



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

June 29, 2021

The Boston School Committee's Exam Schools Admissions Task Force held a remote meeting on June 29, 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; Tanya Freeman-Wisdom; Katherine Grassa; Zena Lum; Samuel Acevedo; Rachel Skerritt; Rosann Tung; and Tamara Waite.

Exam Schools Admissions Task Force Members Absent: None.

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, Somali, 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.

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Ms. Parvex called the roll. Mr. Chernow, Dr. Freeman-Wisdom, Ms. Skerritt, Ms. Sullivan, and Ms. Waite arrived after roll call. All other members were present.

DISCUSSION

Ms. Hogan summarized their discussion from the day before, Monday June 28th. The members helped by adding information that was missing.

Ms. Sullivan said that the Co-Chairs had received much feedback about the mechanism of seat allocation of 100% of the seats by straight rank within census tract tiers, as there was a desire by some to have a 20% citywide seat aside. She opened it up for discussion.

Mr. Cregor said he didn't think that there shouldn't be a division between students. On the other hand, he agreed that the 20%-80% split could show in court that the plan was fundamentally not tied to race, or any other identity.

Mr. Acevedo said that even if he voted for the 100% seat allocations, he would agree with the 20%-80% split as it was a safe decision. Dr. Tung agreed that the 20%-80% split moved them towards their goal but that they could do better.

Ms. Sullivan repeated that it was clear what the 20% of seats represented and she was not comfortable knowing that it was really about high income, one neighborhood, and one certain racial demographic. She also said that if they were going to leave the 20% citywide seats for those who wanted to maintain the status quo, she believed the Task Force should mitigate against the harm that it would cause to some of the most vulnerable students.

Ms. Skerritt said that she thought that with the high poverty indicator and the size of the tiers, the highest ranking students would probably get access either way.

Mr. Contompassis suggested that if they went with the 20%-80%, they should have a poverty indicator of 10 points for every student that attended a school with a poverty rate of 50% or higher. Students that were homeless, in the Department of Children and Families (DCF), or in Boston Housing Authority (BHA) should get an additional five points.

The members engaged in a robust discussion regarding the proposal.

Mr. Cregor summarized "*Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*" and explained the legal implications of this court decision on the work of the Task Force. He said he thought the plan, even with the 100% seats assignment, had a good legal standing as the plan was not tied to race or a specific neighborhood. He added that they had arrived at a consensus as a group which was incredibly valuable.

Ms. Sullivan said that there were people who didn't want the Task Force to succeed, and as a daughter and beneficiary of the civil rights movement she knew this was nothing new and they

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could not be deterred. She made clear that the 20% conversation was political and it was very clear who it benefited. She said that she could get to the 20% but not without some sort of mitigating factor, which could be the 15 points that Mr. Contompasis suggested. She repeated the idea of a 20%-80% seat assignment with a 15 point upward indicator for students who are homeless, in DCF custody, or living in BHA housing, as that would give the most vulnerable students a fighting chance to access the 20%.

Mr. Contompasis told the members that there could be a negative impact on the district if they didn't include the 20% citywide seat assignment. He added that the Co-Chairs realized this was a decision for the greater good. He also said that adding the points to the most vulnerable population in BPS would give them an opportunity to at least make it into the 20% portion.

Ms. Lum said that if the political ramifications of the policy decision rested more with the School Committee than the Task Force, they should let the School Committee decide and not the Task Force.

Mr. Cregor said the Task Force would present a proposal to the School Committee showing they had listened and incorporated feedback from the student and community listening sessions and public comment. This proposal would show the work and reflection the Task Force members had done. He said he could support the new model that was proposed and he thought that what the Task Force had done was substantial and recognized it was done with a vision of the leadership of the NAACP on matters of securing educational equity for all of the youth in Boston.

Ms. Lum stated for the record that she wanted to make sure they didn't miss the opportunity to push the envelope a little bit more on the systemic structures that they were trying to overcome.

Mr. Chernow expressed confusion on how the system worked as he thought it was the members of the Task Force who made the decision and he wondered where the anonymous backlash came from in the past 24 hours.

Dr. Freeman-Wisdom said she felt uncomfortable knowing there were outside powers making their decision. She also expressed her frustration with the test grade scores of the BPS students.

Ms. Skerritt proposed to discuss the 2022-2023 school year and she proposed the same model as for 2023-2024 minus the assessment. All members agreed with this proposal.

Dr. Tung proposed the following additional suggestions to the recommendation: to provide all information about the new admissions policy in all the native languages, both online and in print; annual monitoring of applicants, invitees, enrollees disaggregated by group and by sending school; and also school climate and mental health surveys of students. She also said she would like research comparing the cohorts from 2020 onward.

Mr. Cregor suggested using the five-year average of student enrollment so that parents, students, and others know what to expect of how their school is considered.

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Mr. Contompasis added a three-to-five year review. Ms. Nagasawa suggested including more students to a future Task Force, specifically non-exam school students.

Ms. Sullivan said that these suggestions were in addition to the support for admitted students during summer, as well as investments in English Language Arts (ELA) and math in elementary grade levels to tackle the readiness and access to rigor for BPS students.

Ms. Skerritt added for BPS to consider the effects of adjustments to grading policy and their impact. Ms. Grassa suggested having elementary and high school teachers in a future Task Force.

Ms. Contompasis once again urged the members to reach a consensus for the 20% citywide seats.

Ms. Aguirre acknowledged the amount of work they had done, and expressed sadness that after arriving at a consensus they had to go back on their decision, but that she trusted the Co-Chairs in their recommendation.

The members went through the recommendations and discussed the point system.

Ms. Aguirre asked about students that moved from a high poverty to a low poverty school. The members decided that the school will be determined based on which school submits the report card for the student, either in 5th or 6th grade.

Ms. Sullivan asked if the Co-Chairs could present a recommendation on behalf of the Task Force, of 70%-30% on the mechanism, 20%-80% seat allocation straight rank, with 10 points for students attending high poverty school, or 15 points for DCF, homeless, and BHA students.

Mr. Cregor agreed. Dr. Tung objected saying she as an advocate and activist could not bow to political pressure. Dr. Freeman-Wisdom, Mr. Chernow, and Ms. Nagasawa also objected.

Ms. Aguirre said she leaned towards an objection but hesitated due to the political consequences. She also wondered what the consequences would be if they recommended the 100%.

Ms. Sullivan explained the process of the recommendation and of the School Committee approving a policy.

Ms. Lum wondered why the 100% was off the table and Mr. Contompasis said that both Co-Chairs had made every effort to explain the difficulty with that proposal.

The members talked about the possibility of giving the School Committee two recommendations. Dr. Tung reminded the members that if the School Committee received the two recommendations and didn't make a decision, the policy would default to the pre-pandemic policy.

Ms. Aguirre said that she was bothered by the fact that the 20%-80% was imposed on the Task Force after they had arrived at a consensus after hours of public meetings.

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Ms. Sullivan said that they had to make the best decision to meet the charge, and said that whether it was the 100% or the 20%-80% they were moving the district forward, creating more opportunities for more Boston kids, and helping to strengthen the schools and therefore she did think they were meeting their charge.

Ms. Grassa said she was uncomfortable with this proposal but said that she was foremost thinking of the children, and if the recommendation didn't pass and reverted back to the pre-Covid policy, it would have negative consequences for the children. For these reasons, she was in favor of the proposed recommendation. Several members agreed with Ms. Grassa.

Mr. Contompasis thanked all the members and expressed his deep appreciation for their comments. He acknowledged their frustration but asked them to put their trust in what the Co-Chairs were trying to achieve.

Mr. Cregor said that the City was asking the members to deliberate publicly on Zoom in compliance with the Open Meeting Laws for hours at a time just to have local elected officials weighing in, and that they should be ashamed of themselves for playing Boston politics without breaking any laws while putting all the responsibility on the Task Force. He said it needed to be on the record that you could not demand people to give up their work and family time, be subjected to all kinds of criticism, and then feel good about it.

Ms. Lum asked what the ramifications would be of recommending the 100% allocation of the seats. Mr. Contompasis answered that the ramifications were something they would not want to see. He asked those who had objected if they had changed their minds.

Ms. Sullivan told the members to help them achieve the task set before them and she was not asking the members to agree to the policy recommendation, but to allow the Co-Chairs to present it to the School Committee on behalf of the Task Force.

Ms. Aguirre said the recommendation was good but could have been better. She wanted it to be on the record that members were not comfortable with the last minute political pressure that had been put on the Task Force.

Mr. Acevedo said that in the situation they were facing a zero sum between not advancing the work of the Task Force and meeting their charge imperfectly. He preferred to give permission to do right by the kids.

Dr. Tung said that being in the minority, she didn't have the power to stand in the way of the recommendation to be presented and asked for the possibility to share her dissenting opinion at the School Committee meeting. Mr. Contompasis said they would convey the message to the Superintendent.

Mr. Chernow also objected and said he felt that consensus didn't matter anymore, as the opinions of those not in the Task Force had overpowered the opinion of the group, and was now driving their decision. He also said he didn't mind being part of the minority dissenting opinion.

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Ms. Nagasawa said she respected that the proposed policy was going to be the recommendation and she did think it would be a step forward, but for the record, she wanted to stay opposed and she understood that her dissent was symbolic.

Dr. Freeman-Wisdom said her opinion hadn't changed.

Ms. Sullivan concluded that they would present the recommendation and also make sure there was an opportunity for a statement capturing the objections. She also said it was important to make clear that the recommendation exceeded the charge and would help the district and the City to move forward toward greater inclusion and opportunity.

Mr. Contompasis concurred and said they had completed their task. He thanked everyone for being part of the process, for putting in their time, and having the courage to suggest something that needed improvement. He encouraged the members to remain vigilant to see that the work and recommendations were sustained and improved upon as it was the right thing to do.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

- Mimi Lai, Roslindale resident, Henry Grew Elementary School parent, testified in favor of extra points for high poverty schools and BHA housing, the Chicago Census Tract Model, and no lottery.
- Cindy Tower-Loewen, Marblehead resident, Racial Justice Team, Marblehead Special Education Parents Advisory Council, member of the NAACP Boston Branch, thanked the Task Force members for their work.

CLOSING COMMENTS

The Co-chairs thanked the members and the public. Ms. Sullivan asked the members if they had any last words before the end of the meeting. Ms. Lum said that she wanted it to be on the record that the members had reached consensus and that consensus was taken away from them.

Dr. Tung took the opportunity to share some of the framework she operated on as she felt she needed to be understood on her positions. She expressed that they needed both equity and justice solutions, and equity solutions addressed access and opportunity while justice solutions addressed the root cause of inequity. This was the reason she would support any recommendation that includes either no test or a lottery or both as all the other options improved upon equity, but maintained the root cause of injustice.

Mr. Chernow said it had been an honor to be part of the Task Force. He said that for the sake of transparency, he wanted to make it clear that they did not have full consensus the day before as he was not fully on board with the plan. He said he had issues with testing and how it worked in the level of systemic oppression and racism in the country that goes beyond just the school

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system so he could not in good conscience support either recommendations. He finished by saying that he appreciated the dialogue and learning experience this brought him.

Mr. Contompasis wished the students well.

Mr. Cregor thanked the Co-Chairs, the members, the interpreters and the staff. Ms. Sullivan thanked the members for their partnership, leadership and their commitment to their children and the City. She also thanked the interpreters, Ms. Parvex, Ms. Hogan, Ms. Roberts, and Boston Planning & Development Agency (BPDA) for their support.

She concluded by saying that she believed they had done good work and she was hopeful it would serve as a catalyst for additional work that needs to happen in BPS.

ADJOURN

At approximately 8:33 p.m., the Committee voted unanimously, by roll call, to adjourn the meeting.

Attest:



Lena Parvex
Administrative Assistant