



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

May 25, 2021

The Boston School Committee's Exam Schools Admissions Task Force held a remote meeting on May 25, 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; Dr. Freeman-Wisdom, Katherine Grassa, Zena Lum; Zoe Nagasawa; Rachel Skerritt; Dr. Rosann Tung, and Tamara Waite.

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: May 18, 2021 meeting](#)

[Presentation: Exam School Task Force Simulation Comparaison](#)

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 was absent. Ms. Aguirre, Mr. Chernow, and Dr. Freeman-Wisdom arrived after roll call.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: MAY 18, 2021

Approved – The Task Force unanimously approved the minutes of the May 18, 2021 Exam Schools Admissions Task Force meeting.

DISCUSSION

The Co-Chairs started by confirming that there were no pending data requests and the members moved to the discussion about simulations and other possible criteria and mechanisms for exam school admissions.

Ms. Lum summarized her suggestions from the Friday, May 21st meeting; to look at grades other than math and ELA, and use census tract, instead of zip codes. She also said she would be interested in seeing the impact if they did top 20% by census tract or by tiers, and how that would compare to the top 20%, by school. She would suggest a lottery for the rest of the 80%.

Ms. Grassa, referring back to Mr. Contompasis' suggestions, said there was an issue with 5th grade grading in the Boston Public Schools (BPS), and that this negatively impacted BPS students.

Ms. Skerritt reiterated that it would be helpful to look at the Chicago model and see how it could work in the Boston context. Mr. Cregor reminded the members that while the Chicago model had been structured and studied, he wasn't sure that it's been vetted via a legal challenge.

The members talked about the suggestion of giving students points if they came from schools with a verified poverty level of 50% or above and how it would address the socio-economic diversity factor. They talked about how that would be addressed for charter, private, and parochials students, if they couldn't get the information from individual families. Mr. Cregor said that if they were to maintain any geographic or neighborhood distribution, they should move from a zip code plan to a census tract plan. Mr. Contompasis added the possibility of combining census tracts. The members talked about the issues with the zip codes and how it negatively impacts families that live in a zip code, but fall below the median income for that zip code.

Ms. Hogan explained how the schools determine which students are economically disadvantaged. She said that BPS gets the information from the MA Department of Education (DESE) and only for students that are enrolled in BPS.

Ms. Skerritt talked about the possibility of using more tiers. She said she understood it as the Chicago model took every census tract and assigned it to one of four tiers, so even though you may not qualify for some of the state assistance, you could be in a very different place from an economic situation in terms of your resources to someone who was at the top tier in the city for income. She also said she thought that larger pools, with more similarly situated students, would be ideal, as the problem with the current zip code policy was that it took students with very different economic situations and put them in competition with one another.

Ms. Sullivan said it was important to think about neighborhood diversity and, in order to move forward as a city, they needed to break down the neighborhood silos and the neighborhood isolation that exists. She wondered if the district had an algorithm or that could be created to use geocodes or census tract. Ms. Hogan said her team created the census tract tier map based on the Chicago model. She suggested that members also visit the [San Antonio Independent School District's Website](#), as they followed a similar process.

Ms. Nagasawa suggested using the census tract information for 5th through 8th grade students, instead of all school aged children. She also thought they should try with more than four tiers, as that might create more neighborhood diversity in terms of what the tiers look like. Mr. Contompasis wondered if it would be possible for the district to identify students based on the socio-economic criteria that Chicago uses. Mr. Cregor was of the opinion that using only four tiers wouldn't create a geographic representation and he thought the census tract could be combined, as he thought the zip code plan was not nuanced enough. He said they should try splitting the city into eight tiers and see if it would increase the neighborhood diversity. Ms. Skerritt added that they should model it at four and eight tiers to see the comparison. She also talked about how to figure out if families were in the wrong socioeconomic pool.

Ms. Lum asked if they could look at the overall Grade Point Average (GPA) and then weigh math and ELA. She also asked if they could, as a secondary filter, look at the schools themselves and add the points for those coming from high poverty level schools, regardless of the tier they resided in.

Ms. Hogan presented a slide from a data request that showed a comparison of the SY20-21 actual invitations, an October 2020 simulation based on the working groups proposal, and SY21-22 actual invitations, by race, zip code and economically disadvantaged status. Ms. Hogan explained how they would run the simulations and the decisions the Task Force members would have to take in order to run the simulations.

The members discussed the simulation request for Friday based on the suggestions from the Task Force members. Ms. Lum added to her proposal of doing a two-round lottery system; in the first round, applicants who win the lottery would have to reply and have to make their choice by a certain date. The unoccupied seats would go back into the pool, and there would be a second round lottery for those additional seats to be awarded.

Mr. Contompasis explained how the waitlists for exam schools worked and said the schools assume there will be students not accepting seats and those seats are built into their numbers of

invitations. He also said that the focus of the discussion should be how they modify the 80% seats and not make any change to the 20% of seats. Ms. Aguirre asked who would be part of the lottery pool, and she agreed with Mr. Contompasis to leave the 20% as it was now.

Dr. Freeman-Wisdom said they needed to be aware that the GPA varies by program. She also said it felt like they were building a house from the top down, and they were not talking about the foundation. She said for her, it was a problem when 6th and 7th grade BPS students didn't have the skills and didn't get exam school seats. She also said she thought there should be a test, not because she wanted to exclude students, but to put pressure on the city to help the young people to perform.

Ms. Grassa added that if they were going to use solely GPA, it would put an enormous amount of pressure on the grade 5th grade teachers since most of the students only have one 5th grade teacher, versus middle school when they have multiple teachers. Ms. Aguirre added that the working group used GPA last year for the interim plan as those grades were not influenced by the fact that teachers or families knew they were going to be used, which wouldn't be the case now.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

- Boston City Councilor Ricardo Arroyo, Hyde Park resident, testified in support of the work of the Task Force.
- Magdalena Hernandez, West Roxbury resident, Boston Latin School (BLS) alum and parent, testified in favor of using an assessment as part of the admission process.
- Steve Yang, West Roxbury resident, parent, testified about the negative impact of an admissions policy in the City of Boston.
- Stephanie Shapiro Berkson, South End resident, BPS parent, testified in favor of the interim admissions policy and encouraged the Task Force to explore geocodes.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Ms. Sullivan responded to a petition led by Mr. Steven Yang, "*Petition to Keep An Objective Exam and Reconstitute The Exam School Admissions Task Force*". She said that with the racial awakening that was happening across the country, she could not allow for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the oldest civil rights organization in the United States of America with the mission specifically to address racial discrimination and inequity, to be attacked. She said there was no organization in the country that had done more to create opportunities for all people, and to ensure that the promises of the Constitution of the United States are delivered to all people, than the NAACP. She finished by asking people to respect and honor the work and the legacy of institutions like the NAACP and not attempt to tarnish that legacy because people are personally unhappy with decisions that may have been made.

Ms. Contompasis asked Ms. Parvex to please send the petition to all the Task Force members.

ADJOURN

At approximately 7:15 p.m., the Committee voted unanimously, by roll call, to adjourn the meeting.

Attest:



Lena Parvex
Administrative Assistant