



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

May 28, 2021

The Boston School Committee's Exam Schools Admissions Task Force held a remote meeting on May 28, 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; Matt Cregor; Katherine Grassa; Zena Lum; Zoe Nagasawa; Rachel Skerritt; and Rosann Tung.

Exam Schools Admissions Task Force Members Absent: Simon Chernow; Tanya Freeman-Wisdom; 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 21, 2021 meeting](#)

[Presentation: Exam School Task Force - Census Tract Tier Options](#)

[Comparing Tiers Map](#)

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, 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; Dr. Freeman-Wisdom; and Ms. Waite were absent. Ms. Skerritt arrived after roll call.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: MAY 21, 2021

Approved – The Task Force approved the minutes of the May 21, 2021 Exam Schools Admissions Task Force meeting. Mr. Acevedo abstained. All other members voted yes.

DISCUSSION

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

Ms. Hogan presented six different tier options and the student population living in the different tiers. The student population represented was the 7th grade SY20-21 exam schools applicant pool.

The three first slides she presented were map comparisons of four, five, and eight tiers based on all school-age children vs. children in grades 5-8. She explained the methodology her team used to create the maps based on the five metrics used in Chicago. These were:

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

Ms. Sullivan asked if they could explore adding the child poverty rate as a metric. Ms. Lum added the possibility to also explore the Index of Concentration at the Extremes (ICE). Ms. Hogan clarified to the members that the highest need students were in the lowest number.

Ms. Hogan showed the data for the distribution of tiers using the number of students in all grades, and for students in grades 5-8.

Several of the members had questions about the tiers and the cut-off and Ms. Hogan explained how she arrived at those numbers, how they could be adjusted, and the possible impact depending on where the cut-off happened. Ms. Tung said her conclusion was that the more tiers they used, the better result they would have, but it wouldn't solve all the problems.

Ms. Lum wondered if replacing median income with a different American Community Survey (ACS) metric, like housing or wealth, as opposed to income, would help with grouping the public housing and subsidized housing students into its own tier regardless of where they were located geographically.

Ms. Hogan presented a slide with the data from using tiers as an invitation mechanism. The table displayed the number of seats that would be allocated by tier, depending on number of tiers. The table assumed 1,000 invitations would be distributed and the first 20% of seats would be distributed citywide.

The next slides Ms. Hogan presented were tier enrollment comparisons for the SY20-21 applicant pool by economic status, race, sex, English Learner (EL) status, and Individualized Education Program (IEP) status. She also said she would provide a link to an interactive map with the similar data.

Mr. Cregor asked if there would be a way to show what the invitation rates from the 2020-2021 school year looked like for each of the models proposed as they would be able to see the impact on the neighborhood diversity. He said as they were hoping to see not just social, economic, but also neighborhood diversity represented in the exams schools, it would be convenient to know what model and how many tiers it would take to see a reflection of students from each of the neighborhoods.

The members had a lengthy discussion over the possibility of doing a lottery within the applicant pool.

Dr. Tung was of the opinion that without knowing income, the fairest way to accept students would be through a lottery. She said that once they decided who should be in the applicant pool, whether dividing it up by zip code or tiers, it would give every student performing at grade level a possibility of attending one of the exam schools. She also said it would avoid the economic disparity within zip codes or census tracts, and even within feeder schools, and finally, it would break the stigma of not getting an invite. She added that it would take the burden off of teachers to inflate grades, to test prep, and to rank students; and a lottery might also have the effect of changing the enrollment of the feeder schools and other high schools in Boston.

Ms. Skerritt said she didn't think a lottery system, with no differentiation between students in any one group, would serve to make more families in Boston, of all identities, backgrounds and socio-economic backgrounds less frustrated with the process. She said they should explore all

possibilities and models that allowed them to achieve the same goal in a way where families and students felt like they had some greater degree of exercise in the process, rather than just relying on a lottery.

Ms. Grassa added that the lottery aligned with the school choice system as a district to enter schools in Boston. Mr. Acevedo said he wasn't convinced of a lottery but he was open to listening to the members.

Mr. Contompasis said he disagreed with a possible lottery and said that it wouldn't take into consideration the students academic achievement. He said he thought the working group had achieved what they were charged with, and they had increased the diversity in all three schools. The question now was how to sustain what they had achieved with the interim plan; they had to make a decision around an assessment, or ensuring the relevancy and the readiness of the applicant pool, and finding a way to take into consideration all the concerns around a grade point average (GPA), if the Task Force was going to recommend using it. He also said it was important to decide if they would use the 20%/80% seat distribution, and if so, how they would use it. He finished by saying he thought that the three exam schools are now three of the most diverse schools in the city, and probably in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Dr. Tung agreed that the interim plan increased representation in exam schools, but she thought they could do even better because diversity doesn't necessarily mean representation. She said they could still maintain rigor with a lottery. She also said she didn't agree with 20% citywide allocation of seats, and referred to one of Ms. Hogan's earlier presentations that showed that the 20% citywide students were not representative of the district demographics, and concluded that it did not go far enough in terms of achieving diversity.

Ms. Skerritt wondered why they were separating out by neighborhood and tiers if the lottery, by nature, would do that anyway. She also didn't agree with the thought that the lottery system for the exam schools would have a beneficial effect on enrollment in the district. On the contrary, she thought that the lottery system would drive more people out of the city.

Ms. Lum wondered if there was a possibility to randomize from year-to-year the two areas that BPS would use to select students for eligibility, so it wouldn't be math and ELA every year.

Ms. Sullivan encouraged the members to think about ideas about what the policy should look like, and put it on paper for Tuesday, June 1st. The Co-Chairs agreed that they should also talk about assessment and eligibility at the June meeting .

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

- Irene Tian, West Roxbury resident, student, testified against the zip code policy.
- Travis Marshall, Roslindale resident, BPS parent, testified against a standardized test due to bias.

CLOSING COMMENTS

The Co-Chairs thanked the members and public.

ADJOURN

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

Attest:



Lena Parvex
Administrative Assistant