "We're here, we came to America to

learn English” and it’s only later they say, “Wait, they don’t speak Chinese any more.” When you’re in the higher grades the pressures to do well on the MCAS can take priority over promoting bilingualism. When we talk about 21<sup>st</sup> century learning expectations and you’re talking about students learning only alongside others from a similar cultural background [what are we missing in terms of cross-cultural connections]? You also may have students coming from background with very different educational expectations and philosophies about delivering instruction—just because you’re literate in something doesn’t mean you’re able to blend cultures.

Rice: The concept of multilingual SLIFE or HILT is an oxymoron. Several years ago a predecessor at OEL said we have some kids a few of each speak a particular language. BPS being what it is you would go to different classrooms and there would be kids; we asked, “how did they end up in this multilingual classroom?” and it was other factors or the money that was saved by not placing students in a language-specific program. If you look at it there are probably enough Arabic speaking kids and enough Brazilians to have a Portuguese program to have their own strand and not be dumped in a multilingual classroom. I’ve seen some great multilingual classrooms but be careful who ends up in them. Point number 2, the politics of it, we can probably bet where the attacks will come from outside of this program, but I get a little upset when I hear about the failure of TBE in Boston and there are plenty of examples of where it was working. When people from outside the state got some allies at the Pioneer Institute and decided to get a question on the ballot attacking bilingual ed and wrote a book it because the focus, but don’t repeat that 20 years later. There was a study showing that kids did well statewide. Finally, I think you didn’t fully answer John’s question about the money. **Can you get any of this past DESE without having the dollars committed? Do you have a rough idea of what this costs?**

Tahiliani: **We calculated that the start-up costs for a bilingual classroom runs about \$40,000 apiece. We are still working with budget on what these other models would cost. We worked with the Harvard Graduate School of Education and got some numbers that weren’t quite what we needed but gave us an idea.**

Lee: This is fascinating and appreciated. And this is a proposal. We have a tendency as a district to develop great plans and not focus on the implementation. I just don’t see doing any piece of this by September because of the amount of work that is needed. I would appreciate it if you are doing a presentation to us to be more real about it rather than say we can do all this when we can’t. I want to propose to the program subcommittee to take hold of this and go deeper. That’s the charge of the subcommittee to focus on this and go deeper.

Paulo and Miren will join the Program Quality Subcommittee.

Oliver-Dávila: I’d like to be part of the conversation on the messaging. Is that separate? Yes.

Tan: I think schools are going to be concerned about **the costs of continuing the program, not just starting.**

Assiraj: **I’d like to see more on the scaling up process and the budget each year. And I’d like more clarify on how the ELD levels fit.**

Oliver-Dávila: I'd like to see more about how you monetize over time, you might talk about what savings are created by these new approaches. What are the benefits as well as the costs, if everything you're saying is true in terms of outcomes?

Tan: **We are saying a lot about slowing down, but I don't want to say stop completely. Schools are putting in their programs, we should go with we have.**

Uriarte: In Miami they have partnered with embassies and consulates for curriculum and more. You might want to look around and see what is there in terms of partnerships.

Solano-Campos: When we were here last month we were told about declining enrollment. I don't know if that is something to look at as well to understand who we are serving and who those schools are for.

## 5. Subcommittee Concerns/Updates

### • Work of the Program Quality Subcommittee

Lee: Circulating notes of the HC Subcommittee. This subcommittee is accepting new members.

Tan: **Parent Engagement is doing school visits, the next is 1/4, then 1/10, and 2/5.** Hurley, Orchard Gardens, the Mildred. We are waiting for the Mattahunt. I will share that with Jen to circulate.

Mudd: ELSWD subcommittee. For the first time we have included in the budget document data on student needs and outcomes. Still looking at how we can use that to get our needs met, to get the system to face up to what has been neglected for 3,000–4,000 students so far.

Tan: There is now data around parent engagement on the school level that will be made public. It is interesting and wonderful to hear, look out for it. For the Engagement subcommittee, we are pushing back on the idea of providing support to the schools that are engagement and willing, we are going to be working with Jen to write a letter about priorities for the superintendent hire.

Mudd: **Some of us met to talk about advancing the goal of a multicultural, multilingual BPS. We are just beginning to brainstorm around that issue.** See the notes.

Uriarte: That group may want to take up the issue of messaging and strategy.

Lee: Let's have a conversation with Charles first.

## 6. Brief discussion of job description for superintendent (Alex Oliver-Dávila)

**There are 11 of us on the search committee, formed in late October / early November. We decided to go out into the community and partner with organizations on the ground for listening sessions rather than asking people to come to Bolling.** We had one at Freedom house, in East Boston, with others. We tried to be strategic in terms of where we were having it in the



community, partnering with Boston Chinatown neighborhood center, Greater Boston Latino Network, Boston NAACP. **The strategy was partnering with community-based organizations that have reputation and trust. They were all the same to have fidelity for the process. We asked the community what they felt the district did well, what are the challenges, what are things they liked about previous superintendents and what did they want to see in the next superintendent.** The previous job description was very fluffy, not very action-oriented. The one you see here is draft still, it's still being finalized.

**We also had a survey, between us and BTU we had at least 2,000 people respond**, you can still respond. On the BPS website you can see all the document, under "super search". Pass it along. It's translated only in Spanish, but much of the documents are translated into many of the major languages. At our listening sessions we had child care and translation. We looked at other districts all across the country and used ones we really liked, included all the themes of the community-listening sessions, and all the comments of the 14 different organizations. The other thing to highlight is that we are placing community engagement as number two because we wanted to push that up, front and center. The other piece that will be updated is some language for vocational education because we're kind of lagging behind in the current landscape. The other piece we were charged with was finding a search firm, so we had to revamp the requests for qualifications so that we could go beyond just firms and open the range of firms that would be eligible. **We received six proposals from different firms, interviewed four, and picked Isaacson Miller, a Boston-based firm.** We felt they were the strongest in terms of how they were able to answer questions about the Boston context, and their mission is diversity and they aim to place people in positions where they can stay long and make an impact. Even though their other clients pay more they wanted this job because they feel they can make an impact. They have good stats on placement and retention of people of color, they are kind of like an out-of-the-box firm. They don't usually do superintendent searches because SCs are usually elected and there is a lot of jockeying. They also impressed us because they talked about family and community engagement and all the other firms had a cookie-cutter approach. Finally we really liked the way they did reference checks, looking at people who don't recommend, to the union, to more than a list of "the three people that like me."

Tan: **What really struck me as glaringly missing is cultural competence.** It's not in a big heading. In a district that's so diverse I think it needs to be lifted up.

Mudd: We've ended up with a pretty good job description that emphasized attention to special populations all the way through. I want to emphasize the concerns of many advocacy organizations who are very concerned that the hire be for an educator first, not a manager. I think we need to weigh in with that letter and keep vigilant. **And to be honest with you, the ultimate decision is made by the mayor, so he needs to understand how strongly we feel about this issue. We need to make sure that is expressed and not just to Alex.**

Lee: Maybe some of the people who are interested in highlighting can come together.

Jen will draft a letter with input from TF members. Tan, Assiraj, Mudd. De Barros will comment on the first draft.

**FOLLOW UP** Draft a letter from the ELLTF to the Superintendent Search Committee.

Oliver-Dávila: **Note that we are focusing on listening. So far we really have a 50-50 on manager versus educator. It is not falling clearly on a preference for an educator from these listening sessions. Timeline is that we hopefully would hire somebody by 6/30.** Once you get the draft and you can add your comments and we should consider sending it to the search committee, the *Globe*, and the mayor.

## **7. Public Comment**

None (folded into the above parts of the meeting)

## **Adjourn**