



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

June 4, 2021

The Boston School Committee's Exam Schools Admissions Task Force held a remote meeting on June 4, 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; Zena Lum; Zoe Nagasawa; Rachel Skerritt; Rosann Tung; and Tamara Waite.

Exam Schools Admissions Task Force Members Absent: Katherine Grassa; and Tanya 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](#)

[Meeting Minutes: May 28, 2021 meeting](#)

[Presentation: Exam School Task Force: Follow Up on Census Tract Tiers](#)

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

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: MAY 28, 2021

Approved – The Task Force approved the minutes of the May 28th, 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 follow up on census tract tiers. She said she thought that there was a consensus around eight tiers and proportionality to children in grades 5-8. She also said there was a wish for the tiers to be more evenly sized. She presented four different options for the members. She also presented a race neutral version of the index of concentration at the extremes (high income households versus low income households). Ms. Sullivan asked if it was possible to convert all the maps with the neighborhoods written out. The members then proceeded to look at the data from the overall comparison of tier options. Mr. Chernow commented that, according to the data, it looked like the more privileged the student, the more likely a student would be invited.

Ms. Hogan presented the simulation set 1: 20% distributed citywide, 80% distributed by tier and the simulation set 2: 100% distributed by tier. The simulations were by economic status, by zip code, and by race.

Dr. Tung pointed out that this was at least the third time the members had seen data that showed that allocating 20% citywide contributed to inequity and thought they shouldn't be talking about allocating 20%-80% .

Mr. Contompassis mentioned that they shouldn't disregard achievement and that the 20% reflected the students who may have played by the rules. Ms. Sullivan said the data showed that the majority of the 20% were overwhelmingly white and wealthy. Mr. Chernow added that it was hard to talk about achievement without speaking to the context of the city of Boston in the context of structural racism.

Dr. Tung added that the terms hard working, deserving, and playing by the rules, were terms that had been used repeatedly with the implication that the highest scoring students were more hard working and deserving than other students, despite many studies that showed that selection is a measure of family income and education level, rather than merit.

Dr. Tung added that she thought they should use the census tract as the basis for the selection to keep the neighborhood diversity, and not tiers. Ms. Sullivan added that if they used the census tract instead of zip codes, they might not only maintain the diversity that they obtained from the interim policy, but also solve for the socio-economic challenge. She added that with the interim plan, more students from different neighborhoods across the city were invited to the exam schools, and for her that was a win. She continued saying that this was a win for different reasons, first, as these were citywide schools, they were supposed to have students from all neighborhoods, secondly, because it was well known that kids learning from other kids from different neighborhoods enriches the educational experience, and finally, because it was important to break down, at an early age, the neighborhood siloes in Boston.

Mr. Acevedo also mentioned the importance of maintaining the neighborhood diversity that the working group had achieved through the interim policy and that with the data shown in the simulations, using tiers, or geocodes, they could also increase the socioeconomic diversity. He mentioned that even with the 20%-80% approach, they saw an increase in diversity. Ms. Sullivan observed that she was never settled with the 20%-80% when they were a working group as that still preserved elitism.

Mr. Cregor reminded the members that the working group settled on the 20%-80% because they knew that there would be neighborhoods where there would be very few students potentially admitted, and the 20% allowed for the opportunity to help correct that cut.

Ms. Sullivan asked the members to discuss how they would create the pool. She said that pre-pandemic, there were only two factors; assessment and Grade Point Average (GPA), but that the members had heard many additional factors like educator recommendations, essays, portfolios, etc. She said there were members with opposite views on a possible assessment and that they would have to arrive at a consensus, as that was the most healthy for the city. She also gave an overview of the calendar for the upcoming weeks and told the members that the Co-Chairs would present a status update to the School Committee at their next meeting scheduled for June 9. They would present two-to-three recommendations on qualifiers to the pool for consideration, and two-to-three recommendations on mechanisms for seat allocation. She also mentioned that there would be two listening sessions held jointly with the School Committee to hear reactions specifically to what they present and that they would present their recommendations to the School Committee at its second meeting in June.

Ms. Sullivan gave an overview of the different possibilities for assessments; MCAS, MAP growth and also MAP used as an achievement measure.

Mr. Acevedo said he would be interested in using the MAP as a growth indicator, requiring the administration of the MAP at least twice, especially as the NWEA recommended it be used as a growth tool rather than an assessment. Ms. Lum said she wasn't opposed to an assessment, but she wanted to push the use of a more comprehensive GPA than just in ELA and math.

Mr. Cregor stated that he wasn't opposed to an exam but he wanted it to be as unburdensome as possible. He said that if a student had MCAS scores that showed they were performing at or

above grade level, those could be used instead of MAP growth, and if a student had the scores in the MAP growth they should use that without the MCAS. He also said he was open to hearing how to incorporate growth in addition to achievement as an additional way to demonstrate the students' preparedness to participate in the exam schools. He concluded that he thought their charge was to remove barriers to give educational opportunities and if they would administer an exam, it should be done in any manner that can most eliminate those barriers.

Mr. Chernow said he was opposed to using an assessment for admissions to the exam schools as it continued to uphold systemic racism, and it was time for the Task Force to make some radical change. He finished by quoting Dr. Ibrim X. Kendi, saying "standardized tests have become the most effective racist weapon ever devised to objectively degrade black minds and legally exclude their bodies."

Ms. Aguirre said she was not opposed to having an assessment and asked if non-BPS students could take the MCAS.

Mr. Contompasis said that in order for the MAP test to be used to determine growth, the district would have to be mandated to give that test across all of the grades and across all of the schools and he didn't know how that would work for non-BPS students. He also reminded the members that the MCAS was not given last year. He also said they would have to reach consensus on having an assessment and how they would use the results of an assessment for this coming entering group a year from September.

Ms. Skerritt said that the school leaders like Dr. Freeman-Wisdom, Ms. Grassa, and herself were all in favor of an assessment. She said it felt defeatist to think that the only way to get a diverse community in the exam schools is to accept that they would have to take an exam off the table, because there's no way to compete with the prep industry in Boston. She added there was nothing wrong with the test takers, but the test was reflective of the preparation of the students.

Ms. Nagasawa said she was open to giving an assessment or not. She thought GPA should not be the sole measure of academic achievement because of the pressure put on teachers and if they could find an option that does not use a test but includes some other factor, she would be fine with it. She also said she would be open to using the MAP growth.

Ms. Sullivan asked if there was any scenario in which the members would accept a proposal that included an assessment. Mr. Chernow said he was willing to hear other perspectives and other suggestions that may involve a test. Dr. Tung said she could not support the use of a test given their charge and the history of generations of exclusion.

Ms. Sullivan said she struggled with reinforcing systems of oppression. She also mentioned that she was concerned about significantly disadvantaged BPS students by asking them to take one high stakes test after a very difficult pandemic year. She said they could use the MAP growth and/or maybe as an achievement option, including factors like educator recommendation, essays, or videos from the student. She also thought of using 6th grade grades in the first term or first quarter in math, ELA, social studies and science. She said she was trying to use more factors to

get “closer to the student” and give them more opportunities to demonstrate their brilliance and their potential, while recognizing that all of these factors in one way or another, are problematic. She concluded by saying that they would present two proposals with assessment and one without an assessment and asked the members if there was an objection to these proposals. There was none.

Ms. Skerritt asked that when this was to be presented to the School Committee, she thought it would be important to accompany all the scenarios with the operations involved as it would be necessary to understand the scope and personnel that would be needed to execute the different scenarios

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

- Yufang Rong, West Roxbury resident, Boston Latin School (BLS) parent, testified against lottery or geographic measures as admission criteria.
- Mei Yu, Roxbury resident, Josiah Quincy Elementary School (JQES) parent, testified against zip code as admissions criteria.
- Stuart Wang, Jamaica Plain resident, parent, testified against lottery or geographical measures as admission criteria.
- Jingsong Cao, West Roxbury resident, Boston Public School (BPS) parent, testified in favor postponing the timeline and vote of the Task Force.
- Steve Yang, West Roxbury resident, parent, testified in favor of an exam for admission criteria.
- Kelly Wang, South End resident, District English Learner Advisory Committee (DELAC), testified in favor of an exam and GPA for admissions criteria.
- Leah Wu, Charlestown resident, JQES parent, testified in favor of an exam.
- Jodie Cen, Charlestown resident, JQES parent, testified in favor of an exam.
- Shirley Weng, Brighton resident, JQES parent, testified against the zip code as admissions criteria.
- Xiuzhen Lin, South Boston resident, JQES parent, testified against zip code and lottery as admissions criteria.
- Jenny Xie, Brighton resident, parent testified in against zip code and lottery as admissions criteria.
- Kelly Liao, Chinatown resident, parent, testified in favor of an exam and GPA as admissions criteria.

CLOSING COMMENTS

The Co-Chairs thanked the members and public.

ADJOURN

Exam Schools Admissions Task Force Remote Meeting
Zoom
June 4, 2021

At approximately 8:30 p.m., the Committee voted unanimously, by roll call, to adjourn the meeting.

Attest:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lena Parvex". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Lena Parvex
Administrative Assistant