



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

May 21, 2021

The Boston School Committee's Exam Schools Admissions Task Force held a remote meeting on May 21, 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; Simon Chernow; Matt Cregor; Dr. Freeman-Wisdom, Zena Lum; Zoe Nagasawa; Rachel Skerritt; and Rosann Tung.

Exam Schools Admissions Task Force Members Absent: Katherine Grassa and Tamara Waite.

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 14, 2021 meeting](#)

[Presentation: The Use of Tests in Selective School Admissions, Dr. Lorrie Shepard, Distinguished Professor at the University of Colorado Boulder](#)

[Presentation: Exam School Admission Follow Up, May 21, 2021](#)

[Census Tract Map](#)

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Contompasis called the meeting to order. He announced that simultaneous interpretation services were available in Spanish, Haitian Creole, 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 Ms. Waite were absent. Mr. Acevedo and Ms. Aguirre arrived after roll call. Dr. Freeman-Wisdom arrived after roll call and departed prior to adjourning.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: MAY 14, 2021

Approved – The Task Force approved the minutes of the May 14, 2021 Exam Schools Admissions Task Force meeting. Ms. Sullivan abstained.

PRESENTATION

Dr. Tung welcomed the speaker for the evening; Dr. Lorrie Shepard, Distinguished Professor at the University of Colorado Boulder. Dr. Shepard presented a report entitled, *The Use of Tests in Selective School Admissions*. Dr. Shepard started by presenting the dilemma of the need of selecting students with prerequisite knowledge and skills in order to participate in academically challenging contexts, while being aware that standardized tests are correlated with family income. She explained that in college admissions, grades are better predictors than tests because grades are cumulative and grades reflect effort as well as academic skills. She also explained that standardized tests show a greater difference between groups, especially between white Americans and historically marginalized, African American and Latino students.

Dr. Shepard said it was important to know that given modest predictive correlations, tests should never be used as if they are perfect measures of merit. She explained that there were two important points regarding the NWEA MAP assessment. The first was that using Differential Item Functioning (DIF) does not make a test unbiased, and that NWEA MAP uses all multiple-choice or selected-response items and can therefore not measure aspects of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks such as modeling and argumentation. She ended by saying that if the Task Force were to choose a test, it should consider the MCAS as it's a better test.

Mr. Acevedo explained that the problem with MCAS was that it was not being administered to non-Boston Public School (BPS) students. Dr. Shepard said that unless that contractor would be willing to allow test administration, the district would have to choose the lowest common denominator solution which would not be ideal, because of its uniformity and usually uniform isn't always the fairest.

Ms. Sullivan asked if there was any research that supported the notion that assessments create a level playing field for students. Dr. Shepard said that there weren't, especially when they are low level, multiple choice tests. Ms. Skerritt asked what the recommendation would be for a measure to indicate whether students have the requisite skills for the academically challenging

environment, in the absence of an assessment. Dr. Shepard said her stance would be to use the MCAS for the eligible students and NWEA for the non-BPS students. She also said that she hoped the Task Force members would consider top-ranked students from the feeder schools, and not a test.

Mr. Contompasis said he wondered how to identify students who show promise and work with those students and offset potential gaming of the process. Dr. Shepard noted that grades could also be gamed by grade inflation, which is why she recommends looking at grades and class rank. She also said some schools provided more opportunity to their students than other schools, and that needed to be disrupted, especially by asking for more nominations from the schools that have historically not been feeders.

Mr. Chernow asked what her opinion on grades and a lottery system would look like. Dr. Shepard explained that she thought a lottery within all of those who are qualified would be possible.

Mr. Cregor asked her to expand more on the notion of a teacher nomination system. Dr. Shepard said she would use teacher nominations and the top 10% of the students together, like a portfolio. She added that if you're doing the top 10% per school, you're really ensuring participation across all the schools.

Ms. Sullivan asked how an assessment might be used to help create a pool, but not be a determining factor from a selection standpoint. Dr. Shepard said that instead of narrowing the selection, they would have to have a much bigger pool, based on the test where everyone was qualified. Thereafter use another criteria, or select with a lottery. That would be a way to answer the rigor without doing top down selection. She concluded by saying that she would applaud a recommendation that came out of the Task Force that said we shouldn't have elite schools that disproportionately serve those who've had privilege, as many more students could profit from the kinds of curricula that are now afforded to only the three elite schools.

The Co-Chairs thanked Dr. Shepard for her presentation and continued with the next item on the agenda: other criteria; review of data requested. Ms. Hogan shared maps and slides responding to outstanding data requests, and gave an overview on how to look at this data.

Next they continued with discussion of possible criteria for admissions.

Ms. Skerritt said the Task Force could potentially start with a model that's already been built and vetted, both in practice, and in litigation. She said she would be interested in the Chicago model, as they were top down selection within groups, as Dr. Shepard had suggested.

Mr. Contompasis presented some suggestions for consideration for possible criteria for admissions for consideration:

- Combination of an assessment and grade point averages.
- An assessment can be used to determine the readiness of the pool or it can be used as it has been in the past to determine a specific score for each of those parts.

- Give additional consideration to go with a tiered system of whether to retain the 20% - 80% combination, whether to continue to use zip codes and the median family income or substitute it by the census tracts.
- Add 10 points to the total score of all applicants currently attending a school where the verified poverty level is fifty percent or above.
- Have a periodic review by the district of the outcomes that are generated by this change. This would need to be done before a contract for a vendor is either extended or renewed.
- Develop and implement an anonymous annual wellness survey for the students at the three exam schools.
- Re-emphasize and retain the testing on weekdays for BPS students, and on Saturdays, for non-BPS students..
- Retain the untimed test for students whose Individual Education Plans (IEP) requires it.
- Ensure that the program that the Task Force recommended, approved by the Boston School Committee, is fully funded in grades 4 to 6 in every BPS school.
- Ensure that the three week boot camp for entering exam school students is fully funded and sustained over time. Appropriate support should be provided during the school year as well.

Ms. Lum said she would like to discuss the possibility of a lottery. She also suggested that instead of looking at families' median income, to look at families in the applicant pool.

Ms. Nagasawa said that if they went with the Chicago model, she thought they could ask families to self-report their family income and number of family members.

Mr. Chernow proposed they not give a test, but rather focus on the three main categories; GPA, being a BPS student, and socio-economic status.

Mr. Creggor said it was important to make it clear and easy to understand for the families in the district. He also said he was intrigued by the proposal of giving added weight to any students attending a school with a higher proportion of economically disadvantaged students. He was interested in mapping out the top 10, or top X percent plan, especially with some of the other factors such as the notion of teacher nominations.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

- Mika Liu, Chinatown resident, Josiah Quincy Elementary school student, testified against the zip code policy.
- Suri Yang, West Roxbury resident, student, testified against the zip code policy.
- Elise Morgan, Jamaica Plain resident, BPS parent, testified regarding concerns about teachers at sending schools if the admission process is based on grades.
- Shery Keleher, Charlestown resident, BPS parent, testified about the decision making process.
- Somy Kim, Mattapan resident, BPS parent, testified in favor of changing the Boston exam schools admissions process.
- Derun Li, West Roxbury resident, parent, testified against the zip code policy.

- Karyn Li, Waltham resident, Boston Latin School (BLS) alumna, testified in favor of changing the Boston exam schools admissions process.
- Steve Yang, West Roxbury resident, parent, testified against the zip code policy.
- Lauren Peter, Roslindale resident, Sumner school parent, testified in favor of changing the Boston exam schools admissions process.
- Abby Machson-Carter, Roslindale resident, incoming BPS parent, testified in favor of changing the Boston exam schools admissions process.
- Yufang Rong, West Roxbury resident, BLS parent, testified in favor of the MAP assessment.
- Yuhong Jia, West Roxbury resident, BPS parent, testified against the zip code policy and gave suggestions for the Task Force.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Ms. Aguirre asked for the meeting minutes to be translated to all major BPS languages, and more language accessibility for all the Task Force materials.

ADJOURN

At approximately 7:35 p.m., the Committee voted unanimously, by roll call, to adjourn the meeting.

Attest:



Lena Parvex
Administrative Assistant