



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

May 11, 2021

The Boston School Committee's Exam Schools Admissions Task Force held a remote meeting on May 11, 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; Zena Lum; Zoe Nagasawa; Rachel Skerritt; Rosann Tung; and Tamara Waite.

Exam Schools Admissions Task Force Members Absent: Katherine Grassa; and Tanya Freeman-Wisdom.

BPS Staff Present: Monica Hogan, Senior Executive Director of the Office of Data and Accountability.

DOCUMENTS PRESENTED

[Agenda](#)

[Meeting Minutes: May 4, 2021 meeting](#)

[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. Ms. Grassa and Dr. Freeman-Wisdom were absent. Ms. Skerritt and Ms. Waite arrived after roll call.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: MAY 4, 2021

Approved – The Task Force unanimously approved the minutes of the May 4, 2021 Exam Schools Admissions Task Force meeting with modifications.

PRESENTATION

Monica Hogan, Senior Executive Director of the Office of Data and Accountability, presented an overview of additional information and data for exam schools admissions. The data she presented were:

- Census Tracts vs. Geocodes
- Opportunity Index
- Top Percentage of School
- Percentage of Economically Disadvantaged Students by School
- Chicago Tier Replication

Ms. Hogan explained that there are approximately 178 census tracts in the city of Boston. These are reviewed every 10 years as part of the U.S. Census process, and the data that is available to the district by census tract includes all of the data that is part of the American Community Survey. The geocode was originally created in the 1970's and there are over 800 geocodes in the city of Boston. There is no data on how and when geocodes are redrawn, and the American Community Survey data is not available by geocode.

Ms. Sullivan asked the team to research if the geocodes had been redrawn since the 1970's, as what came to her mind was redlining, and how the geocodes and redlining might impact each other.

Ms. Tung wanted to know how geocodes were used. Ms. Hogan said she was only aware of how Boston Public Schools (BPS) had used it within the Opportunity Index (OI) to measure the number of times a student has moved in the last five years.

Ms. Lum asked whether geocodes or census tract data were used to determine if schools or districts qualify for free lunch. Ms. Hogan explained that before 2014, districts in Massachusetts used to collect data from individual families to determine if they qualified, but since then Boston has participated in the Community Eligibility Provision, which means all students receive free lunch, regardless of income.

Mr. Acevedo wanted to know how else the district uses census tract data. Ms. Hogan said the main application was through the Opportunity Index. Ms. Hogan continued the presentation explaining the Opportunity Index. She said there were three main components of an Opportunity Index score: neighborhood components, individual student characteristics, and past performance at the student level. These were aggregated together and called a weighted composite where the weights were determined based on statistical modeling of historical data. She explained how each school receives an Opportunity Index (OI) score between .01-.99. One thing she noted was that because of the individual nature of the data included in the OI's, it's not something the district would be able to calculate for non-BPS schools.

Mr. Acevedo asked about the cut off score for schools to access partnership fund money from BPS from last year. Ms. Hogan explained that the Opportunity Index is used to distribute partnership funds and that funds are distributed to schools to spend specifically on partnerships with community organizations to support their students.

Mr. Contompasis asked about the weights of the Opportunity Index scores. Ms. Hogan explained the weights were set initially with the Boston Area Research Initiative (BARI). After their first year of implementation, they reviewed the model based on feedback from the community and from schools, and made a few adjustments to data. She also said they use the five-year average for all of the neighborhood data, and that the components of the model don't change but they do update the data every year. She said what they don't want is for a school to move drastically in and out of the partnership fund, where they might not be able to sustain a partnership year-over-year.

Ms. Skerrit wondered which components, specifically in the Opportunity Index criteria, would be easily attainable, whether through public records or Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) reports for non-BPS schools, if they wanted to assess levels across the city regardless of the types of schools that students attend.

Ms. Hogan said that the district would have to know every individual student's address to get that information for a school. She mentioned that neighborhood data is publicly available by census tract, so they would have to determine where the students at a specific school live.

Ms. Lum asked to get more information about the scores and how it factored in if a school qualified for partnership funding. Ms. Hogan explained that the Opportunity Index was designed to show need relative to other schools in the district, so it was primarily designed for resource allocation within the district.

Ms. Sullivan asked for a clarification if a lower Opportunity Index score indicates higher need or lesser need and Ms. Hogan confirmed that a lower Opportunity Index score indicated lesser need.

Ms. Lum wanted to know if the district knew the scores of the sending schools to the exam schools. Ms. Sullivan clarified that they would be able to get the scores for sending schools that are BPS schools as the district didn't have the information for other school types.

Next, Ms. Hogan presented the Top Percentage of School model for exam schools admissions. The model she presented was similar to the one in the state of Texas, where the top 10% of graduating seniors are guaranteed admission to a public university in the state. Her presentation included BPS, charter schools, as well as private and parochial schools. She showed how many students it would be with both the 5% and 10%. After being asked, she clarified that class rank is done based only on grade point average(GPA).

The members asked clarifying questions regarding the size of classes in the different schools and the percentages. Mr. Chernow wanted to know more about the top 5% or 10% performing students in non-BPS schools. Ms. Hogan said that if this is something of interest to pursue, they would need to talk with the partners in other schools on how to identify those students.

The next topic Ms. Hogan presented was the percentage of economically disadvantaged students by school. The data was provided by DESE and it was only for BPS and charter schools. She showed that the majority of schools serving either sixth or eighth grade have more than 50% of their students being economically disadvantaged.

Mr. Lum asked if DESE tracked the private schools data the same way as they do with public schools. Ms. Hogan said that she wasn't aware how DESE dealt with private schools, as the way they hold public schools accountable is through the MCAS scores, which private schools do not take.

The last slide Ms. Hogan presented how to create tiers with census data. She explained how her team followed the Chicago model of using American Community Survey data with census tracts and to see what the results would look like in the city of Boston.

The variables included:

- Median household income
- Percent of households occupied by the owner
- Percent of families headed by a single parent
- Percent of households where a language other than English is spoken
- Educational attainment -
 - Do not have high school diploma
 - High school diploma
 - Some college
 - College degree
 - Advanced degree

She explained that this data is obtained by census tract and how the tiers are calculated. She said the census tract data provides more differentiation within a zip code to see different levels of socio-economics but these tiers are only connected to students' homes, not the sending schools' address.

Ms. Sullivan said that she did understand how this could be helpful with respect to socio-economic diversity, but she also wondered how it could be helpful in advancing geographic

diversity. Ms. Hogan said because of the size of the tiers, she didn't believe all of the exam school invitations would be concentrated in one neighborhood at any tier level.

Dr. Tung wondered about the tiers and school-aged children. Ms. Hogan explained that the way tiers are divided, it uses the number of school-aged children in the census tract and determines the number of tracts within each tier in order to get to a roughly equal number of school-age children within each tier.

Ms. Sullivan added that they want to make sure that there's equity in any process that they recommend from the standpoint of making sure the proportionate allocation of seats, which is different than an equal percentage, or could be different than an equal percentage of seats within a particular tier. Ms. Hogan reminded the members that this had been purely a replication of the data points selected in Chicago, following their methodology which might or might not be the same elements chosen by the Task Force.

Ms. Lum added that applicants to exam schools are of a certain age, so even if you have equal proportions of school-age children within each track, that doesn't necessarily reflect the fact that you have equal proportions of exam-aged qualified students in each track. Ms. Hogan said it was a factor to consider, as not all eligible school-aged children may necessarily be applicants.

Finally Ms. Hogan explained Chicago's School Performance Variable, which Chicago added after their first initial implementation. This is the weighted average of schools' state standardized test composite scores.

Ms. Sullivan wondered what Chicago Public Schools were trying to achieve with this performance bill variable, given that it wasn't part of their initial policy. She thought it would be helpful to understand what issue Chicago was trying to address by adding this particular factor, mostly so the Task Force could better understand how it might or might not correlate to the Boston landscape.

Ms. Sullivan reminded Ms. Hogan that the members hoped to get desegregated and historical data regarding exam school invitations at the May 14th meeting. She added that it was a priority for the Task Force to receive this information.

Ms. Tung reminded the members that she wanted to have a conversation about the term rigor and if there is a consensus definition of rigor to move forward with since that was one of the charges for the Task Force. Ms. Lum also added as a discussion point whether the standard of rigor is something that is fixed, or if it's something that is relative.

Mr. Chernow made a request of the presenters and Task Force members to use more accessible terms as it would be helpful for him and the public.

Mr. Acevedo commented that he thought it would be important for the Task Force to read through the U.S. Circuit Court's decision. Ms. Sullivan said she agreed with Mr. Acevedo, saying that she found the decision incredibly instructive for this particular task in front of them, and she thought it would be a good idea to ask Mr. Michael Keating, lawyer at Foley Hoag LLP, to talk

more about it with the Task Force so they can make sure they all have a base-level understanding from which to work.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

- Weimin Zhao, West Roxbury resident, Boston Latin School (BLS) parent, testified regarding the results of the SY20-21 invitations.
- Jingsong Cao, West Roxbury resident, BPS parent, testified against this year's temporary admissions policy.
- Veronika Brozek, South End resident, parent, asked the Task Force to please keep in mind the children and for it to be a fair process.
- Yufang Rong, West Roxbury resident, BLS parent, testified how the interim plan harmed families.
- Minnie Bareng, West Roxbury resident, BPS parent, testified against this year's temporary admissions policy.

CLOSING COMMENTS

There was no new business and the Co-Chairs thanked the members for their time.

ADJOURN

At approximately 7:05 p.m., the Committee voted unanimously, by roll call, to adjourn the meeting.

Attest:



Lena Parvex
Administrative Assistant