



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

**June 1, 2021**

The Boston School Committee's Exam Schools Admissions Task Force held a remote meeting on June 1, 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; Samuel Acevedo; Acacia Aguirre; Simon Chernow; Matt Cregor; Tanya Freeman-Wisdom; Katherine Grassa; Zena Lum; Zoe Nagasawa; Rachel Skerritt; Rosann Tung; and Tamara Waite.

Exam Schools Admissions Task Force Members Absent: Co-Chair Tanisha Sullivan

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 25, 2021 meeting](#)

[Presentation: Exam School Task Force: Possible Additional Census Tract Variables](#)

### **CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Contompasis called the meeting to order. He announced that simultaneous interpretation services were available in Spanish, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Mandarin, Arabic, Somali, 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. Sullivan was absent. Mr. Acevedo, Ms. Aguirre, Mr. Chernow, and Ms. Waite arrived after roll call. Dr. Freeman-Wisdom arrived after roll call and left before the meeting adjourned.

## APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: MAY 25, 2021

*Approved* – The Task Force unanimously approved the minutes of the May 25th, 2021 Exam Schools Admissions Task Force meeting.

## 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 a slide with three additional census tract variables; index of concentration at the extremes (high income white households versus low income Black households); index of concentration at the extremes (high income white non-Hispanic households versus low income people of color households); and percentage of persons below poverty. She also presented maps reflecting the data.

Mr. Cregor thought it would be interesting in switching out median income for something that looked at income at the extremes, as it looked more nuanced. He also wondered how difficult it would be to get and to verify individual students' social-economic data. Ms. Grassa expressed her concern on the impact that this could have for undocumented families, and the weight this process would put on the schools. Ms. Skerritt suggested that the Task Force look at schools with high concentrations of socio-economically disadvantaged students, so that families wouldn't have to submit their individual information. She also proposed the district move towards a centralized collection process and not a school-based collection process, in case they needed to collect information. She thought that if they could identify any economically disadvantaged students and set aside a number of seats and place those students first before filling the rest of the seats to the level that is determined by the district, that would be an ideal model. She also said that it would be a model that would be easier for families to understand.

The Task Force members started to discuss proposals for possible recommendation to the Boston School Committee for consideration.

Ms. Lum presented her proposals for admissions. The eligibility criteria would be to look at overall class rank, from the end of 5th grade, and not only look at the Grade Point Average (GPA) for math and ELA. She would combine it with an assessment given in the fall of 6th grade. For the invitations, she said she wanted to know if there was a difference in 20% citywide

versus 20% by tier. Finally she suggested placing a deadline for parents to accept their children's seat, and any unclaimed seats would be given out in a lottery.

Mr. Cregor's had two models to suggest. The first was that the first 20% of seats go citywide, in a system based on grades and an exam, or a combination of both. The remaining 80% of seats would be filled by a tiered lottery, using eight tiers, so students from each of the tiers would be in the lottery with each other. The second suggestion was a 80%-20% model, with eight tiers of admission. They would give a boost for students attending high poverty schools. He suggested that if they use a test, to use it to help determine the cutoff of the applicant pool.

Mr. Chernow's proposal was a 3.0 GPA or B to be the starting point for eligibility and then a lottery from the applicant pool. His suggestion was that a student shouldn't get more weight by having a higher GPA than a 3.0, and also included giving some type of weight to BPS students.

Dr. Tung presented her admissions policy proposal:

Eligibility:

- Minimum GPA of 3.0 (or equivalent) in 5<sup>th</sup> grade and 6<sup>th</sup> grade
- Additional weights for facing barriers (ELL, SWD, DCF-involved, homeless, low social-economic status)
- Preference for attending BPS in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade

Selection

- Lottery of eligible students by 6<sup>th</sup> grade school
- Opportunity Index used to order BPS 6<sup>th</sup> grade schools followed by non-BPS 6<sup>th</sup> grade schools
- Invitations proportionate to size of 6<sup>th</sup> grade in 6<sup>th</sup> grade school

She also suggested an annual monitoring of applicants, invitees, and enrollees

- GPA, attendance, graduation
- School climate surveys of students
- Disaggregated by group and by 6<sup>th</sup> grade school
- Could compare 3 cohorts
  - 2020 (GPA + ISEE)
  - 2021 (GPA + zip code for 80%)
  - 2022 (TBD)

Dr. Tung said her proposal didn't include an admissions test as the members had heard enough evidence from college admissions studies that the GPA was a better indicator for success. She also referred to studies that showed that tests are a barrier to admission for low income students and students of color.

Ms. Grassa said that she believed that the eligibility should include a test component as she thought grades alone would be far more inequitable than potentially using a combination of an assessment and grades. The selection would be a lottery. Mr. Acevedo said he still was unsure about a lottery system.

Dr. Tung said she was strongly opposed to the use of the NWEA Map test, stating that, among other things, it violated multiple standards and it had no evidence of success predictability.

Ms. Skerritt gave her reasoning on the importance of including an assessment. She said she thought it would be unfair that potentially the highest performing students in the city of Boston might not have a seat at any of the exam schools because of an arbitrary lottery.

Dr. Freeman-Wisdom said that she was opposed to a lottery and was concerned about the use of GPA without an assessment. She explained that the schools would have students that had a 3.0 without taking into consideration the program these students came from.

Mr. Chernow reflected on the exam schools and thought it really didn't make sense for a district to have all the gifted students in the same three schools.

Dr. Tung added that she also agreed that they should use all the subjects, and not only ELA and math, as the more indicators, the better and more nuanced results. She also said her vision for BPS was for it to have open enrollment high schools, so students could be matched with schools based on curriculum and learning style. She said she wasn't proposing to eliminate exam schools but to make the entry process more equitable so they could be more accessible to everyone.

Mr. Contompasis gave an overview of the different opinions of the members and said they all agreed to have some kind of eligibility requirements to be in the pool which would be a B or better GPA in math and English Language Arts as the indicator.

Mr. Acevedo added that colleges could process transcripts and AP work, and could afford to skip assessments, but he thought for the exam schools, some sort of an assessment was necessary. He wondered if there was a way to have non-BPS students take the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). Ms. Grassa explained that the MCAS was controlled by the State and the complexities it would bring. Mr. Contompasis added that he thought it would further negatively impact the students in BPS to use the MCAS.

Mr. Contompasis said the district needed a mechanism to determine the readiness, or the threshold level of the pool. He thought it could be a combination of assessment and GPA, weighted or not. He emphasized on the importance of reaching consensus.

The members discussed the possibility of using teacher nominations as a criteria. Ms. Grassa said that it would place a lot of pressure on teachers to have teacher recommendations, and it would be a biased process. Ms. Skerritt added that it would be a difficult process that could potentially advantage students who already had tremendous advantages. She concluded by saying that not administering an assessment felt like lowering expectations and there was a difference between removing barriers and preparing students for barriers that exist.

- Yanxi Fang, West Roxbury resident, Boston Latin School (BLS) alum, testified with suggestions about the selection criteria.
- Mimi Lai, Roslindale resident, BPS parent and BLS alum, testified against using a lottery as an admissions criteria.
- Steve Yang, West Roxbury resident, parent, testified in favor of using an assessment as admissions criteria.
- Nat Adams, West Roxbury resident, testified with a question about the applicant pool.
- Anna Dore, West Roxbury resident, Kilmer K-8 School parent, testified in support of a lottery system.

## CLOSING COMMENTS

Mr. Contompasis thanked the members and asked them to be prepared to take a vote on each of the suggestions that had been made.

## ADJOURN

At approximately 7:20 p.m., the Committee voted unanimously, by roll call, to adjourn the meeting.

Attest:



Lena Parvex  
Administrative Assistant