



OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE BOSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE EXAM SCHOOLS ADMISSIONS TASK FORCE

April 27, 2021

The Boston School Committee's Exam Schools Admissions Task Force held a remote meeting on April 27, 2021 at 5 p.m. on Zoom. For more information about any of the items listed below, visit <https://www.bostonpublicschools.org/esataskforce>, email feedback@bostonpublicschools.org or call the Boston School Committee Office at (617) 635-9014.

ATTENDANCE

Exam Schools Admissions Task Force Members Present: Co-Chair Michael Contompasis; Co-Chair Tanisha Sullivan; Acacia Aguirre; Simon Chernow; Matt Cregor; Tanya Freeman-Wisdom; Katherine Grassa; Zena Lum; Zoe Nagasawa; Rachel Skerritt; Rosann Tung; and Tamara Wait.

Exam Schools Admissions Task Force Member Absent: Samuel Acevedo.

BPS Staff Present: Monica Roberts, Chief of Student, Family and Community Advancement; and Monica Hogan, Senior Executive Director of the Office of Data and Accountability.

DOCUMENTS PRESENTED

[Agenda](#)

[Meeting Minutes: April 13, 2021](#)

[Presentation: Exam High School Admissions, Detroit, MI](#)

[Presentation: Overview MAP Growth Assessment](#)

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Contompasis called the meeting to order. He announced that simultaneous interpretation services were available in Spanish, Haitian Creole, Cabo Verdean, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Mandarin, Portuguese, Somali, Arabic, and American Sign Language (ASL); the interpreters introduced themselves and gave instructions in their native language on how to access simultaneous interpretation by changing the Zoom channel.

Ms. Parvex called the roll. Mr. Samuel Acevedo was absent. Ms. Tanisha Sullivan, Tamara Waite, and Dr. Freeman-Wisdom arrived shortly after roll call.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: APRIL 13, 2021

Approved – The Task Force unanimously approved the minutes of the April 13, 2021 Exam Schools Admissions Task Force meeting.

PRESENTATION

Ms. Kisha Verduco, Senior Director, Selective Admissions Detroit Public Schools Community District, provided an overview of *Exam High School Admissions in Detroit, Michigan*. She first gave a background on the district and explained that they introduced a new admission process in 2018. This process was not interrupted during Covid-19.

The admissions process consists of the following criterias:

- 750-word essay written by the student
- Transcript/ Report Card showing the two most recent school years and, if applicable, year-to-date progress reports
- Three references
- High School Placement Test

After implementing the changes in the district's applications by making it a fully transparent process, the enrollment in the exam high schools grew significantly. She described the different criterias and how they were weighted. She said there were bonus points to students in the district, and some schools had additional bonus points depending on the proximity of the students from the school. She also said the district offers a variety of support mechanisms, such as online, phone, and video support assistance. They also conduct webinars for families and offer tutoring for students.

Mr. Cregor asked if there are any schools in the district or outside the district that have higher GPAs and if they weigh grades differently from different types of schools. Ms. Verduco said they don't do anything differently, and added that it all evens out with the test scores as the students from schools with higher GPAs tend to have lower test and essay scores.

Ms. Skerritt wanted to know more about the assessment the students take. Ms. Verduco said it was a timed, multiple choice test that comprises several subjects.

Mr. Chernow asked about the neighborhood breakdown and to how many schools a student could apply. Ms. Verduco said students can apply to five schools.

Mr. Contompasis wanted clarification if students that were not City residents could apply to the exam schools, and also wanted to know more about the preparation for the essays. Ms. Verduco explained that a student outside the district could apply but they would not get the bonus point as someone in the district. She also said that the district weighted the essays more heavily for their content, and not so much the structure.

Mr. Contompasis asked if there was an assessment unit working on the admissions process in the district. Ms. Verduco said that there was an admissions team, housed within the Office of enrollment, as well as selective admissions in the district working on the admissions process. She said that they also work with other departments within the district, like the assessment department, the Office of Research, and the guidance counselor service.

Ms. Tung wanted to know how representative the selective high schools are of the Detroit K-8 diversity, and if they see some feeder schools with higher rates of being selected into the exam schools. Ms. Verduco said the schools are reflective of the student body racially but not socio-economically.

Ms. Tung also wanted to know if someone had looked at how predictive of high school performance the test results were by race or by socioeconomic status and if there was a test prep industry built around the test. Ms. Verduco said the test was offered by private schools in the area and that there was not a test prep industry yet. She reminded the Task Force that this was only their second year using the test and that the district was still evaluating the outcomes.

Ms. Lum asked about the essay and the reasoning behind including a qualitative aspect to the application process. Ms. Verduco explained that from their experience having a qualitative aspect had an impact especially during the petition process. She further explained that students that didn't get a seat had the opportunity to do a petition and the schools would look at the applications, therefore qualitative aspect does have an impact in the decisions schools make.

Ms. Hogan and Ms. Roberts provided an overview of the *NWEA's MAP Growth Assessment*. Ms. Roberts explained the process of selecting the test by the committee in charge. She mentioned some of the features the committee had looked at, like how it's a computer adaptive test so it's individualized to the student, it's untimed, and multiple choice. This test is also used as a formative test in Boston Public Schools and is aligned to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. The MAP test is for use with diverse students. In particular, there is a bias view process, which looks at both sensitivity and fairness. It also includes several built-in accommodations for English learners and students with disabilities.

Ms. Hogan gave an overview of the test itself. She explained how the results are reported and what it means that it is an adaptive test. She mentioned there has been a research study linking the MCAS with NWEA map growth assessment to help understand the relationship. She also said that the MAP was introduced in Boston Public Schools 2020 School Year as a formative assessment.

Ms. Sullivan asked if the MAP Growth was available in languages other than English and Spanish. Ms. Roberts said that for the time being it was only provided in English and Spanish.

Ms. Sullivan also asked about the composition of the committee that reviewed and chose the assessment. Ms. Roberts explained that it was a two step process: the first committee that had developed the Request for Proposal (RFP), included staff from the Office of Data and Assessment, the Office of Opportunity Gaps, and the Office of Student, Family & Community Advancement, as well as an academic superintendent. The assessment process also had staff from Boston Public Schools. Ms. Roberts explained how the RFP worked and how it was not a public process.

Ms. Sullivan wanted to know more about the bias review and also know what type of review is conducted for gender, socio-economic, racial, and ethnic bias in the assessment. Ms. Roberts explained that when they refer to fairness in this context, it is about making sure that they are assessing students solely on the knowledge that they should have been able to gain in the classroom. Sensitivity is about things on a test that might distract the student during the course of the test. Ms. Roberts did indicate that she would have to get more information about the bias process but her understanding was that NWEA has internal staff working with external experts. They look to see if they are aligned to the curriculum frameworks, and also at the accuracy and the validity of these tests.

Ms. Tung asked for the technical report that NWEA has written on bias review and on differential item functioning, predictability validity studies, and the copy of the MCAS Map linking study. She also wondered what the MAP test provides that the MCAS didn't. Ms. Hogan explained that the MCAS was not an adaptive assessment and it will not provide that deeper information to an instructor about where to focus as the MAP assessment will. Also, if they would use MCAS, they would still need to come up with an assessment for students that do not take the MCAS.

Ms. Roberts emphasized that the main reason for not using the MCAS as the assessment was that not all the students in Massachusetts took it, and the district would have to demonstrate an alignment between the MCAS and the assessment for the non-BPS students.

Ms. Sullivan said that if there is equivalency between two assessments, she would have a question about which assessment could be used and which assessment should be used.

Mr. Contompasis added that the members hadn't heard from NWEA but he was hopeful that they could follow up with questions, and get the appropriate response. He said the members could look on the NWEA website for answers to some of the questions. He also added that if the Task Force listed their concerns, it might have an influence on NWEA making a decision to join the Task Force at a future meeting.

Ms. Sullivan explained that NWEA was invited to present at the meeting but declined. She expressed her concern and disappointment over this matter. She said she hoped they would reconsider and decide to share with the Task Force in a transparent manner.

Mr. Chernow wanted to know more about the bias review in testing. Ms. Hogan explained it with an example from an MCAS from earlier years.

Ms. Skerritt suggested that the Task Force take into account the time of year in which the MCAS and MAP are given, and the difference between something that's being used for eligibility or to rank students as she was not sure there is sufficient gradation on an MCAS exam in order to differentiate beyond a baseline level of proficiency.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

- Tiffany Luo, Allston resident, Boston Latin School (BLS) student, and Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC) member, testified in favor of diversifying the exam schools.
- Federico Rollo, Allston resident, Boston Latin Academy (BLA), alumni 2019, testified in favor of the MAP growth assessment.
- Rosalba Schino, Downtown resident, BLS parent, testified against a change that didn't include an exam and in favor of quality education for all students.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Ms. Sullivan reminded the Task Force members that they would start to transition to designing their proposed solution for the School Committee. She asked the members to think about data they would like to see, if they wanted more information about certain criterias, or any information that they thought would be helpful for the Task Force, they should ask for it. She announced that in May the Task Force would start meeting twice a week. Their goal was to provide the School Committee with a recommendation by the end of May.

Ms. Tung asked to see the temporary admissions policy played out in terms of invitations to each of the three exam schools by socio-economics, gender, and race. Ms. Sullian said they didn't have the information available yet. Ms. Roberts explained that the district was ready to send out invitations but that they were working with the legal team and waiting on the appeal process.

Ms. Nagasawa and Mr. Chernow invited the members and the public to the Student Listening Session on May 1..

Ms. Lum asked what communication had been issued to parents that are awaiting exam school invitations. Ms. Roberts said the district sent letters to parents indicating that they expected to send invitations anywhere between mid-to-end of April. Ms. Sullivan added that it is important to be mindful that there are families and students anxiously awaiting these decisions. She said there is a need to acknowledge that the district court has spoken and families deserve to know and the district needs to act. Mr. Contompasis added that this message should be conveyed to the Superintendent, with insistence that they hold to the timeline that they've established, which would end this week.

ADJOURN

At approximately 7:07 p.m., the Committee voted unanimously, by roll call, to adjourn the meeting.

Attest:



Lena Parvex
Administrative Assistant