

Notes from ESSER Student Commission Meeting 3

August 12, 2021 from 5:00pm-6:00pm

Facilitated by Charles Paige with Brenda Cassellius, Eva Mitchell, and Maggie Riddell

Student Commission Participants:

- Nicholas Tavarez - Excel, 11th grade
- Choice McCarty - BAA
- Dorion Levy - BCLA 10th grader, West Roxbury.
- Elijah Holmes - 10th grade, south end.
- Eryn Hersheson - BLS, 12th grade, Dorchester
- Kevin Zhong - 10th grade at BLS, Brighton
- Preston Tran

Headlines:

- **Fieldwork & getting out into the community and the outdoors to learn**

Q&A with the Superintendent

- **Nicholas:** You said we're going to spend \$125M/year, but we usually spend \$1.4B - have there been budget cuts?
 - BC: No, this \$400M is on top of our regular operating budget. Most of our funding comes from the City of Boston plus some from the State and the Federal government.
 - N: I'd like to see investments in financial literacy courses. It should be mandatory.
 - BC: if you're really interested in that, you should try to put it into graduation requirements. We just passed our first ever graduation requirements, called MassCore. You could push this as a policy that could go to the Youth Cabinet or BSAC to vet the policy, cost it out, and get a survey of other students' interest as a requirement or an elective. Ultimately, the School Committee would need to change the policy. We could offer financial literacy courses as an elective without a policy change. I really want to have a district wide course catalog and that would help us know which schools offer financial literacy already. An option to explore is if schools could offer it online to expand access to other schools?
- **Kevin:** What steps is BPS taking to diversity our curriculum more, especially in English courses? In three years of ELA at BLS, I have only read one book about Asian American history. New books?
 - BC: Very important and motivating to have students be able to see themselves in the curriculum. We're looking at Ethnic Studies courses. Our new Deputy of Academics is going to take a deep dive on making sure our curriculum is linguistically and culturally representative of our students.
 - K: Also, how is BPS prioritizing mental health and guidance counselors? Especially in schools that have less strong programs.
 - BC: we added at least one social worker to every school and also a family liaison and the prior two years we added nurses. This team will work to identify and support students who have a mental health services need. We also have some requests on adding 9th grade counselors to our secondary schools to provide additional support with academic learning and connect them to tutoring, mentoring, credit recovery, or other courses. Do you think that would be of value?
- **One Suggestion**
 - Choice: more student bonding and programs that help students get more connected with each other because for me personally, it's easier for me to talk to my peers than adults. Overall, even throughout the grades, I've seen and heard (BAA) that we really miss each other doing our art in person - the bonding that comes from shared passion and interest. I'd like to see more socializing and bonding.
 - BC: the more you can be connected to your community, you're more motivated to come to school or work.
 - Eryn: Several points

- Professional sex or health ed people who can come talk to us about it. Right now, we have the gym teachers doing it and they're barely or not at all doing it and that's really important for us to feel comfortable in our bodies.
- Maybe have the teachers complete some training courses on how to deal with trauma or uncomfortable topics to better talk to students about it.
- I also see a lot of food waste. I know there's recycling, composting could get messy, but it's hard to see that waste. (BLS, senior, Dorchester).
- At BLS, they do a good job of having outside opportunities like I'm doing a summer internship and it's been great. They make the options really well known to students and I want that to be going on in every school. I really miss field trips - I haven't had any in high school and they were great for bonding, meeting new people who have jobs you maybe didn't know existed which I love. I'm also passionate about the arts - offering a wider range of arts would be good. I know it's not seen as important as other things in school but it's really important to me. Working at the Gardner Museum and something we're doing is a program that's partnering with schools for teachers to learn visual thinking strategies - having student centered discussions. It's a really great way to teach students confidence in themselves and show that their thoughts are valuable.
 - BC: These are all really good suggestions. Thanks for sharing. We really want to lift up your voices since you're the recipients of this funding - want to be sure it's going to impact your lives in a meaningful way.
- Elijah - 10th grade, south end. SHould teach us how to pay bills and about housing and taxes. They don't really teach us stuff like that and that's the main thing we need to learn because we'll need that in life.
 - Eva: That's part of financial literacy. "Adulting" is another word I hear a lot - how do you do life planning? Do you mean more on the money stuff or the money plus, sort of adulting?
 - E: Yes - both.
 - Dorian: my school does financial literacy - budgeting, finding an apartment, house, mortgage, credit card debt. I really like the idea of all schools having that.
- Preston:
- Dorian: BCLA 10th grader, West Roxbury. I think more of 21st century learning equipment - new updated technology, books that have more info about current events like the pandemic. More resources, gym equipment, all that 21st century kind of thing.

Engagement Activities: What would you like to see in your schools? For example, should it be a game? Discussion? Voting?

- Next Step: Charles will create options based on input from the group
- Ideas from the Group
 - Dorians: check-ins with students and teachers from heads of schools. Student bonding came up before and also with teachers and school staff - building those relationships and a community. People will be able to come together and advocate for what they need for their school when that happens.
 - Choice: being able to go out and connect with our environment more - it's getting kind of weird and wild with the wildfires. As people living on this planet, and having to interact with the environment, I'm finding it important to see where we live nad where we are and learn how to actually take care of it to prevent things like forest fires and flooding. Imagination and creativity stem from experience and being relaxed overall. I'd like to see more outings (not field trips - they're super expensive) but walks around the neighborhood and not feel trapped in a school building. Outdoor learning and experiencing that can help us when it come sto learning, especially with passive absorption. That'll also help with student bonding.
 - Eva: unpacking these rich experiences outside the classroom. I heard you say it's more engaging, social-emotional learning/bonding experience, more relevant and connected to your community and your life. "Field Work" rather than "class work" - going out into the community or an outdoor space and learning about that environment with intentionality. Or "Place-based education", "project-based learning" or "problem-based learning"
 - Choice: yes, that resonates. I've heard my mom say that. She's a teacher. That will also help people know when they're going to use their learnin g- NOW!
 - Maybe some cross-school visits to learn about the experience of other students.

- Preston: Something that I'd really like is a chance for students to teach the rest of the class in some sort of way. To exhibit their knowledge in some sort of subject. It can be a bit mundane to have the same person teaching you everyday in the same way. Offering different perspectives from students would be pretty unique and add more excitement to the classroom. I would prefer seeing that. The small number of times I've done something like that, it's made me really excited. I love sharing my knowledge and I bet other students would too.
 - Eva: That resonates with "adulting" like we talked about earlier - making the world bigger than one classroom and being more connected to places and people outside of the K-12 experience. Seeing the future.
- Kevin: it's important to connect our learning to the real world and what you might do outside of school. Like geometry connected to building something or history helping us solve present and future problems. Instead of just learning about something to memorize facts.
- Eryn: My ideas are kind of unfinished. Over remote learning, we had some mandatory meetings that had to do with relevant social issues - I think we should continue them. We tend to not do them in person. Having that opportunity to discuss with each other and spread awareness about issues where there aren't any wrong answers or shaming. I like what Choice was saying about going outside - that's become so key in the pandemic. It can be really hard to focus when you're sitting still all day. Field trips or outdoor learning time, even going to some parks and learning about how they upkeep parks and restore nature. Also some arts-centered projects like writing or visual arts provide a way to self-reflect, share, and express themselves. I also like the idea of checking in with your classmates and teachers everyday about how you're feeling and if we feel ready to learn about X today. Making sure to take breaks too - that can be really helpful. In ES, the older kids could read to the younger kids - more opportunities for the class to bond by helping out younger students would be really cool. I don't know what's going on in different schools and we all need a better sense of what's working and what's not - visiting schools and companies is really important if we're going to change things. Seeing what jobs are possible this summer has been so fun. I've been learning so much to prepare me to the real world. When you're a kid and have playtime in school, I want that for us high schoolers too!
- Elijah: there should be more field trips. Like if we're doing a project about animals, we should go to a zoo or aquarium to help us learn while we're there. Also more access to have paying jobs
- Field trips was the most selected answer on the ESSER Student Commission applications!