



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

June 11, 2021

The Boston School Committee's Exam Schools Admissions Task Force held a remote meeting on June 11, 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; Simon Chernow; Matt Cregor; Tanya Freeman-Wisdom; Katherine Grassa; Zena Lum; Zoe Nagasawa; Rachel Skerritt; and Rosann Tung.

Exam Schools Admissions Task Force Members Absent: Acacia Aguirre; and Tamara Waite.

BPS Staff Present: Monica Roberts, Chief of Student, Family and Community Advancement.

DOCUMENTS PRESENTED

[Agenda](#)

[Meeting Minutes: June 4, 2021 meeting](#)

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Contompasis called the meeting to order. He announced that simultaneous interpretation services were available in Spanish, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, 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.

June 11, 2021

Ms. Parvex called the roll. Ms. Aguirre and Ms. Waite were absent. Mr. Acevedo, Mr. Chernow, Dr. Freeman-Wisdom, and Ms. Sullivan arrived after roll call.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: JUNE 4, 2021

Approved – The Task Force approved unanimously the minutes of the June 4th, 2021 Exam Schools Admissions Task Force meeting.

DISCUSSION

Mr. Contompasis updated the Task Force members with the new dates for the upcoming meetings and said that the Co-Chairs would present an Exam Schools Admissions Task Force status update at the June 16th School Committee meeting. He also said that the Co-Chairs were hoping to present a set of recommendations at the June 30th School Committee meeting.

The members discussed the possible criterias for admissions. Dr. Tung reminded the members that grades were a better predictor of future academics than test scores, and that tests have a greater disparate impact than using grades alone, and that the members shouldn't choose the test just because it is uniform as uniform isn't always the fairest.

Mr. Contompasis summarized the eligibility criteria for the applicant pool. The first one was to use grade point average (GPA), with either English Language Arts (ELA) and math or adding more subjects, the use of an assessment and how to use it, also adding an essay, educator recommendation, and utilizing a lottery across the district.

Mr. Cregor said he would like to see a plan that fulfills their charge, results in meaningful neighborhood socioeconomic and racial diversity, within the bounds of the Constitution and Supreme Court precedent on the matter. He added that if a test was used, it should be as flexible as possible.

The members talked about whether GPA should be only for math and ELA or if it should include more subject matters.

Ms. Lum said they should be looking at an overall GPA and if the criteria is not an effective measure across schools, that is a district issue and a pipeline issue, not a Task Force issue. She thought the more variables included for the eligibility, the more fair the process would be. Mr. Contompasis said that the focus on ELA and math is because those two subjects are the ones that have been the most consistent across the grade levels in the district.

Mr. Acevedo said he believed it was essential that the Task Force arrived at a consensus and that the only way they could deliver a recommendation to the Boston School Committee that would result in a permanent and equitable admissions policy to the city's exam schools would be as expressed through the consensus of the Task Force.

June 11, 2021

Ms. Grassa said she thought there is always too much emphasis on just ELA and mathematics and this would be an opportunity for the district to bring value to other important subject areas. She also said she thought it would take away the emphasis of one teacher holding all the weight of a particular score and for kids to be able to shine in some different areas. Mr. Contompasis said that if students, due to the pandemic, were only submitting their 6th grade grades, maybe science and social studies could be added.

Dr. Tung asked if their recommendation could be a permanent one with a one year exception; the permanent one would be 5th grade, and the first half of 6th grade GPA, with added subjects. For the upcoming school year admission it would be just half of the 6th grade with all subjects. The members thought this was an acceptable idea.

Ms. Skerritt agreed with the suggestions of having two stages of a GPA, a one-year Covid provision, and a long-term policy. She suggested that there should be an analysis of the one-year results. so they could look at the data. Ms. Grassa reminded the members that there needs to be clear language whether they meant quarters or trimesters as different schools worked differently. Ms. Lum agreed with the proposal but she asked if they could look at the overall class rank from 5th grade for the permanent solution, adding the math and ELA in 6th grade.

Mr. Acevedo added that they shouldn't talk about two different sets of recommendations, but a multiphased permanent policy with an initial phase for the first year, and a longer phase which would be the permanent policy. Ms. Sullivan suggested they use the ELA and math grades of 5th grade and all the subject areas for 6th grade.

Mr. Contompasis wondered if they should ask the district to change the grading system for grade 5. Ms. Grassa summarized the work the district has been doing related to grading, saying there were ten pilot schools in the district working on a new grading system.

All of the members supported Ms. Sullivans suggestion.

Mr. Contompasis said they would recommend the use of either the quarters, or the first trimester, for the coming applicant pool which would include in 6th grade the addition of science and social studies to the ELA and math. For the second phase, they would take 5th grade ELA and math grades and in 6th grade they would take grades in the four subjects. They would recommend that the district revert from a number system to a letter system in grade 5.

Mr. Contompasis talked about the options around an assessment, suggesting that the MAP assessment could be used, either as an absolute score or an indicator or threshold, and if used for either it would be in a combination with the GPA. He said he believed the use of an assessment was essential and they would not only rely on GPA. He believed they should use an assessment in conjunction with the GPA. Ms. Skerritt asked those who did not want an assessment, what tool they would use to indicate that the students were performing at grade level as compared to state standards.

June 11, 2021

Ms. Sullivan said, referring to Dr. Shepard's presentation from May 21st, that based on the research and data, the best indicator in those processes is the GPA. She also said Dr. Shepard had said that research supports the use of an assessment, if it is best used, as a validator of what the GPA may tell, and not used as a tool. Ms. Sullivan also said that she was opposed to using an assessment that would be looking at an absolute score, specifically for the fall of 2021. She added that after the year the students had gone through it wouldn't be fair to the BPS students to give them a high stakes test in the fall. She also reminded the members that the NWEA said that the MAP test was intended to be used as a growth measure and not as a high stakes test.

Mr. Acevedo said that he had come to the conclusion they would have to use some kind of assessment and he thought it could be used as a normalizer. He said that if there were a practical way to introduce the NWEA as an indicator of growth that all students could take, that would be the best solution.

Mr. Contompassis explained the logistical problems with the NWEA for this upcoming year to be used as a growth measure; it would have to be taken twice during the fall and there was a time limit. He also said it would disadvantage the students from parochial and charter schools. He suggested that they use the MAP specifically for grade level standards for an absolute score or to determine an absolute minimum threshold that would be used to indicate the readiness to enter the eligibility pool, and the GPA, would then be used to rank the students, or they would use a lottery for this.

Mr. Acevedo suggested using a phased solution to the assessment. Ms. Lum agreed and observed they could use the MCAS as an absolute score for BPS and MAP for non-BPS students. For the second phase they could use MCAS for a grade level threshold and look at growth to demonstrate the students progress in addition to demonstrating their grade level achievement.

Ms. Grassa gave some context regarding the timing with the growth test and she also wanted to highlight that students could have significant growth and not be anywhere near grade level or have minimal growth and be off the charts.

Ms. Sullivan repeated her deep concern that she had in asking BPS students to sit for a test in the fall, knowing that they are not on the same playing field as students who have been in classrooms for the last year, and that it wasn't setting up their students for success.

Mr. Contompassis insisted in the need of an assessment, but thought that it could be used based on a threshold score, and then they could use the GPA, for purposes of choosing the students for the schools.

Dr. Freeman-Wisdom reiterated what Ms. Grassa had said, that you can have a high growth score, but not be on grade level, and a low growth score and be way above grade level. Therefore she believed that an assessment is needed to validate grade level readiness. Ms. Grassa added that under no circumstances could they use the MCAS scores for this year. Dr. Tung proposed a

June 11, 2021

minimum eligibility requirement to use GPA, MCAS proficiency, or the achievement part of MAP growth.

Ms. Sullivan was very adamant that BPS students should not sit for an assessment in fall 2021 competing for seats with kids who have been in private schools and other types of schools, since March of 2020 every day. Dr. Tung agreed with Ms. Sullivan and said that the Task Force risks going against its charge if it uses a cut score on a test for eligibility.

Mr. Contompassis said he had a third option to try to reach consensus. He proposed to look at the assessment to determine the grade level readiness of the students to get into the applicant pool. In addition, students who take the test, if they do not reach grade level equivalent on the threshold, and they do get grade level equivalent on the GPA, they enter the pool.

Mr. Cregor said that if there were to be an exam, it should not be administered until 2022 and he also suggested having a recommendation from a teacher of whether a student was ready for grade level work. Dr. Freeman-Wisdom said she wasn't opposed to having an assessment in the spring of 2022 instead of the fall of 2021 to give more time for students to get back into the rhythm of things.

The members talked about the grades of the student applicant pool this year and how the grades of the BPS students were not verified by the district. Ms. Sullivan said that was more of an operational issue and that she wanted to understand what the process will be for BPS to be ready to implement the recommendations, especially as it relates to verification of grades.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

- Suri Yang, West Roxbury resident, student, testified against only the use of a GPA for admissions criteria.
- Xiangguo Shi, parent, testified against the zip code criteria.
- Lisa Green, North End, BLS parent, Boston Coalition for Education Equity, read a statement on behalf of the Boston Coalition for Education Equity in favor of the continuation of the work of the Task Force.
- James Noonan, Roxbury resident, BPS parent, testified in favor of a change to the admissions policy.
- Peggy Wiesenber, Jamaica Plain resident, testified in favor of a lottery system of qualified applicants.
- Sharon Hinton, Hyde Park, Black Teachers Matter Inc, testified in favor of equitable changes to the exam school admissions.
- Domingos DaRosa, Hyde Park resident, At-Large City Council Candidate, testified in favor of the changes.
- Christina Jiang, West Roxbury resident, Joyce Kilmer K-8 School parent, testified in opposition to non merit-based exam school admission criteria.
- Rachel Miselman, BLS alumna, testified against the changes to exam school admissions.

**Exam Schools Admissions Task Force Remote Meeting
Zoom**

June 11, 2021

- Kevin Murray, Roslindale resident, executive director of Massachusetts Advocates for Children, testified in favor of equitable changes to the exam school admissions.
- Sharon Kunz, Roslindale resident, Hernandez K-8 School parent, testified against an assessment and in favor of a lottery.

CLOSING COMMENTS

The Co-Chairs thanked the members and public.

ADJOURN

At approximately 7:55 p.m., the Committee voted unanimously, by roll call, to adjourn the meeting.

Attest:



Lena Parvex
Administrative Assistant