

School Quality Working Group II Planning Meeting - Minutes

Date:

Wednesday, September 28, 2016

Time:

5:30 p.m.

Location:

School Committee Chamber
Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building, 2nd Floor
2300 Washington St.
Roxbury, MA 02119

SQWG II Planning Committee Members in Attendance:

- Dean Hardin Coleman, chair
- Pauline Lugira
- Efrain Toledano
- Josh Weiss
- Geralde Gabeau
- Robert Rametti
- Craig Lankhorst
- Marinell Rousmaniere
- William Thomas

Boston Public Schools (BPS) central office staff from the Office of Engagement, the Office of Instructional and Informational Technology, Office and Data and Accountability, Opportunity and Achievement Gap, Superintendent's Cabinet, and an Instructional Superintendent representative were also in attendance.

Meeting Discussion:

Welcome and Introductions

Monica Roberts introduced the agenda and invited attendees to look over the School Quality Framework policy document.

Overview of Committee Expectations (Donna Muncey, on behalf of Dr. Chang)

Provided an overview of the expectations for the proposed SQWG II. Also provided historic context since the beginning of Dr. Chang's superintendence and reminded attendees that the launch date for the new School Quality Framework (SQF) is November 1, 2016.

The BPS cabinet member explained Dr. Chang's vision for the group to attend monthly meetings, work in collaboration with BPS staff to ensure successful implementation of the SQF, make suggestions for

improvements, to help troubleshoot concerns with the SQF, and to help prepare presentations and testify to the school committee as needed.

Technology Demonstration and Q&A

BPS staff demonstrated the updated DiscoverBPS.org test site, explaining the new customized school quality reports available to families who are researching their school choice list. The staff member showed attendees the information contained within each tab of the website, showing how families can explore the various metrics included in the SQF and find more information on how each school receives its quality score.

A committee member inquired about the inclusion of only one tier 1 school in the particular example demonstrated. A BPS staff member explained a technical glitch for paired schools, known to BPS, that resulted in a school's exclusion from the customized school quality report. BPS staff confirmed that they are aware and working to fix the issue.

A committee member asked about the data shown in the demonstration reference. A BPS staff member explained that the tiers represent data from the 2013-2014 school year, which is consistent with the 2014 policy. The staff member also explained the difficulties regarding standardized test data, as schools were not held accountable for PARCC and will transition to another new assessment this school year. The attendee asked if there was an analysis on potential changes with updated data. The BPS staff member explained the changes that would need to be considered to convert PARCC data.

A committee member expressed his concern about being held accountable on three-year-old data because of the gains that have been made since that time. A former SQWG I committee member, now sitting on SQWG II, explained that the rationale for avoiding an annual update of the data was to ensure consistency for families. The attendee explained that the "assignment tier," was to be updated every three years while the "snapshot tier," was to be updated annually to provide transparency of current data. The attendee observed that there have been a number of changes since the policy, such as changes to standardized testing, facilities, etc.

A committee member explained that PARCC has been converted to previous MCAS levels. A committee member asked what would be necessary to update information to the 2015-2016 school year. A BPS staff member explained that it would not be feasible on the current timeline of release and that the five PARCC performance levels do not perfectly correlate with the previous MCAS performance levels. In addition, the transition to the new MCAS would lead to an inconsistent "snapshot" from year-to-year due to the instability of the standardized test. The BPS staff member also explained the lack of funding and capacity to update currently. Another BPS staff member explained that schools were not held accountable for PARCC scores, which varied based on whether the test was administered on paper or on a computer; schools were only held accountable for participation.

A committee member asked how tiers are explained to parents and the community and the messaging to the community about the quality of BPS overall. The attendee expressed his concern that this will contribute to the conversation around opening charter schools. The attendee wondered if it would make sense to postpone the implementation again in order to update the data and provide up-to-date information. The attendee expressed the concern that traditional schools labeled as poor

performing do not receive the resources necessary to deal with a challenging population who did not choose the school. A BPS staff member explained that the majority of BPS schools are tier 3 and explained the improvement from the prior MCAS tier system.

A committee member explained that tiers were labelled with numbers to avoid using any descriptive language such as “exceeds expectations” or “meets expectations.” The attendee stated that while the tiers are not new, the updated measurements determining the tiers is. Another attendee, who was also a member of SQWG I and the the External Advisory Committee (EAC) explained that the EAC, appointed to redesign student assignment, recommended a multidimensional measurement of school quality, hence the development of the SQF. The attendee explained that the implementation has been delayed twice and expressed his discomfort with using the MCAS tiers, which he stated were inferior to the new SQF tiers.

Another attendee agreed that the MCAS tiers would use the same data, but would only be limited to test scores, while the SQF provides a fuller picture of what’s happening in schools. The attendee stated that while this is an imperfect system, it’s an improvement. A committee member explained that another advantage of the school quality tiers is that all schools could become tier 1 and 2.

A committee member expressed concern regarding the timing of the release coinciding with announcement of new state accountability levels, as many schools have become Level 1, but have school quality data from three years ago. A committee member suggested that parents be informed that the data is from 2013-2014. The attendees agreed that the message on the customized school quality report website about the years from which the data was obtained should be more prominent.

A BPS staff member explained that many families make school choices based on many considerations including distance, availability of after school programs, etc., so more measures are helpful. The BPS staff member explained that BPS Communications is thinking of how we market schools on a limited budget in the form of “Choose BPS” campaign and the use of DiscoverBPS.org and bostonpublicschools.org.

A committee member suggested that BPS provide a comparison of the new state accountability levels and the current school quality tiers to be able to assess how much disparity there is. The attendee reiterated her preference for the more robust set of measurements contained in the SQF. A BPS staff member explained that the SQF allows BPS to see how we can assist a school that is low performing according to its school quality tier.

A committee member expressed concern that it is unfair to compare an open enrollment high school to an exam school. A committee member explained that this is the rationale behind the emphasis on growth and the measurement of different student subgroups in the SQF, as this creates a more valid comparison between different school types. The attendee responded that in order to “sell” the framework to school leaders, they will need to be informed of the methodology and what types of students’ achievement are measured.

A committee member argued that student demographics should factor into the SQF and expressed concern about racial segregation in schools.

A committee member asked if the test site could be accessed from home. A BPS staff member explained that the test site is not public, but that it has been shared with Welcome Services staff who

are helping to troubleshoot. The chair asked if principals had access to the tool. A BPS staff member explained that the internal SQF staff will present the new tool to each Teaching and Learning Team (TLT) so principals can explore their data prior to the November 1 launch. Another BPS staff member explained that school leaders have already received this data, though they have not yet seen the new school quality report tool.

A committee member explained that when piloting the home-based model, the EAC had access to a simulation only accessible by a limited number of people to help inform BPS staff. Another attendee agreed that providing access to the new tool to the group would allow for a greater likelihood that errors will be fixed prior to the launch.

Timeline and Meeting Schedule

A committee member expressed her confusion regarding the charge and timeline of the working group. The chair explained that the committee's role would include reacting to and challenging the new SQF as well as providing a critical eye for the internal BPS staff working on implementation. The chair explained that after the launch, the group can provide recommendations for improvements and incorporation of new data.

A committee member asked about the process of setting the agenda for the next meeting as well as the possibility of shifting some meeting times to the morning. The chair invited attendees to send dates they would miss on the proposed meeting schedule to the BPS staff so that calendar could be adjusted.

Dr. Chang joined the meeting and expressed his gratefulness for the commitment of the new SQWG II and explained the complexities of implementing the SQF. The superintendent reiterated the need for a better framework for measuring school quality beyond test scores, for continually improving future iterations of the SQF, and continually informing families.

The chair asked how the new emphasis in federal regulations on evidence-based practice puts the SQF in the forefront and stated that this makes the SQWG II more critical. The superintendent agreed that the work in BPS will influence the rest of the state and explained how Boston has given public commentary to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) ensuring that the state engages Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in developing new regulations, as ESSA places more authority on the states. The superintendent expressed excitement for the work of the SQWG II.

A committee member expressed concern about the November 1 launch without the opportunity for SQWG II to troubleshoot. The attendee inquired about the possibility of pushing back the launch into December. Another attendee explained that November 1 is the start of the school choice season, so it would have to be launched then unless it is delayed another year. The chair explained that while there will be problems, delaying implementation will only delay receiving feedback on issues. The chair explained that the importance of creating a system to receive feedback.

A committee member asked if implementation should be delayed until after the election, considering the charter cap ballot question. The chair suggested that this discussion be placed on the October meeting agenda.

A committee member asked about a statewide collaborative to look at additional measures of school quality. A BPS staff member explained that the collaborative includes superintendents and presidents of teachers' unions who meet monthly to look at the proposed implementation of more valid, alternative performance-based assessment systems that would be developed by member sites. The BPS staff member explained that this alternative system would include teacher's grading, but that it is in the formative stages.

The chair distributed information from the federal government website showing an emphasis on climate surveys and comparative data. A committee member suggested that this information could provide context of where to look in the future for new tools and assessments. The attendee reiterated the desire to have an analysis of state levels vs. school quality tiers at the next meeting and to look at the implications of changes in the last 2 years.

Closing Comments and Adjournment

A member of the public stated that the delineation between domains in the customized school quality reports was unclear and inquired about the weighting of growth and achievement metrics. The member of the public agreed that the context of when and where data was obtained from is important for parents.

A BPS staff member expressed excitement about the detail included in the SQF and the attempt to measure quality more holistically. The staff member explained the unfortunate timing of implementation of the SQF during a turbulent time in the history of standardized testing as there is a need for 2-3 years of standardized test data to ensure stability. The BPS staff member complimented and thanked the SQWG I for their work in creating the SQF, which reflects the priorities of Boston, and explained that it will take a while to realize the benefits of the SQF, but that it will be helpful for school choice and to understand the system's diverse "bright spots."

The next meeting of the SQWG II will be October 19.

Meeting adjourned.