



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

**May 18, 2021**

The Boston School Committee's Exam Schools Admissions Task Force held a remote meeting on May 18, 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](mailto: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; Katherine Grassa; Matt Cregor; Zena Lum; Zoe Nagasawa; Rachel Skerritt; Rosann Tung; and Tamara Waite.

Exam Schools Admissions Task Force Members Absent: Simon Chernow; and Tanya Freeman-Wisdom.

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 11, 2021 meeting](#)

[Presentation: Exam School Admission Update, May 18, 2021](#)

### **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. Chernow and Dr. Freeman-Wisdom were absent. Mr. Acevedo, Ms. Aguirre, and Ms. Waite arrived after roll call.

## **APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: MAY 11, 2021**

***Approved*** – The Task Force unanimously approved the minutes of the May 11, 2021 Exam Schools Admissions Task Force meeting.

## **PRESENTATION**

Monica Roberts, Chief of Student, Family and Community Advancement, and Monica Hogan, Senior Executive Director of the Office of Data and Accountability, reviewed additional data requested by the Task Force related to the exam schools admissions results for School Year 2021-2022.

Ms. Roberts started by presenting responses to questions asked regarding Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA DESE). She said that the Massachusetts Department of Elementary only collects aggregate enrollment data for non-public schools. Regarding the question about sub-separate classrooms in the exam schools, she said that the Office of Special Education was working with the school leaders, and that the schools will be staffed to provide the services, including students' individual education plans (IEP) and in the case that a substantially separate classroom is needed, that would be provided.

Ms. Hogan gave an update on the Census Tract and then continued with additional data on exam school invitations, specifically the percentage of invitations by school by student group for both 7th and 9th grade.

The next slides Ms. Hogan presented the percentage of invitations to economically disadvantaged students by zip code in 7th and 9th grade on a two year comparison. Ms. Hogan noted that to protect student privacy, when they were disaggregating by multiple characteristics, staff suppressed information.

Ms. Roberts presented the percentage of invitations by zip code and school type for 7th and 9th grade for the past two years. She also presented the Grade Point Average (GPA) distribution of invited students for 7th and 9th grade.

Ms. Sullivan inquired if it was possible to get the data of the zip codes that had fewer than 10 invitations. She said she understood the concern with privacy, but wanted to try to figure out how they could still get a sense of what that data looked like.

Ms. Hogan responded to the request about how many Boston Public Schools (BPS) schools did not have any students receive invitations in SY21-22. For 7th Grade, there were four BPS

schools that did not have any students receive an invitation, representing 13 applicants in total. For 9th grade, there were two BPS schools that did not have any students receive an invitation, representing six applicants. The McKinley school had no applicants for 7th or 9th grade, and the Horace Mann School had no applicants for 9th grade.

Ms. Skerritt asked the presenters if they had a data analysis summary of GPA by zip code. Ms. Roberts said that for 7th grade, most GPAs were B+ plus or higher in the average for the neighborhoods. Most of them were between a B+ and A-. The lowest average in terms of neighborhood was in the B plus zone. Ms Hogan clarified that all students with a perfect GPA, a 12, did receive an invitation to an exam school. For 9th grade, the average GPA across neighborhoods was a B+ to an A-range across all of the zipcodes.

Mr. Acevedo asked if there was any evidence of a drop in the average GPA distribution, with this year's student body compared to previous year. Ms. Hogan explained that because the GPA represented different time periods, it was hard to make that comparison. Additionally, the overall GPA was not rounded this year to an integer, whereas in previous years, students' GPAs were rounded to the nearest whole number. Ms. Skerritt added that in the past, GPA was not the sole criteria, so students' GPAs could be mitigated or compensated with the assessment scores. She added she anticipated that these students would thrive with the grades they had.

Mr. Contompasis asked about the decision of not rounding off the grades. Ms. Lum said that the Working Group decided not to round because they wanted to mitigate ties.

Dr. Tung asked about a definition of rigor from BPS. Ms. Roberts said the Office of Academics and the Chief of Schools were looking more deeply at the definition of rigor of BPS, but she did say that BPS Essentials for Instructional Equity guides the work of ensuring academic rigor and in this case rigor is academically, intellectually, and personally challenging, as well as culturally and linguistically sustaining instruction, learning experiences, coursework and educational expectations.

Dr. Tung pointed out the difference of this definition from the one that the U.S. News and World Report uses to rank schools. Ms. Skerritt clarified that when she discussed maintaining rigor, she was thinking more about the overall achievement of the school, as measured by how schools are generally tiered and or ranked by achievement, than the actual learning process.

Ms. Sullivan added it was an important question to get an answer to as there seemed to be a gap between different definitions of rigor and she wanted to make sure the Task Force members were all on the same page. Mr. Contompasis added that the key question is: How does the district measure what is definition of rigor?

Mr. Acevedo reminded the members of what he had expressed at the Friday, May 11th meeting, that the word rigor, is for many an exclusionary term and how important it is to come up with admissions recommendations that are both protecting the schools' rigor while being inclusive.

Ms. Sullivan asked the members if they had thoughts and ideas about criteria.

Mr. Cregor asked that as they reach back to the School Committee on the question of rigor, should they also review with them, the part of the charter where they make reference to diversity and make sure that it is indeed in alignment with what the School Committee is expecting the Task Force to review. He also said that he does expect there to be a legal challenge which means that they will have to do their best as a Task Force to be meticulous and really know the ground rules. He also said that they need to make sure that, whatever plan they come up with, it's subject to a periodic review that can incorporate the feedback of students as to their experiences on the basis of their race, neighborhood, and socio-economic status.

Ms. Lum wondered if they could use the temporary policy as a benchmark to start with, and improve it.

Ms. Skerritt said that she would feel uncomfortable using the temporary policy as the starting point being that it was created out of the unavailability of specific information. She said she was interested in the models such as Detroit, where applicants were able to apply as their own person, but with additional factors and considerations based on their specific status. She also said she would like to look at the school type that a student attends, because some of the inequities around things such as test preparation and resources were often very much connected to the resources and the status of the schools.

Mr. Acevedo said he would also be cautious about using the one-year policy as a baseline, specifically as the recommendations passed constitutional muster because they were by definition, limited in scope. He didn't think it was clear that the same policy would pass constitutional muster long term. He also thought it would be interesting to look at communities that had enacted intentionally long term policies.

Ms. Grassa said she thought the members needed to have a real conversation about whether or not they were going to use an assessment in the recommendations.

Ms. Lum said that she had heard someone suggesting using grading in more subjects than math and English Language Arts (ELA).

Ms. Skerritt asked any members who may not recommend an assessment as a component of the policy to please suggest another attainable data point from all applicants that could represent students' performance at or near grade level before matriculating to the schools.

Ms. Sullivan finished by asking the members to think if they were designing a policy that was intended to exclude, or to include students, because depending on the policy they were intending to design, it would inform the types of criteria that they might recommend be included in a policy. She also encouraged each member to individually design a policy to help them guide their individual thinking while giving them something to work with when they come together as a group.

- Travis Marshall, Roslindale resident, Bates Elementary School parent, testified against a test and in favor of a policy that serves all of Boston students.
- Jane Zhou, West Roxbury resident, former BPS parent, testified in favor of maintaining the high academic standards of the exam schools.
- Alan Tian, West Roxbury resident, parent, testified against the zip code criteria.
- Stuart Wang, West Roxbury resident, parent, testified against the zip code criteria.
- Steve Yang, West Roxbury resident, parent, testified against the zip code criteria.
- Rachel Miselman, East Boston resident, BPS alumna, testified regarding her concerns of the implementation of the zip code plan.
- Sarah Grandfield, West Roxbury resident, parent, testified about the manner in which BPS has provided the admissions data, and the composition of the Task Force.

## CLOSING COMMENTS

Mr. Contompassis reminded the Task Force members that they were going to have a speaker for the Friday, May 21st meeting at which time they would continue the discussion regarding criteria.

## ADJOURN

At approximately 7:04 p.m., the Committee voted unanimously, by roll call, to adjourn the meeting.

Attest:



Lena Parvex  
Administrative Assistant