

School Quality Working Group II Meeting - Minutes

Date:

Wednesday, October 19th, 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
- William Thomas
- Efrain Toledano
- Josh Weiss
- Celina Miranda

Boston Public Schools (BPS) central office staff from the Office of Engagement, Office of Data and Accountability, and an Instructional Superintendent were also in attendance as well as members of the public.

Meeting Discussion:

Welcome and Introductions

The chair introduced the agenda and invited attendees to look over the School Quality Framework policy document.

Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes

The chair elected to skip the review and approval of meeting minutes because the group did not have a quorum.

Updates

a. Principal/Headmaster PD

A member of the Office of Data and Accountability described went through the School Quality Framework and described process for informing school leaders at Principal PD. He emphasized wanting to be transparent about the policy and explained that they would provide an overview of domains. He also talked about providing an overview of DiscoverBPS and leaving significant time for

questions. He walked through two handouts that will be going out to all schools: an FAQ sheet to help schools communicate to parents and a brief overview of the School Quality Framework.

The committee chair asked the group how they anticipate principals are feeling about roll out and encouraged the group to speak about any concerns that they could see principals bringing up. He specifically asked for school leaders in the room to voice their concerns.

A representative from the Office of Data and Accountability answered by saying that the superintendent received a letter from principals when it was announced voicing significant concerns, one of which being the lack of principal voice on the committee. He noted that they will point out the principals in attendance during today's meeting as a way that they are actively trying to address this concern.

Some committee members in the room voiced concerns around putting their name on this work, because they don't feel like they have ownerships over it yet. One committee member went on to voice his concerns as a school leader. He confirmed that the initial email sent out by principals to the superintendent addressed many of his concerns. He also wanted to reiterate that he thought the framework was like comparing apples to oranges because the measurement and metrics that are being used are not a fair comparison in many cases. He provided the example of comparing student performance through these measures between Boston Latin to Charlestown which he talked about not being a fair comparison because it's comparing schools who have selection processes with schools who have open enrollment. He also voiced concerns about how a lower designation will affect enrollment.

The chair encouraged conversation around this to continue and summarized the points made by the committee member in two ways. In one way the School Quality Framework can be used to drive and organize school improvement based on where it shows school's successes and barriers. It can also be used when thinking about the assignment process which is the area in which challenges most often could arise.

Another school leader expressed agreement with first school leader's comment. He also added that there are elements of a school beyond the framework that are not being captured. Specifically he spoke about risks that different students come to the school with as well as the access and special opportunities that the schools provide.

A central office administrator added that there is a distinction between K-8 and high schools because in K-8 enrollment options are limited for families. She also encouraged the group to think of the improvements that this framework offers in comparison to current measure of school quality which is just test scores.

A committee member responded by explaining that this improvement on the framework has been overlooked because principals haven't felt like they have had a seat at the table and students haven't either. He pointed out that both school leaders in the room had only been to two meetings so don't feel ownership over the work yet. He acknowledged that the framework offers a better perspective than where we started, but there is more ways to go that will need more input from school leaders and students.

A Central Office administrator noted as a follow up that the data is two years old so DESE levels on the framework are incorrect.

A committee member spoke to the school leader's point about capturing what is within and outside of the power of the school and noted that this has been brought up before. He explains that the tool was always meant for uses, but may need to be different depending on who is using it. Speaking as a parent he noted that he didn't care too much about what was in or out of control of the school, because he just wants what's best for his child. He also reminded the group that the drive for this work started because of the change in the assignment system.

The Committee Chair summarized a dilemma that was brought up between parents trying to say that we have to make a decision and staff saying that this does not fully capture what the student's experience will be. He noted that he doesn't think we will ever be able to fully solve this dilemma but thinks we can come closer.

A committee member spoke as a parent and said that he would care about what is beyond the school's control, particularly when it comes to diversity.

There was a discussion brought up by both the Chair and a committee member about people liking to send their kids to schools close to their neighborhood. They also reiterated the importance of having an assignment system that does more to solve the issue of diversity and integration. Another committee member expressed hesitation around this fact of parents choosing neighborhood schools and wondered what role privilege played in that decision.

A committee member talked about the value of this tool as a way to make more information available to parents to combat the challenge facing us now around parents with more privilege and ability being able to research schools more than parents who don't. She also brought up a question in response to the statement that the framework compares apples to oranges which was to what extent will this quality exercise look at quality over time.

The representative from the Office of Data and Accountability explained that while the data is not perfect, it's far better than it was. He posed a question to the group around how they would improve the data used or could be looked at differently.

The board chair reiterated principal concerns about the framework not reflecting the barriers to improvement that schools face. He posed a question to the group about what other ways that we can communicate the profile of our schools, and how can we communicate what is working at the school.

A committee member pointed out that one important way for people to understand a school is to visit. A school leader reiterated this and offered a suggestion of the Welcome Center communicating to families about the importance of visiting a school and also to remind them that the data used in the framework is old.

b. Launch of School Quality Framework

The Committee Chair moved on to another question that has been posted around delaying the presentation until after the election and said that it was unrealistic to delay any further at this point. He also responded to the suggestion about Welcome Center communication by saying that the Welcome Center will also be kept informed of updates. The Committee Chair then moved the group

on to questions prioritizing the scope of work. He defined it in the following three ways: making sure we provide the information that parents need, making sure we use the right information to represent schools well, and think about how are we using this data to define school improvement plans and allocation of resources.

A committee member agreed with this idea and added that the process of creating those plans can come back the other way. He brought up a concern around people creating the plans and saying we really need to improve these three items and that's not reflected in the plan, that's a problem.

The Committee chair summarized by asking if we are creating these plans with a current set of data, how can we use the plans to get feedback on how we can improve the data and framework itself? He also posed the question again of old data and asked if the group had suggestions to the district about how to explain that well to the public and to parents. The representative from ODA offered the suggestion of making making the information about the data more prominent on the DiscoverBPS site and providing a link on the site to most recent data. The committee chair then asked if there was also a way to run a banner on DiscoverBPS to encourage people to go visit schools and Office of Engagement representative talked about school choice season is coming up. The question was reiterated about communicating this message on DiscoverBPS and a school leader backed up the idea. The group determined together that communicating about the importance of visiting a school is essential. The chair brought up another point made earlier around measuring student access to the site and wondered if schools should be evaluated by this.

A committee member offered the idea of going back to the beginning to come up with ways to measure a lot of areas identified as important earlier in the process, for example student access. A central office administrator reminded the group that there is a balance between what a school can and can't control. She talked about quality partnerships as an example of something that can be controlled. A committee member added that student access is part of what can and can't be controlled. He pointed out that the framework hasn't captured the fact that there are some schools that have high concentrations of special ed students, for example and schools that are willing to do that work should be reflected in this framework.

The committee chair brought up a past interest in collecting feedback on how the framework metrics were holding up and also an interest in improving the climate survey tool. The ODA representative expanded this point by saying that the previous group expressed a lot of recommendations about what they would like to see and that they would like to test a lot of things our current climate survey doesn't test. He offered the suggestion that maybe this group could give some direction to that about outcomes they would like to be capturing and agreed that there is interest.

A committee member asked about what data went into the family, community and culture area of the framework. He mentioned that some schools, especially at high school level, have different levels of family responsiveness which could skew data. The ODA representative explained that it was primarily student and parent climate surveys, and teacher surveys. He said it also included average daily attendance, % teachers who are minority, and the family engagement index. The committee chair summarized by saying that there is a need to sit down with the current data, and get samples from current schools and data to see what that says about them and see how it applies in certain conditions

A committee member asked whether principal PD was going to be provided around the data portion and talked about a data packet he received two years ago, but pointed out that some principals are newer than that. The ODA representative confirmed that that was a good recommendation. The committee chair emphasized the importance of showing principals how this connects to their ability to advocate for their school and for resources. A committee member added that he guessed that 1 and 2 levels wouldn't care as much as 3 and 4. The chair asked about timing on final enrollment count and the committee member responded. The committee member then asked more about what it means to be a "quality school." He reminded the group that we still don't have a definition of what makes a quality school, and assumed that based on this framework, it had to do with test scores. The ODA representative noted that the framework heavily measures growth, not just individual performance. A committee member pointed out that growth looks different depending on the population you are serving different populations.

The committee chair summarized the previous point by saying that making sure that tool is correct is key, and posing a question about whether the percent to which we assigned student performance on this metric should be something the group addresses, and if yes, how often should metrics be updated. He then posed another question about tools for families and communities, which was how do we capture the experience and feeling at different schools. Finally, he brought up the question of implementation of the choice model, and asked if we should provide insight to school committee on implementation and evaluation, and oversight of the home base model. The Office of Engagement representative noted that this group could house the evaluation of the home base model, but it would have to be separate from this meeting.

The committee chair reiterated that big priorities are how schools get reflected accurately in the model, and how we get a system that is useful to principals. The ODA representative added another priority around transparency. He mentioned that the current model is complex and doesn't lend itself well to experts looking at it let alone community members. He asked if we should look at simplifying it to explain to others. A committee member reminded the group that this gets to the point around different needs based on the audience. He suggested the idea of looking again at reducing the amount of data points to get parents to look a little closer. Another committee member said that he didn't think this was too complex, and that the bigger problem was about the validity of the data (e.g. teacher surveys). The chair responded by asking a question about whether BPS has the capacity and ability to do this type of data analysis. There was a conversation about the use of consultants versus internal BPS staff to do this analysis.

Discussion Items

a. SQWG Member Recruitment

The chair mentioned feedback from the school community about growing group to include SpedPac, members of ELL community, and students, and identified it as a goal.

b. Open Q&A

No other questions from the committee.

Public Comment

A member of QUEST brought up the following points: importance of information getting put into framework around percent of students with special needs, ELL needs, reduced lunch. She mentioned that she would like there to be a caveat on the website that reads “standardized test scores such as the MCAS upon which 75% of this metric is based, have been shown to be highly correlated to socio-economic status of a family, and in addition, are often highly affected by the testing challenges facing children with ELL and special needs”? She also talked about concern over roll over date and wondering why school committee would need to vote on it. She was particularly concerned about the roll out date being so close to the election.

A school leader expressed his concerns about the disparity between DESE levels and school quality tiers, as his school is a DESE level 3, and a SQF tier 4. The school leader discussed the use of quantitative metrics vs qualitative measurements and the need to incorporate qualitative measurements to create a system that is better than the DESE levels. The school leader expressed concern with the use of surveys that he believed lacked validity, particularly with the issue of return rates. The leader also expressed concern about access and equity in school admissions and mentioned the use of both absolute and relative metrics in some states. The leader also expressed concern about confusion between DESE levels and SQF tiers, especially at this particular time as well as labeling schools with a tier at all, aside for assignment purposes. The leader expressed his concern that current school leaders were not part of the decision-making process in the first process, that there is not school support, and that it is being released in a way that is detrimental to BPS.

Closing Comments and Adjournment

The chair reiterated the need to make the system trustworthy.

Meeting Adjourned