



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

May 7, 2021

The Boston School Committee's Exam Schools Admissions Task Force held a remote meeting on May 7, 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; Samuel Acevedo; Acacia Aguirre; Tanya Freeman-Wisdom; Katherine Grassa; Zena Lum; Zoe Nagasawa; Rachel Skerritt; Rosann Tung; and Tamara Waite.

Exam Schools Admissions Task Force Members Absent: Simon Chernow; and Matt Cregor.

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: May 1, 2021 Listening Session](#)

[Presentation: Exam School Admission Update](#)

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. Acevedo and Ms. Waite arrived after roll call.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: MAY 1, 2021 STUDENT LISTENING SESSION

Approved – The Task Force approved the minutes of the May 1, 2021 Exam Schools Admissions Task Force Student Listening Session. Ms. Sullivan abstained.

PRESENTATION

Monica Roberts, Chief of Student, Family and Community Advancement, presented an Exam School Admissions Update. She gave a general overview of the applicant pool and the students that received invitations to the exam schools for School Year 2021-22. Ms. Roberts explained that BPS sent out fewer invitations this year compared with past years as they expect that the temporary admissions process will lead to a higher acceptance rate. When it came to socioeconomic status, the percentage of invitations to economically disadvantaged students increased from 33% to 48% overall, and invitations of students experiencing homelessness or in the care of DCF, increased from 29 invitations last year to 73 this year. She also mentioned that in some zip codes, there was little to no change in the number of invitations, but they did notice that zip codes with the lowest median family income received more invitations than last year, including zip codes in Dorchester, Roxbury, and Mattapan. In the invitations by race she noted that the percentage of Black and Latinx students receiving an invitation increased from last year to this year by six, and four percentage points respectively. She also said that students from BPS make up 75% of invitations for this year, an increase from 65% from previous years. Ms. Roberts concluded by saying that students who are English learners and students in special education programming also received more invitations than in previous years.

The Task Force members made a number of requests for disaggregated data following up on the presentation, especially comparing the numbers of this year to previous years.

Ms. Lum asked how the 20% of seats awarded purely based on GPA impacted the 80% of seats awarded by zip code. Ms. Roberts explained how those seats were allocated.

Ms. Grassa asked about the demographic makeup of the accepted students by school and asked about the fact that more applicants will be accepting the exam schools seats, compared to other years. Ms. Roberts explained that in prior years, students didn't have to rank schools as the district ranked for them, even though they might not have intended to attend an exam school. Ms. Skerritt added that the lower number of invitations this year has been carefully studied by the BPS planning and analysis team, based on analyses on historical acceptance rates.

Ms. Sullivan asked Ms. Roberts to clarify the term merit seats, and to explain how the 80% of seats were allocated, which she did. Ms. Sullivan then confirmed that all seats are allocated

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based on merit, just the first 20% are allocated city-wide. The 80% are allocated based on neighborhood zip code, but in each instance, the students with the highest GPA are offered seats, so all of the seats are merit-based.

Ms. Lum asked when the district would be able to have the data of acceptances and wondered if the Task Force could have data with this information. Ms. Roberts explained how the process works for families to accept seats at the exam schools as BPS doesn't have a hard acceptance date.

Mr. Contompasis continued to the next agenda item of possible criteria for admissions and opened up the floor for questions. Ms. Sullivan added that the Task Force will make a recommendation that meets the needs of each of these schools, students, and families, but the final policy decision ultimately rests with the School Committee.

Ms. Lum asked the Task Force members if the projections that were made to the working group meet their expectations in the reality of the invitations in terms of their hopes for broader socioeconomic diversity and access. She also said that they should think about more nuanced data than tract level and census level data with regards to socioeconomic diversity as one of the refinements to the criteria.

Mr. Contompasis said that if they looked at the data that was presented, it appeared that there had been some movement in the concerns that were raised as they began to look at some of the factors that they discussed at the work group level. He also said that he thought that the results of the zip code and coupling that with mean family income showed that it may have had some disadvantages, particularly with families in those zip codes that have a much lower income than the mean income. He said this was something for the Task Force to consider.

Mr. Acevedo said he was encouraged by Mr. Keating's feedback on the court update. He said it will be interesting to study the decision by the court as it gives the Task Force feedback for any recommendations they will make, and that the members will need to make sure that these recommendations are litigation-proof.

Ms. Grassa asked if it was possible to use the Opportunity Index that Boston Public Schools uses to allocate partnership funding. Ms. Hogan explained how the Opportunity Index level is calculated and the information that they use for it. She added that as it is a student-based calculation at the school level; it would not be something the district would be able to calculate for non-BPS schools.

Ms. Skerritt wondered if there was something regarding socio-economics that could be obtained from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). She also said that she was interested in Detroit's presentation about their model which was built around a point system.

Dr. Tung said that in order to talk about possible criteria, she would need to fully understand what happened when they changed the criteria. She also said that she also would like to have a deeper conversation about what the Task Force means by "rigor" based on the phrasing of the

group's charge "to expand the applicant pool, maintain rigor, and reflect Boston students' diversity."

Mr Acevedo said that the working group may have done some projections comparing the impact of using geocodes versus zip codes and that it would be worth revisiting. Ms. Hogan explained that the geocodes were much smaller and students in Boston reside in over 800 geocodes, compared to the 13 zip codes (plus the homeless zipcode), and if those were used, she would recommend grouping them in some way. Ms. Sullivan said she did believe the group should look at the geocodes as it could allow them to get to the issue that has been raised repeatedly with respect to income inequality within a particular zip code. Ms. Hogan explained that Chicago uses census tracts, not geocodes, and explained how they are grouped into tiers and their descriptions.

Dr. Tung listed the items they had talked about so far; zip codes data on census tracts, geocodes, Opportunity Index, feeder schools, some sort of point or weight system, or some combination of those options. Mr. Contompasis added he thought that the Task Force needed to re-examine the use of an assessment as a way of identifying the readiness of the applicant pool.

Ms. Skerritt mentioned that she was very interested in Detroit's point system that allowed students to be treated as individual applicants, but still were able to weigh them differently based on aspects of their profile.

Mr. Contompasis said that they needed to revisit the use of grades and that looking at the 20% city-wide seats this year would also be helpful to see if there are any patterns regarding grade types or potential areas where higher grades are more common.

Ms. Lum asked if BPS had ever considered a two-stage process for qualifying and inviting students, similar to an early admissions process in higher education, for those students who are high performing regardless of whether or not they would have applied. Ms Skerritt added that if they took top GPA students, there wouldn't be room for anyone else. Ms. Sullivan asked Ms. Hogan to look into the Texas model of extending invitations to students who are the top percentage of any attending school.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

- Kathleen Chardavoynne, Charlestown resident, BPS parent, and Boston Latin School (BLS) alumna, testified about the disadvantages of the zip code criteria.
- Marie Mercurio, Jamaica Plain resident, Curley and BLS parent, testified in favor of an exam and the impact of the zip code criteria and a need for a waitlist.
- Tatum Donovan, South Boston resident, Eliot K-8 Innovation School student, testified regarding the negative impact of the zip code criteria and ideas for admissions.
- Ruifeng Li, West Roxbury resident, parent, testified regarding her family's experience in this year's admissions process and in favor of an exam.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Ms. Skerritt expressed her appreciation for the speakers during public comment and conveyed that the members are listening carefully to the speakers that come and tell their personal stories. Ms. Sullivan concluded by saying that she greatly appreciated the thoughtful conversation the Task Force was starting to have and she was looking forward to seeing the result.

ADJOURN

At approximately 6:55 p.m., the Committee voted unanimously, by roll call, to adjourn the meeting.

Attest:



Lena Parvex
Administrative Assistant