

## MEMO

**Date:** December 23, 2019  
**To:** Superintendent Brenda Cassellius  
**From:** English Language Learners Task Force (ELLTF) of the BPS School Committee  
**CC:** Andrea Zayas, Chief Academic Officer  
Priya Tahiliani, Assistant Superintendent, Office of English Learners  
Cindie Neilson, Assistant Superintendent, Office of Special Education  
Monica Roberts, Chief of Student, Family & Community Advancement  
Albert Taylor, Jr., Chief Human Capital Officer  
Nate Kuder, Chief Financial Officer

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Dear Superintendent Cassellius,

We write to share a vision and action recommendations for your strategic planning process. In the attached document we highlight immediate, near-term, and long-term actions the district can take to embrace and occupy a multilingual, multicultural school system that is truly reflective of — and poised to serve with high-quality, equitable education — Boston’s students, families, and communities.

As you know, we need to explore boldly and with clear vision new approaches to English learners (ELs). A cornerstone of that work will be to take advantage of the opportunities under the LOOK Bill, which provides flexibility for education programs beyond the focus we’ve been forced to have on sheltered English immersion. On that note, we want to share our deep concern that it appears BPS will not submit proposals this January to DESE to reach a significant number of students with LOOK Bill-enabled programming. Last year just four program proposals were submitted and approved, with the collective potential to impact a handful of students, of which we understand that not all were implemented. The EL Task Force has repeatedly raised this issue with BPS leaders. It is now time to see action.

We would like to highlight here as well the matter of professional development. This cross-cutting issue appears under each of the content areas in our recommendations. It is a key lever of change for improving student performance and reducing achievement gaps, and we hope the district will prioritize it as such.

Finally, as we anticipate the upcoming leadership transition for the Office of English Learners, we share with you our hope that there will be a national search for a candidate who brings solid experience in and knowledge about educating English language learners.

We envision the attached strategy document as a work-in-progress. We look forward to ongoing collaboration with you and BPS leaders and schools as you finalize and implement a strategic plan.

Sincerely,  
Suzanne Lee and Lorna Rivera, ELLTF Co-chairs, on behalf of the ELLTF

Attachment: ELLTF Strategic Plan Recommendations

## **PREFACE**

In October, 2009, the Boston School Committee voted to authorize the creation of the English Language Learners Task Force for the following purposes:

- To provide guidance to the School Committee, the Superintendent, and BPS in the vision and development of a plan of action that responds to the new demographics of the BPS for students whose home language is not English;
- To identify mechanisms to address the needs of our increasing multi-cultural and multilingual district and its students.
- Monitor the district's progress in meeting the educational needs of ELLs.

Ten years into oversight by the federal Department of Justice, the district has made enormous strides in meeting its obligation to provide adequate educational services to English learners, but compliance is only a starting place.

- There is no strategy in place or in development to use the flexibility provided by the LOOK Bill, passed in 2017 to give districts the opportunity to use native language more flexibly in classes for EL students.
- There is no centralized district data on teacher / staff language skills, and there are no plans currently in place to align staff qualifications with students' linguistic needs.
- Schools too often function at a distance from the communities they serve, with only four of Boston's 125 schools satisfying the district's own standards for model family engagement.
- BPS has adopted a commitment to culturally and linguistically sustaining practices, and we share that commitment, but it is yet to be made a reality in the classroom.

Today, Boston has a multilingual, multicultural school community. The majority experience is to be bilingual or not speak English.

- About 57% of current BPS students (n=31,927)<sup>1</sup> live in a household where a language other than English is spoken.
- At least 49% of BPS students have a first language other than English — they include the 31% of BPS students who are classified as English learners (ELs) (n=17,442), the 13% who are former English learners (n=7,080), and another 5% who entered the system already bilingual (n=2,871).

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<sup>1</sup> Data is for SY2018-19

- English learners are one-third of all BPS students with disabilities (SWDs) (n=3,802), a group with the lowest performance outcomes of all students.
- ELSWDs and all ELs have *no* reliable access to native language supports, and ELs continue to be over-represented in our highest needs schools.
- This BPS school community has been until recently served within a policy and legal framework that bans most forms of bilingual education, by an educator force that remains predominantly white and monolingual, and with an array of educational programs and services that are centered on English. Latinos now comprise 42.5% of all BPS students, while Latino teachers make up only 10% of the educator force, a number that has not budged for years.

Reflecting on our work in the decade since the ELLTF began, we share the following lessons:

- Change in BPS has been the result of the intervention of the DOJ.
- Leadership at the highest levels of BPS is critical to keeping EL students as a focus. Change requires clearly-stated EL-related goals and practices that begin with the superintendent / at the top of the district and are reflected in the upper layers of BPS instructional leadership, including the selection of school leaders who make each building a welcoming place for families and students.
- Because ELs / EL families represent half of students in the district, all work should be designed with ELs at the center, rather than designing without ELs in mind and then trying to adapt non-EL-centered plans to the needs of ELs.
- A shift in mindset is required to embrace the language and cultural diversity of the district.
- It is necessary to align leadership, human capital, and budget to meet the needs of ELs.

## OVERVIEW

The English Language Learners Task Force (ELLTF) of the BPS School Committee recommends concrete strategies in seven priority areas to address the needs of English learners and create a system with the capacity to serve Boston’s multilingual, multicultural community of learners. As shown in the table below, the ELLTF’s strategic recommendations have strong resonance with the five strategic commitments highlighted by Superintendent Cassellius.

<b>The ELLTF’s strategic recommendations have strong resonance with the priorities expressed in the Superintendent’s strategic plan draft.</b>					
<b>ELLTF Strategic Plan Recommendations December 2019</b>	<b>Boston Public Schools Strategic Plan Draft December 11, 2019</b>				
	<b>Elevate Equity</b>	<b>Accelerate Learning</b>	<b>Expand Opportunity</b>	<b>Cultivate Trust</b>	<b>Amplify All Voices</b>
1. <b>LOOK ACT-ENABLED PROGRAMMING.</b> Develop a plan to use the provisions of the LOOK Act to move the system beyond Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) and address both language and culture.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2. <b>HUMAN CAPITAL.</b> Develop a Human Capital plan that includes language diversity as well as racial and ethnic diversity as part of school and district staffing criteria diversity goals, with aggressive near-term targets for compliance.	✓		✓	✓	✓
3. <b>BUDGET.</b> Allocate sufficient funding to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of ELs and their families.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4. <b>ENGLISH LEARNER STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES.</b> Implement long-identified strategies to improve educational services for EL students with disabilities (ELSWDs).	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5. <b>ENGAGEMENT.</b> Put resources and requirements behind a system-wide family and community engagement plan with EL families and community members at the center.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6. <b>ENGLISH LEARNER STUDENT ASSIGNMENT.</b> Make transparent the impact of the Home-based Assignment Policy (HPAP) on EL students and families.	✓	✓	✓	✓	
7. <b>ENGLISH LEARNER DATA.</b> Create transparent and accessible data systems for monitoring and improving services to ELs and EL outcomes.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

## STRATEGIES

The ELLTF recommends that the following strategic objectives be included in Superintendent Cassellius's Strategic Plan.

1. **LOOK ACT-ENABLED PROGRAMMING. [By the end of SY19-20] Develop a plan to use the provisions of the LOOK Act to move the system beyond Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) and address both language and culture.** This plan would have 1-, 3-, 5-, and 10-year benchmarks — i.e., concrete, interim implementation steps that have immediate-term impacts for students — specify clear lines of accountability, and include straightforward descriptions of the various system obstacles to change and how they can be tackled.
  - A. **[Immediately] Make a commitment to provide access to native language supports for ELSWDs and SLIFEs, as a central component of a system that meets their needs from the start, not as an afterthought.** ELSWDs get to participate fully and SLIFEs get to participate fully. (See below for more specific immediate-term recommendations for ELSWDs.)
  - B. **Create a graduation requirement that every student achieves proficiency in at least two languages, to equip them for full social and civic participation and leadership in a multilingual, multicultural Boston (and beyond).** Fully implemented, this policy would result in a BPS where support for native language is a default position for nearly all BPS students, and acquisition of fluency in at least one additional language used in Boston's communities is an expectation for all BPS students.

Programs in a system set up to achieve these objectives would be some combination of dual language, heritage language, and transitional bilingual offerings, developed in collaboration with community partners, designed to serve<sup>2</sup> . . .

- A percentage of students with a Spanish-English program
- A percentage of students with a Haitian-English program
- A percentage of students with a Cape Verdean-English program
- A percentage of students with a Chinese-English program
- A percentage of students with a Vietnamese-English program
- Smaller Arabic-English, French-English, Portuguese-English and Somali-English programs
- A percentage of students with an American Sign Language-English program
- All students with the option to study a third or fourth language as an elective

These programs should include authentic materials and authentic assessments, reflecting a focus on both culture and language. In some instances, program

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<sup>2</sup> It is beyond the scope of this memo to specify precisely how many students would be served by each of the listed programs, but we would anticipate that program sizes will broadly reflect the distribution of native languages spoken by BPS English learners: Spanish (56%), Haitian Creole (7%), Cape Verdean Creole (7%), Chinese (4%), Vietnamese (4%), Portuguese (2%), Arabic (2%), Somali (1%), and French (1%) (data from "Boston Public Schools at a Glance 2019–2020," December 2019).

implementation will require innovative planning and problem-solving to procure rigorous materials, particularly those suitable for the upper grades.

- C. **[By the end of SY19-20] Develop a district-wide inter-departmental plan to operate as a multilingual, multicultural system, with detail for how to adapt BPS curricula, staffing, instruction, and support services to the unique cultural and linguistic needs of Boston’s different linguistic subgroups.** This plan would be developed with the Office of English Learners (OEL), World Languages, the Office of Opportunity and Achievement Gaps (OAG), the Boston Teachers Union (BTU), and other partners that may be identified.
- D. **[Immediately] Design and implement a new K–12 Cape Verdean strand, as one first step toward the BPS system we envision.** We endorse the demand for a Cape Verdean strand, as was requested formally in writing earlier this fall by members of the Cape Verdean community, triggering a legal obligation for a BPS response by early December 2019. **Plans for this strand should be formalized by Fall 2020, proposed to DESE in January 2021, and in the first stages of implementation for SY2021–22.** Consistent with the community’s request, the strand should include:
- One or more Cape Verdean developmental bilingual programs,
  - A K–5 or K–8 dual language program,
  - A feeder path to a high school — either Dearborn STEM Academy, Boston International High School, Jeremiah Burke High School, or Madison Park Vocational High School,
  - Strong partnerships among social agencies, schools, parents and community stakeholders across all program components, and
  - Equitable programs and services for SLIFE and SWD students.

**2. HUMAN CAPITAL. Develop a Human Capital plan that includes language diversity as well as racial and ethnic diversity as part of school and district staffing diversity goals, with aggressive near-term targets for compliance.**

- A. **[Immediately] Create an action plan to recruit, hire, develop, and retain a diverse pool of teachers and school staff** — especially bilingual, bicultural staff and those with expertise in working with ELs and ELSWDs, including alternate certification programs — in time to begin the March 2020 hiring process. Monitor the implementation of this action plan on an ongoing basis.
- B. **[Immediately] Establish formal accountability of school leaders for hiring teachers that match the students in their school.** Include hiring of appropriate teachers as a core requirement of school leaders in their evaluation in order to receive a proficiency rating by Spring 2020 evaluation period.

- C. **[Immediately] Produce and maintain data on SEI teacher-student language match.** Create a system, whether automated or manual (whichever is possible to do immediately), to have available accurate, current-time, system-wide data on the match between the language of the teacher and the language of the single-language SEI class for all single-language SEI classes.
  - D. **[Immediately] Create a system to assess and track staff language skills for all positions.** Develop and implement systems to routinize the collection and storage of staff language data for all staff, as was begun last year for new hires.
  - E. **[Immediately] Write job descriptions and employment qualifications that include appropriate language requirements.** Include language requirements in all new job postings immediately, and eventually in all job descriptions.
  - F. **[Immediately] Produce a list of obstacles to the assignment of language-appropriate teachers in the BTU contract** for discussion with the union in time for final teacher assignments in schools for SY20-21.
  - G. **[Immediately, for implementation in SY20-21] Create professional development practices aligned with a job- and class-embedded strategy, including coaches, observation, feedback, accountability, and assessment of outcomes.**
  - H. **Bring Pipeline and Partner program development to scale, with the necessary funding.**
- 3. BUDGET. Allocate sufficient funding to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of ELs and their families.**
- A. **[Immediately and ongoing] Allocate funding sufficient for strong, iterative implementation of EL instructional programs,** including adequate resources for growth of dual language schools and heritage programs (taking into account the budget implications of the dual language roll-out described in part 1 above).
  - B. **[Immediately and ongoing] Allocate funding sufficient to achieve a linguistically, culturally, and racially representative BPS staff,** consistent with the human capital goals outlined in part 2 above.
  - C. **[Immediately and ongoing] Create stronger guardrails in the budget process to understand and evaluate the importance that principals place on bilingual educators and parent engagement,** which is now negotiated between principals and Budget staff without many guidelines.
  - D. **[Long-term] Create an equitable funding plan for EL students, based on the Student Opportunity Act.**

4. **ENGLISH LEARNER STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES. Implement long-identified strategies to improve educational services for EL students with disabilities (ELSWDs).**
  - A. **[Immediately] Revise the IEP design process so that CLSP goals (Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Practices) and access to native language are mandatory.** Native language must be required in ELSWDs' IEPs, instruction, and support services.
  - B. **[Immediately] Complete, test and disseminate the ELSPED Guidance Document that articulates guidance procedures for all aspects of special education services for ELs.** This document has been under review by the leaders of the Offices of Special Education and English Learners, and is ready to be prepared for distribution and implementation.
  - C. **[Immediately] Accurately assess the need for ELSWD staffing** of dually-certified teachers with a Special Education and an ESL/TESOL or bilingual licensure.
  - D. **[By the end of SY2019-20] Create a strategy to recruit, hire, and develop sufficient bilingual teachers, paras, and other support staff to meet the needs of ELSWDs** over the next 3–5 years at most, with achievable benchmarks and clear accountability.
  - E. **[By the end of SY2019-20, with implementation beginning in SY2020-21] Revise professional development activities to include interventions to build staff capacity to ensure appropriate culturally and linguistically responsive approaches for ELSWDs,** so that the needs of these students for an appropriate education in the least restrictive environment are planned for and met, not handled as an afterthought.
  - F. **[Immediately and ongoing] Create and implement a system for observing, improving, and monitoring the achievement gap of ELs and ELSWDs.** Give high priority to the achievement gap of ELs and ELSWDs as a cornerstone of high-quality service to all students.
  
5. **ENGAGEMENT. Put resources and requirements behind a system-wide family and community engagement plan with EL families and community members at the center.**
  - A. **[Immediately] Provide ongoing professional development to better train, resource, and hold school leaders and educators accountable to building culturally and linguistically welcoming school environments and culturally relevant curriculum** that affirms our diverse student body and families.
  - B. **[Immediately] Redevelop Welcome Center communications and procedures to ensure that information and outreach is adequate to familiarize new immigrant parents with the school registration process,** including the registration timing and schedule, and help parents understand how to pick schools that best meet their child/ren's needs.

- C. **[Immediately] Create school-level standards and practices for welcoming new students and families**, such as: a toolkit for schools with on-boarding materials and procedures and translated reception documents; school-based orientations for new students and their families in their native languages; mid-year orientation processes for ELs and their families who join BPS or transition between schools mid-year; and a linguistically-appropriate point of contact for all families who are newly settling in at a school.
- D. **[Immediately] Assess and expand the capacity at the district, school, and classroom levels to communicate, both orally and in writing, with families in their preferred languages**, and promote strong parent/student/teacher partnerships and full inclusion of all families in local school communities. The assessment would include, but not be limited to:
- School-wide communication that reflects the dominant native languages of the students and families in the school community, like direct signage in school buildings (office signs, procedure signs, etc.), school website content, phone and email alerts, and the like.
  - Classroom-wide and one-on-one teacher communications in families' preferred languages, like progress reports, communication through app-based or other online systems (Google classroom, Class Dojo, Remind, etc.), parent-teacher conferences, and the like.
  - Critical response plans (security threats, emergency closings, etc) that specify a linguistically-appropriate point of contact during emergencies.
- E. **[Immediately, for implementation in SY20-21]** Design and launch a district-wide campaign to promote the value of dual language and multiculturalism, including specific welcoming events for new families.
- F. **[Immediately, for implementation in SY20-21]** Develop a district-wide assessment and reporting plan to track family engagement for all students, including ELs.
- G. **[Immediately and ongoing]** Fully engage stakeholders in an ongoing way, including partnering on EL engagement with internal groups like the Citywide Parent Council (CPC), the District English Language Learners Advisory Council (DELLAC), and the Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SpedPAC), and with external community-based (CBOs) and faith-based organizations (FBOs).

6. **ENGLISH LEARNER STUDENT ASSIGNMENT. Make transparent the impact of the Home-based Assignment Policy (HPAP) on EL students and families.**
  - A. **[Immediately] Conduct the EL overlay analysis of the Home-based Assignment Policy (HBAP) by the end of SY2019-2020.** This analysis should answer the questions: Have the guiding principles of the English Language Learner Overlay been achieved? What is the status of program development for the English Language Learner Overlay?
  - B. **[Immediately] Determine whether the current distribution of EL programs and services responds to the distribution of linguistic groups in Boston’s neighborhoods,** using up-to-date population data.
  
7. **ENGLISH LEARNER DATA. Create transparent and accessible data systems of accountability for monitoring and improving services to ELs, and EL outcomes.**
  - A. **[Immediately] Prioritize the maintenance and frequent monitoring of systems to produce accurate information about EL placement and services for ELs,** including the number of ELs in the district and the distribution / disaggregation of ELs in different types of schools.
  - B. **[Immediately] Respond in a timely way to “red flags” that arise in the data.** Schools who have failures in either reporting data or in meeting student needs will have an action item included in its school quality improvement plan and be held accountable.
  - C. **[Immediately] Define the exit strategy and plan to exit DOJ agreement and create reliable self-monitoring and systems.** It is crucial that BPS not move away from federal oversight until it is capable of performing the functions that the DOJ has been fulfilling.
  - D. **[Immediately] Consistently review a set of indicators of appropriate program placement, outcomes indicators (attendance, suspensions, etc), achievement of ELs, and assignment and enrollment (including families opting out across all grade levels),** disaggregated along numerous characteristics including program, program type, school, school type, grade, ELD level, language group, race, and national group.
  - E. **[Immediately] Disaggregate Black, Latinx, and Asian students in reporting by race and ethnicity,** using the proxies of home language, city of birth, and country of origin data elements.