



OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE'S OPPORTUNITY AND ACHIEVEMENT GAPS TASK FORCE

December 15, 2015

The Boston School Committee's Opportunity and Achievement Gaps Task Force held a meeting on December 15, 2015 at 4 p.m. at the Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building, Roxbury Innovation Center, 2300 Washington Street, Roxbury, Massachusetts. For more information about any of the items listed below, visit www.bostonpublicschools.org, email feedback@bostonpublicschools.org or call the Boston School Committee Office at (617) 635-9014.

ATTENDANCE

Task Force Members Present: Co-Chair Sam Acevedo; Co-Chair Jeri Robinson; Co-Chair Ayele Shakur; Jennifer Aponte; Heshan Berents-Weeramuni; Dr. Carroll Blake; Dr. Hardin Coleman; Kenny Feng; Kim Janey; Adrienne Level; Keondre McClay; Liliana Mickle; Alex Oliver-Davila; Marinelle Rousmaniere; Filberto Santiago-Lizardi; Ron Walker; Sherman Zemler Wu. Superintendent Dr. Tommy Chang was also present.

Task Force Members Absent: Dr. Vanessa Calderon-Rosado; Dr. Gil Noam; and Carline Pignato.

Suzanne Lee and Dr. Miren Uriarte, English Language Learners Task Force liaisons to the OAG Task Force, were not present.

DOCUMENTS PRESENTED

Agenda

Task Force Meeting Minutes: December 8, 2015

AWC Expansion

MassCore: Current Status and Next Steps

Graduation Requirements by School

2012 Revised Implementation Plan for 2006 Achievement Gap Policy

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2016 Draft Meeting Calendar

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Robinson called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone. She then introduced Dr. Colin Rose, the newly appointed Assistant Superintendent for the Opportunity and Achievement Gap. Dr. Rose, a former BPS teacher, said he looks forward to working closely with the Task Force.

ACTION ITEM

The Task Force approved by unanimous consent the minutes of the December 8, 2015 meeting.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

Principal Leader Mary Driscoll presented the Superintendent's proposal to expand Advanced Work Class (AWC). Ms. Driscoll was joined by Principal Leader Kelly Hung and Operational Leader Rayna Briceno.

Ms. Driscoll explained that the Superintendent's 100-Day Plan calls for the creation of a strategy to expand AWC to all students who wish to enroll and a review by the Opportunity and Achievement Gaps Task Force.

Key findings include:

Enrollment in AWC is not representative of BPS demographics.

Some AWC classrooms are not full

AWC is a path, but not the only path to exam schools.

The Superintendent held several listening sessions with a wide variety of stakeholders. A major theme that emerged from the listening sessions was that AWC classes create a close-knit community of learners and provides students with the organizational and study skills and stamina necessary to be successful in exam schools.

Working recommendations:

Establish a pilot cohort of 5-10 schools provide academic rigor and social emotional learning and enrichment opportunities (in and out of school time).

Reinvigorate the exam school initiative.

Focus on getting all students reading at grade level by grade 2.

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Task Force members responded to the presentation with the following observations and suggestions:

All students should receive executive functioning skill-building.

The exam school initiative should include executive functioning skills, not just test prep.

Students and families should be engaged about any changes to AWC.

The plan as presented doesn't offer AWC for ALL.

The district's multiple grade configurations could make this expansion challenging.

Need to address the issue of race since fewer AWC students of color are admitted to exam schools.

Explore providing more resources for middle school students who don't attend exam schools.

Look at lessons learned from schools with high student achievement that don't offer AWC. Director of Data and Accountability Nicole Wagner Lam agreed to provide data on exam school grad rates for students who were previously enrolled in AWC vs. those who were not.

AVID/Cornell note-taking skills should be part of this pilot program.

The district should consider adding a summer component.

The location of schools in the pilot program could have transportation implications.

Assistant Superintendent of Professional Learning Dr. Doannie Tran then presented the Superintendent's proposal to expand MassCore. Principal Leader Jonathan Landman and Senior Analyst for Data and Accountability Jacob Stern co-presented.

MassCore is a recommended course of study approved by MA Board of Education in 2007. It is not required and there are no incentives to districts or schools for offering it. Each district determines for itself what courses meet that bar. Data is on students who have completed high school.

The presenters referred to a study which found that the rigor of a high school curriculum is the strongest indicator of bachelor degree completion.

The Superintendent's 100-Day Plan calls for a complete audit of all high schools to identify which schools offer MassCore curriculum and identify resources for expansion.

Some of the district's findings include:

- Only 38 percent of BPS graduates are completing MassCore.

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- Black and Latino graduates have the lowest MassCore completion rates.
- Less than half of white and Asian graduates have completed MassCore.
- Stumbling blocks include a 4th year of math, as well as world language and art.
- The five additional requirements are the biggest stumbling blocks.
- Most schools do have the capacity to offer MassCore but some do not. Increasing capacity is not enough to solve the problem.
- Improvement has to happen at many levels.

The Superintendent's MassCore Working Group listened to hundreds of people and synthesized the feedback to identify barriers and solutions in three thematic categories: knowledge, systems and capacity.

Additionally, the Working Group determined that the district needs consistency around rigor, GPA calculation, and graduation requirements.

Task Force members responded to the presentation with the following observations and suggestions:

- Research other districts that have made MassCore a graduation requirement
- Get data on BPS graduates and college acceptances to see if colleges are paying attention to MassCore.
- What would be the trade-offs for schools that were to expand MassCore? Would other models of education be threatened?
- Get data on role of rigor in reducing gaps.
- What are successful autonomous schools doing? Should we be doing those MassCore-like things?
- Get data on college-going students who completed MassCore.
- A member noted that slide six refers to African American students, not black. Which is more accurate?
- MassCore expansion could present a budgeting challenge for headmasters.
- There is a consensus around the need for baseline graduation requirements, whether MassCore or not.
- What is the thread from middle school to high school? How does vocational education fit in?

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- Are we concentrating students in certain schools that don't allow them to succeed? What is the model that is leading us to concentrate kids in these schools? This is an equity concern.
- Some worry that increase in rigor will lead to decrease graduation rates – not necessarily.

The Task Force then reviewed the draft meeting dates presented for 2016.

On its January 5th meeting, TF will review a draft of the update that the co-chairs will present to the School Committee on January 13th.

For homework, Ms. Shakur asked the members to review the 2012 Achievement Gap Implementation Plan (which was not implemented).

Dr. Rose explained that he will present questions from the Task Force to district staff and collect responses.

Ms. Robinson clarified that at this time, there is no plan for subgroups to meet with district leaders outside of the regular Task Force meetings.

Dr. Rose stated that he will assume the role of lead content staff person.

PUBLIC COMMENT

John Mudd, advocate, expressed concern that the district did not include as part of its AWC and MassCore presentations specific analysis about how the proposals will narrow achievement gaps. He also requested disaggregated data on black students.

Catherine Chiu, BPS director of guidance, encouraged the Task Force to examine the 8th grade MCAS scores of current 9th graders.

Kenneth Hawkes, BPS parent, shared this child's personal story and encouraged the Task Force to talk about conditions in schools.

UPDATES AND NEXT STEPS

The Task Force then engaged in a long discussion, reflecting on both public comment and the presentations by the district.

Task Force members made the following suggestions:

- The Task Force should ask district leaders two or three questions about the impact of their work on the achievement gap.

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- Dr. Rose needs an avenue to learn about conditions inside schools. Ms. Shakur said that the Task Force will hear more from Dr. Rose regarding his role and vision in January.
- Some members expressed disappointment that few central administrators attended yesterday's young men's conference co-sponsored by COSEBEC and Sociedad Latina.
- Young people need to be empowered to help us close the gap. Cultural competence, identity, racism are key. The District needs to start preventing the gap in the young grades (K-2). Central office needs to own the work, change the language, and find a way to measure.
- Several Task Force members expressed a desire to slow down the process, to allow them to go into greater depth with district leaders. Members discussed finding the right balance between being thoughtful and addressing the urgent gaps.
- A member expressed concern that the AWC and MassCore reports were presented to the Task Force on their way to the School Committee for possible approval and implementation. Only one slide in the MassCore power point presentation connected MassCore expansion to closing the achievement gap.
- Members suggested that advancing equity is not the same as closing the achievement gap.
- Should AWC expansion come before MassCore?
- Do AWC programs differ by neighborhood?
- Need to separate the educational side of AWC from political implications.
- Should the district consider phasing out AWC? Or transition to something else? And/or change admissions criteria?
- Consider including in the policy a statement addressing exam school admissions.
- Ms. Shakur suggested that at its January 5th meeting, the Task Force draft a statement responding to the district's AWC and MassCore presentations.

ADJOURN

At approximately 6:55 p.m., the co-chairs adjourned the meeting.

Attest:



Elizabeth A. Sullivan
Executive Secretary