

## THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF THE CITY OF BOSTON



### **Minutes of the English Language Learners (ELL) Task Force Meeting April 28, 2016**

The English Language Learners Task Force of the Boston School Committee held a meeting on April 28, 2016 at 9:00am at Bruce Bolling Building. For more information about any of the items listed below, contact Michael Berardino, ELL Task Force Coordinator, at [bpselltaskforce@gmail.com](mailto:bpselltaskforce@gmail.com).

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#### **Call to Order:**

**Task Force Members Present:** Miren Uriarte, Suzanne Lee, Janet Anderson, Bob Hildreth, John Mudd, Kim Janey, Maria Serpa, Cheng Imm Tan, Michael Berardino - Coordinator. **Other persons and BPS Staff Present:** Frances Esparza, Kim Tsai, Faye Karp, Joelle Gamere, Apryl Clarkson, Sonia Gomez-Banrey, Cynthoria Grant, Karla Jenkins, Samuel Hurtado, Claudia Rinaldi, Iria Dopazo Ruibal, Katrina Brink. **Members Absent:** Paulo De Barros, Alejandra St. Guillen, Geralde Gabeau, Abdul Hussein, and Diana Lam.

Michael Berardino opened the meeting in his capacity of Coordinator of the Task Force. The meeting minutes from February 18, 2016 were unanimously approved.

#### **Updates from the Office of English Language Learners**

Dr. Frances Esparza, Assistant Superintendent, Office of English Language Learners and other staff from OELL prepared several presentations. The prepared updates on (i) the longitudinal study on ELL outcomes in BPS, (ii) updates on the March 2016 DOJ compliance reports, (iii) impact of the FY2017 budget on ELL programming and instruction, (iv) serving undocumented students in BPS, (v) Instructional Theory of Change for ELLs, and (vi) Multi-Tiered Systems of Support for ELLs. However, OELL only had time to report on three topics.

- **ELL Longitudinal Study:** As part of the settlement with the Department of Justice (DOJ)/Office of Civil Rights (OCR), BPS is required to provide 3 longitudinal studies outlining the improvements of instruction and outcomes for ELLs in the district. The district is currently working on the third study. The previous two longitudinal studies were conducted by external researchers in collaboration with BPS. Unlike the previous two longitudinal studies, BPS is completing the third study internally. The ELL Task Force asked OELL for updates on the progress of the current study, asking for information on study design and central research questions.

Faye Karp from OELL provided updates on the study. OELL along with the Office of Data and Accountability, led by Nicole Wagner, are leading the study. They are targeting the end of May for a completion date. Once they complete the study they will send it to the DOJ. The design of the study is determined by DOJ/OCR who have been extremely prescriptive in what they are looking for in the study.

Therefore, the decisions on which information to include have been determined by DOJ/OCR. The study will look from 2010-2011 to 2014-2015. There are two primary research questions.

- 1) What has the progress of ELLs been in educational outcomes as compared to former ELLs and never ELLs (students that entered school English proficient)?
- 2) Are ELLs fully and equally participating in educational programs, as compared to former ELLs and never ELLs?

To address this second research question, OELL is looking at broad program participation including likelihood of identification as SPED, preparation for AWC, taking Honors courses and taking AP courses.

Q: [Maria de Lourdes Serpa] Will the analysis look at the outcomes of ELL-SWD as a separate group?

A: This was not a point of emphasis for the DOJ so it is not part of this study.

Q: Will the analysis look at different ELL program types? Will it look at dual language programs

A: Yes. The analysis will look at SEI language specific, SEI multilingual, Dual Language, and SIFE programs.

Q: [Miren Uriarte] This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> study and Faye Karp has been the only one involved with all three studies. This is the first study being done internally. Is there a difference?

A: There are advantages and disadvantages. At the beginning they did not have the capacity, but DOJ/OCR has been very supportive throughout the process. One clear benefit is building the internal capacity to undergo these types of analyses. OELL has been working closely with ODA to complete this study and this will help with future analyses. Dr. Esparza added that working on this study across departments has been a new development for the district.

Q: [Maria de Lourdes Serpa] Will the study look at /control for the teachers delivering the services to ELLs, specifically to ELL-SWDs? Specifically will you be looking at the linguistic capacity of the teachers serving ELLs and ELL-SWDs?

A: OELL are currently not controlling for this information as part of the DOJ report, but agree that it is important.

Q: Are other cities also going through similar settlements with the DOJ and are they producing similar studies.

A: Yes, there are other cities across the country that reached settlements with the DOJ around services for ELLs. However, the BPS agreement is the most detailed and the only one where they are required to provide three longitudinal studies. Miren Uriarte added that the level of detail required in the DOJ reports reflects the level of need for ELL in the district.

Q: [Kim Janey] This approach to analyze issues across offices in BPS is refreshing. Is the goal to build capacity to solve problems?

A: [Dr. Esparza] Bringing everyone to the table; OHC is supplying the teachers and information o teachers and OELL needs to know who is in the classrooms. There has been progress and this isn't just OELL.

- **DOJ Reports** – Kim Tsai from OELL presented the paper “Submission of Paragraph 54 Per Successor Agreement – March 1, 2016”. This report provides highlights from the latest DOJ report. The summary reviewed findings on correct delivery type, minutes, grouping, and ESL certification.

Q: [John Mudd]: The table report on 13,421 ELLs, but we have been told that there are 17,000 ELLs. Why is there a discrepancy? Where are the 4,000 other ELLs?

A: There are some schools, including in-district charter schools that are not included in the reporting. These schools are not currently required to submit their ELL and ESL instruction information to OELL. OELL agrees that this is a problem.

Q: Does the reporting “% of LEPs whose Teachers of ESL are ALL ESL Certified” include students in K0 & K1?

A: The DOJ reports are just K-12 and do not include early childhood education. These are the DOJ requirements.

Q: The last row on Page 1 shows the “% of LEPs who are Correctly Grouped for All ESL Courses”. The table shows that 89% of LEPs in Elementary grades are correctly grouped but only 66% of LEPs in Secondary grades. Has there been analysis of why this secondary proportion is lower?

A: OELL is looking into this, but it is important to remember that the category is students correctly grouped for all ESL courses. This means that if there is a class of 20 students and there are 19 students at ELD Level 1-2 and one at ELD Level 3, all 20 students are considered to be incorrectly grouped. Because there are fewer LEPs in secondary grades, there are more instances of grouping LEPs in this manner. This is a very conservative measure.

All of the charts show that there have been vast improvements in ESL Instructional Type, ESL minutes, ESL grouping, and ESL certified teachers since October 2015. In Table 2 “Linking Together the Level of ESL Services: March 2016”, the last row shows the percentage of ELLs that are receiving the correct ESL Instructional Type, the correct number of Instructional Minutes, in the correct ESL grouping, and with an ESL certified teachers. As of March 2016, 69% of all ELLs had the correct ESL instructional type, minutes, grouping, and teacher up from 29% in March of 2015.

Q: Are these improvements due to more accurate reporting of data or have there been substantive changes in the assignment and instruction of ELLs?

A: There have been vast improvements in the accurate recording of information. There has been support and PD with the LATFs including multiple meetings throughout the year (instead of just at the beginning of the year), professional development at the school site (instead of just at the central offices). In the past, LATFs were scheduled to input the data at the beginning of the year, but received very little follow up or support to document changes. They are confident they can get to 100% correctly linked, but really need LATFs to be full-time (instead of being one of many obligations for teachers and administrators). The Instructional Teams can fill that support.

Q: [Suzanne Lee] This is a great improvement, but what do we know about program quality? Has there been any evaluation or reflection on the consequences of “one-size fits all” ELL program design?

- **Instructional Development:** Joelle Gamere of OELL presented two documents “Instructional Theory of Change for ELLs” and “Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTTS) for ELLs”. These two documents are drafts of a coherent and comprehensive instructional plan for ELLs in the district. They are focusing on Long Term ELL’s (defined as ELLs for more than 5 years); of the 17,000 ELLs in the district, 6,000 are long-term ELLs. BPS and OELL looked at the school climate and the opportunity gap facing ELLs and determined what kind of support they required. This is part of the movement from compliance to instruction. The “Instructional Theory of Change” document is a living document, based on data and other evidence of instructional best practices including the Council of Great City Schools. Some examples of the instructional development are to infuse more complex texts into the curriculum for ELLs and to strengthen the instruction of academic language. Additional changes include newcomer strategies, targeted PD, and built in self-reflection of practices.

A major part of the instructional theory of change is the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, a version of a RTI model. They are focusing the MTTS model on ELLs at ELD Level 3 because these students are more likely to be stagnant in their ELD. Part of the problem is the transition from “learning to read” to “reading to learn”. Some of the students at ELD Level 3 have not mastered reading academic English and therefore fail to proceed in their English language development. This requires PD for teachers and tiers of support for the students.

Q: [Rev Cheng Imm Tan] These documents are an encouraging step. How can parent engagement help with the development of the plans and to convene the various actors in the district?

A: OELL knows the cultural background of the students, but parental involvement will be key to make these changes in instruction.

Q: [John Mudd] One of the central components of the Instructional Theory for Change is cultural responsiveness and affirms the linguistic and cultural assets of students. This is critical for the successful education of students, but how do we insure that these are district goals for all students and not just the goal of OELL and ELLs?

Q: These documents start a discussion of the importance of the decolonization of curriculum in the district and it will be necessary for this to permeate the whole district.

It was decided for the sake of time that a deeper discussion of the instructional documents should be led by the Program Quality Subcommittee who would follow up with Joelle Gamere.

### **Preparation for June Presentation of ELL Task Force to the Boston School Committee**

Miren Uriarte led a discussion reviewing a draft of the presentation being made to the Boston School Committee in June. The presentation will be 30 minutes long and will discuss what the Task Force has accomplished over the year and ask for renewal. The goal is to prepare a presentation based on the work of the Task Force and the subcommittees, but have one person present to the school committee.

Janet Anderson reviewed the work of the Data and Student Assignment Subcommittee. One of the goals was to be more systemic in the requests of data for ELL Task Force meetings and to establish a data calendar so that departments and offices knew in advance that the ELL Task Force expected various reports at a given time. For instance, in the fall/winter, the ELL Task Force would like a summary of PARCC/MCAS results for ELLs by ELD Levels and language groups. More than just getting data for the sake of getting data, the goal is to get reports to use in the monitoring of ELLs in the district. We are answering the questions: “What did we learn?”, “how does this represent change?”, and what are we going to do next?”. This means the data requests have to be purposeful and lead to action. Sometimes the data request itself alerts the departments and offices that they need to look at the topic more closely. Additionally, we are responsible for bringing back data to the school committee.

Maria Serpa presented information about the ELL-SWD subcommittee sharing the work that has been done so far. There has been limited overall progress in the district in addressing the needs of ELL-SWDs. Some of the areas of progress have been OELL working on the translation and interpretation of IEPs. However, too much of the responsibility of dealing with ELL-SWDs has fallen to OELL, who may not have the expertise with Special Education and therefore there is an unfair burden.

The concerns of the subcommittee are that the district does not have the personnel to teach ELL-SWDs. They have been asking if there are enough highly qualified teachers in the district, but no one knows the numbers. They have made requests, but no department/office has this information at the moment. One of the major challenges at the moment is information.

The Subcommittee and the Task Force need baseline numbers on the personnel including the language data of the personnel and their qualifications/certifications. ELL-SWDs are being treated as monolingual

students. It is the educational right of these students to receive a complete education and the role of the subcommittee is to monitor and report to the people that make policy. To this end, there is a meeting on the books between OELL, OHC, Student Services and others to move this conversation forward and to determine who will take responsibility for serving this student population. During the presentation to the School Committee this will be a forceful conversation outlining the challenges and concerns.

Suzanne Lee discussed the work of the Program Quality Subcommittee. This subcommittee has faced similar challenges as the ELL-SWD subcommittee. They decided to focus on personnel as a way to evaluate and monitor program quality in the district. There was a meeting with OHC to determine the proportion of teachers that are SEI endorsed by language group, but OHC did not have the information. OHC referred the subcommittee to OELL, but this is not the responsibility of OELL. From this, it is clear that OHC needs to work harder to track teachers and their characteristics. Moving forward the Program Quality Subcommittee will work with OELL on the Instructional Theory of Change, as well as focusing improving parent participation and school climate, making sure all schools are a safe space for students and parents.

It was decided that in light of the discussion, the subcommittee leads would review the work of their subcommittees and submit edited slides for the presentation.

### **Parent Engagement**

Rev. Tan led a discussion of the work of the Parent Engagement Subcommittee and parent engagement in the district. She presented the document “ELL Task Force, Parent Engagement Subcommittee, Summary of Work 2015-2016 School Year”. The Parent Engagement had several goals including developing list of knowledgeable recommendations.

The subcommittee has also been documenting issues through site visits and collection of information through the experiences of subcommittee members and BPS staff. The site visits have been “eye-opening”. While everyone in the schools and in the district knows that parent engagement is critical, but the literature and the site visits shows it is sporadically implemented and especially so among ELL parents. Even in the instances where parent engagement is being promoted, there is no follow through with the parent engagement activities.

A common concern is that as schools are focusing on instruction they are leaving the parents out of the equation. The Instructional Theory of Change draft presented at the beginning of the meeting by OELL presents a good opportunity for parent engagement.

Another issue that surfaced during the site visits is confusion around ELL programs and strands. According to parents and staff, some ELL programs and strands are being moved or eliminated, but there is limited communication or explanation of why or where the programs are going. There are even instances where principals are unaware of changes to the program strands at their school.

There are also concerns around a reduction in seats for ELL students and concerns around a lack of information. School choice is complicated because parents rely more on word of mouth, rather than on the district’s information. Parents said it was hard to get information and language was a key barrier. Sonia Gomez-Banrey, from Countdown to Kindergarten said that the district provides school registration and school choice information in 8 different languages and they utilize health centers and other community organizations as centers of outreach. Despite these efforts parents still are unsure about the registration information. Regardless of the outreach, parents are not prepared to make decision on school choice when they enroll their children. The Welcome Center and NACC provide guidance for parents, but the structure in place cannot give objective advice for school choice.

The site visits and presentations have shown that positive parent engagement is principal driven, but there isn't a clear evaluation of what successful parent engagement looks like, what activities and behavior principals and teachers are doing to promote parent engagement. The Office of Engagement discussed the Family Friendly School Initiative, with the goal of finding out what successful schools are doing for parent engagement. There are 4 schools participating in this initiative and 2 that are certified as Family Friendly Schools.

**Membership**

ELL Task Force members reviewed the current membership. At the Jun 8<sup>th</sup> Boston School Committee meeting, Miren Uriarte will recommend the addition of Claudia Rinaldi and Samuel Hurtado. The Task Force also recommended adding additional members.