



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

June 14, 2021

The Boston School Committee's Exam Schools Admissions Task Force held a remote meeting on June 14, 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; Katherine Grassa; Zena Lum; Zoe Nagasawa; Rachel Skerritt; Rosann Tung; and Tamara Waite.

Exam Schools Admissions Task Force Members Absent: Dr. Freeman-Wisdom.

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](#)

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.

Ms. Parvex called the roll. Dr. Freeman-Wisdom was absent. Mr. Chernow and Ms. Skerritt arrived after roll call.

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DISCUSSION

Mr. Contompasis stated that there were no minutes to approve. Ms. Roberts said there was no additional data to present at the meeting.

Mr. Contompasis thanked the members of the Task Force for reaching a verbal consensus at the June 11th meeting on the determination of the Grade Point Average (GPA) as a criteria for the applicant pool.

Ms. Sullivan suggested that the members should try to resolve the mechanism for invitations before the School Committee presentation on June 16th. She summarized the mechanisms they had on the table so far. The first was the 20% seat allocation citywide based on a straight ranking and then 80% seat allocation based on tiers or census tracts. The second option was a 20%-80% seat allocation but with the 80% being allocated based on census tracts. She also said they could consider the utilization of a lottery process based on a qualified pool of applicants.

Mr. Contompasis suggested thinking about the mechanism in phases, as they did for the GPA discussion. Mr. Acevedo said the discussion for mechanism should first be for fall of 2022.

Dr. Tung said she also wanted to keep sending schools grouped by Opportunity Index (OI) in the discussion, as it touched both requirements for geography and socioeconomic status (SES) diversity. She disagreed with the 20% city wide seat allocation in any mechanism as she believed it to be exclusionary. She added that the non-Boston Public Schools (BPS) should be put in their own grouping.

Ms. Skerritt commented that she didn't think charter schools with a more disadvantaged population should be in the same category as independent schools. She suggested reserving a certain number of seats for students from specifically economically disadvantaged schools. She said a certain percentage would be set aside for socioeconomic factors and the other percentage could continue with the tiers model for those seats and allocate them via ranking by tiers still using the census tracts, or using it in combination with some of the other models proposed.

Ms. Sullivan asked the members how they felt with respect to an allocation of seats for admissions year 22-23 and repeated the four different recommendations.

Option 1: Using the 20% citywide straight rank, 80% ranking within tiers or census tracts, with one census tract for Department of Children and Families (DCF), students suffering from housing fragility and those in Boston Housing Authority (BHA).

Option 2: Qualified lottery.

Option 3: Allocation of seats based on students' ranking in their schools. These schools would be grouped by their socioeconomic index.

Option 4: Allocation of seats that would include tier allocation by straight rank and an economic set aside of seats.

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Ms. Sullivan said that one of the issues with a straight citywide lottery is that it wouldn't address the geographic diversity factor, so she thought it should be in some grouping like tiers or census tract.

Mr. Chernow wanted to know what the lottery would look like. Ms. Grassa explained that she originally thought if they used 20% straight rank, the remaining 80% would be a lottery.

Dr. Tung said her proposal was that once a student was eligible, they would get "a ball in the basket," and for every category of added challenge, the student would get an extra ball in the lottery. The 100% of seats would be allocated but they would be proportionate to the grouping, whether it's sending school, census tract, or tiers.

Mr. Acevedo expressed his concern with a lottery as it seemed very arbitrary and he felt it wasn't fair to the community to do something in the name of equity when the mechanism was a lottery, and he thought there were other ways to reach racial and economic diversity. Ms. Aguirre agreed with Mr. Acevedo and said if they were adding extra balls to the basket for qualifiers, then it wasn't a lottery anymore. She thought that if they were going to add qualifiers they might as well go with other models like SES, tiers, etc. as the other models would do a better job at achieving their goal. Mr. Chernow responded that it wouldn't be arbitrary if all students in the pool had demonstrated that they were performing at grade level.

Ms. Lum also expressed hesitation around the lottery, specifically speaking as a parent as there was a feeling of lack of transparency and it was hard to understand, even though it's probably a very simple process. She emphasized the importance of being thoughtful and transparent about their considerations.

Ms. Skerritt agreed that from a parent perspective, a lottery system would feel random and said that she could only see potential of the lottery in the order the invited students might choose their schools. Mr. Contompasis said he also opposed the 100% lottery proposal.

Ms. Lum talked about the possibility of opening up the unclaimed seats and assigning those seats in a lottery.

Dr. Tung agreed with the need for transparency and an easy process. She said that they were working towards justice, which meant breaking down the structures that maintain inequities, which exam schools did. Therefore she believed that they should use the lottery as it mitigates gaming the system and stereotype threat faced by some students.

Ms. Sullivan asked if they could get some consensus around the 20%-80% as one of the proposals for the School Committee presentation. All members agreed and she confirmed that it would be one of the ideas to present at the meeting. She then said the three remaining proposals all involved some form of lottery. She said they needed to talk about the proposal of the top -yet to be determined- percentage of students in each grouping of schools by socioeconomic status.

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Ms. Skerritt said she didn't understand the implementation of a top X percent, and thought they could arrive at a similar diversity of neighborhood school type if they maintained rank and had a number of seats by groupings. She also responded to Dr. Tung's comment and said she thought it was against their charge of the Task Force to address the existence of the exam schools as they are currently structured. She also said they had demonstrated through the one-year admissions policy that they could have a more diverse student body through their work.

Ms. Sullivan said she did appreciate knowing the members' philosophical stance on this matter as it helped her understand their thinking and proposals.

Mr. Contompasis added that the Task Force was charged with ensuring that as many students as possible have access to the exam school, not dismantling them.

Ms. Sullivan continued talking about the mechanism recommendation of the top X percent of students and said that the top X of their applicant pool from their sending school would receive an invitation to an exam school. In order to address the concern about smaller schools or smaller classes, there could be grouping of schools.

Ms. Sullivan asked the members if they were comfortable with the Co-Chairs including a lottery as part of their presentation for the School Committee. Mr. Contompasis, Ms. Skerritt, Mr. Acevedo, and Ms. Aguirre objected but as the majority didn't object, the Co-Chairs decided to include the lottery as a proposal.

Ms. Sullivan then suggested that there were two ways of including the lottery. One was part of the initial seat allocation process, which would be a straight allocation based on the qualifying pool. The second option was a lottery within tiers, tracts or another grouping.

Mr. Chernow stated he would prefer lottery within some sort of grouping as it would help provide neighborhood diversity. Mr. Acevedo also agreed with the second option.

The members discussed the difference between lottery for selection versus lottery for assignment, and Ms. Lum said she would be open to a lottery for assignment. Ms. Skerritt clarified that she was talking about the lottery for assignment, and not for selection.

Ms. Sullivan said they would present a qualified lottery with tiers or groupings as a proposal for the School Committee presentation. The members agreed.

For the third proposal, Ms. Sullivan talked about a yet-to-be-determined percentage or some sort of set aside for socioeconomic status.

Mr. Acevedo said that if they could achieve constitutional muster for some sort of socioeconomic race-neutral set aside, he would prefer that, as BPS had such a diversity of sending schools. Ms. Sullivan asked Michael Keating, the legal counsel, to have his team look into whether using a socioeconomic set aside would be legally permissible. Mr. Keating responded that they would look into it.

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Ms. Lum asked if the set aside was in combination with a 80%-20% rank or if they were looking at the set aside as 20% set aside for socioeconomic considerations and then 80% straight rank by tier. Ms. Skerritt said there were different ways of doing it, like ranking the entire applicant pool and filling the economic set aside seats first, and then going to the tiers or the model chosen.

Mr. Contompasis suggested that it would be easier to do the tier selection by rank order for a certain percentage and for the second percentage to be determined at each tier by lottery.

Ms. Sullivan said that what she understood from the members was to present the following:
Option 1: 20% allocated citywide based on straight rank and 80% allocated by tiers straight rank.
Option 2: 20% allocated straight rank citywide and 80% allocated within tiers by lottery
Option 3: Hybrid model: 20% allocated citywide straight rank, 80% breaking down in tiers, with 70% of the seats allocated straight rank and 30% allocated by lottery.

Ms. Skerritt added any of the three models could be chosen to do a citywide pull out.

Ms. Sullivan asked the members if they had consensus on presenting these ideas. The members agreed.

Ms. Sullivan summarized what the members had consensus on: mechanisms for seat allocation; GPA; and including 10 points to students who attend a high poverty school.

She said they still had open to discuss assessment, absolute score versus growth, and also additional factors as educator validation, etc. She asked the members if they could arrive at a consensus about not using grades alone as criteria and would look into other qualifying factors. Dr. Tung said she didn't know as she didn't know the additional factors. None of the other members objected.

Ms. Sullivan said they still needed to determine what the additional criteria would be. These factors could be assessment, educator validation, students work as an essay, writing sample, video, etc.

She finished by saying that after the School Committee meeting on June 16th, the Task Force would continue the work and have opportunities to hear from the public to help them arrive at a final recommendation for the Committee's consideration.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

- Suri Yang, West Roxbury resident, student, testified against the use of a growth for admissions criteria.
- Tiffany Luo, Allston resident, Boston Latin School (BLS) student, testified in favor of a change to the admissions policy.

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Zoom**

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- Shery Keleher, Charlestown resident, BPS parent, testified against changes to the exam school admissions.
- Derun Li, West Roxbury resident, testified against the use of tiers and lottery in admissions.
- Steve Yang, West Roxbury resident, parent, testified against the use of growth for admissions criteria.
- Eric Shi, BPS parent, testified against the use of lottery.
- Nora McManus Vincent, West Roxbury resident, Bates Elementary School parent, testified against the use of standardized testing.
- Weimin Zhao, West Roxbury resident, BLS parent, testified against the use of a lottery.
- Shirley Chen Weng, Brighton resident, Josiah Quincy Elementary School (JQES) parent, testified in favor of an exam and GPA for the exam schools.
- Jodie Cen, Charlestown resident, parent, testified in favor of an exam.

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