

## THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF THE CITY OF BOSTON



### Minutes of the English Language Learners (ELL) Task Force Meeting October 12, 2017

The English Language Learners Task Force of the Boston School Committee held a meeting on October 12, 2017 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).

---

#### Call to Order:

**Task Force Members Present:** Suzanne Leem Miren Uriarte, Janet Anderson, John Mudd, Samuel Hurtado, Cheng Imm Tan, Diana Lam, Maria Serpa, and Michael Berardino - Coordinator. **Other persons and BPS Staff Present:** Priya Tahiliani, Faye Karp, Sonia Gómez Banrey, Emily Qazilbash, Chelsea Banks, Tommy Welch, Gabrielle Fraenkel **Members Absent:** Andres Alonso, Kim Janey, Bob Hildreth, Alejandra St. Guillen, Paulo DeBarros, Geralde Gabeau, Farah Assiraj, Abdul Hussein, Patricia Crain de Galarce.

#### Introductions

Michael Berardino, Coordinator, of the Task Force opened the meeting.

Miren Uriarte, co-chair of the Task Force began by talking about the political setting for the discussion of the influx of students from Puerto Rico. So far the majority of families coming from Puerto Rico have gone to Western Mass, but with the indication from the President that FEMA aide will not be continuous everyone is anticipating further migration.

#### BPS Cares/Unidos por Puerto Rico

Sonia Gómez Banrey, Office of Engagement/Countdown to Kindergarten, discussed the work being done by BPS to prepare for the potential influx of families and students from Puerto Rico. We know that there are 35,000 families in Boston with connections to Puerto Rico. The city of Boston anticipates that these families will invite their families in Puerto Rico. Up until this point there have been no direct flights to Boston, but that is changing this week.

Superintendent Chang put together the Tiger Team to plan for the influx of students. Currently they do not know the number of students that are going to enter the system. With this in mid they are trying to plan as best as possible. The first thing they are doing is having Pop-Up Welcome Centers in four locations around the city with help from local organizations: East Boston, South Boston, Dorchester, and Roxbury, and they will add more as needed. At each pop-up center there will be BPS registration specialists. Furthermore, they are continually updating the BPS Care website with up to date information and resources including a direct link the FEMA, to the list of food pantries, to housing and shelter information, and other resources in city. Housing will be a major concern because the current system for

shelters and Section 8 housing only guarantees 45 days of housing and this will likely be much longer need. If families do not have housing they can go to 1010 Mass Ave with their airline tickets to get the resources to get them into a shelter.

Once the students begin enrolling in BPS through the pop-up centers, if they need language assessment, they will go to Bolling for testing. The plan is to cluster students in schools that have at least 20 seats. There are numerous reasons for clustering students. One is that the district along with the city hopes to provide wraparound services for the students and families. Multiple offices in BPS (OHC, OELL, Budget, etc.) have met to coordinate the resources necessary to provide the services. If numbers get too large, they will meet again. BPS is working with MEMA, Boston Housing Authority, Boston Public Health, the help coordinate the services provided to the families in the schools. The district has identified 605 total seats available in the district, but many of them are dispersed throughout the city. They are opted to place students in schools where there are at least 20 seats open, to be able to provide the best resources for the incoming students.

BPS is also working with Holyoke, Worcester, Springfield, and Lawrence to coordinate the approaches to serving the incoming students from Puerto Rico.

Q: [Janet Anderson] We can anticipate that schools with 20 open seats are likely the least desirable schools in the district. While it is commendable that the district will be providing great resources for these students, we want to be mindful of grouping these students in the lowest performing schools.

A: [Sonia Gómez Banrey] They are aware of this concern and all families will be able to go through the normal transfer process at the end of the year. And not all of the schools are low performing schools. Again, the focus is more on having schools that can be centers of wrap around services so they worked with YMCA and BYCA to select the schools.

Q: [Miren Uriarte] Are these schools that have SEI Spanish programs?

A: [Sonia Gómez Banrey] The emphasis on SEI Spanish programs comes after they have enrolled the students and made sure there are emergency services and resources. The goal is to keep these students out of SEI multilingual programs.

[Miren Uriarte] We have heard from the principals at the dual language schools and they are willing to absorb these students. The concern is that we do not want to dump them in SEI Multilingual programs. It is one thing for families to choose these programs, but it is another thing if the district decided for them.

[Sonia Gómez Banrey] The schools identified so far include the Blackstone, Tobin, JFK, as well as the Muniz and Hernández. It is a two-phase process. If the numbers of incoming students exceeds the available space, the team is set up to look for more options.

[Miren Uriarte] It is also important to plan for situation where students that come from Puerto Rico may return to Puerto Rico. We should consider developing educational passports for their schools in Puerto Rico.

Q: [Maria Serpa] The considerations for school placement and supplies are great. Will there also be plans to care about the Social Emotional needs of these incoming students?

A: [Sonia Gómez Banrey] BPS is working with Boston Children's Hospital, BPH, etc. and will be offering counseling for students and their families. The BPS SEL Dept. is coordinating this and the counseling is part of the wraparound services. The BPS Cares website has information on these resources and the website will be continually updated as new resources are identified.

Q: [Samuel Hurtado] These developments are great for the incoming students and families, but in South Boston and other areas we are struggling to get these resources for the families already in Boston. Housing is going to be a huge issue. We don't have the capacity to deal with the families already here.

Families are still waiting to get their children tested for language placement. It is important to build up the capacity in BPS.

### **Review of ELL TF Goals and Priorities**

The ELLTF reviewed the goals and priorities. Maria Serpa and John Mudd discussed the draft priorities for the school year. One focus for the work of the SPED-ELL Subcommittee will be on the IEP process in BPS, with a focus on the potential EasyIEP.

The ELL Task Force discussed the role of the Task Force, which is a monitoring body. The Task Force cannot dictate that the district conduct studies; instead we can suggest that the district look at topics and if there are Task Force members that can help with analyses, this will help. We suggest indicating that the priority for the year will be monitoring the IEP process. In the past one of the most effective monitoring tools has been the site visits of the Parent Engagement Subcommittee, which had real impact with the School Committee.

### **BuildBPS**

The ELL Task Force determined they were interested in learning about the rubrics and criteria being developed for any decision-making regarding school openings, closures, or mergers. The task Force wants to know how ELLs are being considered as part of any BuildBPS decisions, with an emphasis on ELLs with disabilities. How will BuildBPS ensure that ELLs and SPED-ELLs are not dispersed across schools preventing effective programming? The Task Force also wants to know how concrete the current plans are – will there be an opportunity for input from parents?

Tommy Welch, Assistant Superintendent, shared information about the BuildBPS process with the Task Force. The goal of the discussion was to assuage some of the anxiety that was coming from the ELL Task Force and from across the districts. BuildBPS is asking what impact any changes will have on ELLs and SPED-ELLs; they know that any changes may have programmatic impacts, which might make sense logistically but not practical sense. The goal is to make a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment and to make it sustainable.

There is a 10-year plan, which involves planning and enrollment projections; they presented this to the mayor two weeks earlier. The 10-year plan is a 3-legged stool: programming (BPS), budget (City of Boston), and facilities (city of Boston). He feels like they have to lead with the programming, not just with the projections of student enrollment. What direction should they go with the money that is available?

BuildBPS has 10 key planning principles. From these they are working on 6 central priorities: align building capacity to enrollment and demographic trends citywide; improve the match between educational programs and their facilities; develop program and building utilization plans in the neighborhoods that are not projected for high-growth among youth populations and have excess building capacity; focus initial school renovation and expansion projects primarily in neighborhoods where school building sites can be expanded and where swing space is available; expand K1 seats in neighborhoods where the estimated supply of high-quality seats does not meet with palsies from the Universal Pre-K policy development process; and focus new school construction primarily in high-growth neighborhoods with limited options for site expansion.

A major piece of BuildBPS is leading the discussion around grade reconfiguration. This work will likely focus on middle schools first. In the district there are over 1200 excess seats in grades 6-7 and existing programs do not use space efficiently or in a way that meets demand. There are limited options for expanding high-priority elementary programs. The current grade configurations lead to multiple

transitions before high school and do not provide high-quality pathway options for students after 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

There are three strategies BuildBPS may utilize in reconfiguring BPS: reconfiguring existing schools; creating and utilizing swing space; and build new schools/major expansion projects.

When looking at reconfiguring existing schools, BPS is overpaying for programs in under-enrolled middle schools and programs that aren't in demand. K-8 schools, Exam Schools, and charter schools are creating competing influences that are negatively impacting middle schools. BuildBPS may identify schools with physical and programmatic capacity to make the first moves towards a predominantly PK-6/7-12 and K-8/912 school system. These reconfiguration plans are led with developing coherent Special Education, English Learning, and other specialized program pathways.

Q: [Miren Uriarte] Does the revision of grade configuration have to happen before any BuildBPS change?

A: [Tommy Welch] There are some things we can do without causing huge system-wide changes; some "low-hanging fruit". This includes potentially changing some K-8 to K-6, where there is very low enrollment in middle school grades.

Q: [Suzanne Lee] Are feeder schools part of the conversation?

A: [Tommy Welch] This is part of the discussion. There are neighborhoods where there are informal feeders from early elementary to middle schools. They are going to explore the ways in which these feeders can make sense and in some ways they should have been doing his all along.

Q: [John Mudd] What is the timeline and what are the BPS programs that are central to the considerations of BuildBPS.

A: [Tommy Welch] First, they are getting the mayor's reaction. The next phase is figuring out time and more. They need to set up platforms for community engagement. If a school is moving from a K-8 to K-6 (Perry) they need to talk to families first. In terms of programs, they are focusing on grade reconfiguration. For instance, the Umana added middle school grades, which inadvertently created a vacuum in the other East Boston middle schools. Students are coming back to East Boston High, but there is under-enrollment in the other middle schools.

Creating and utilizing swing space – the district will use available swing space to relocate school populations, allowing for massive renovation projects. The current stock of viable swing space is limited across the city, and the sites may not necessarily exist in the prioritized communities, but more swing space sites will become available in upcoming years. Often, unused buildings are not in desired neighborhoods, but there is swing space in middle schools. This provides options – they can relocate students in an open school for a year while renovations are done in their school. Or they complete renovations while students are still in the building. These are topics they are exploring.

Build new schools and major expansion projects – create change in highly desirable areas across the system rather than waiting for existing swing space to open. This provides swing space for future projects and takes poorly rated (by SMMA) building off-line by moving one or two schools into new buildings.

When identifying schools with physical and programmatic capacity and need to align programs to programmatic needs. Before any grade reconfigurations, or a lower/upper school situation, they have to look at the language group, SPED needs, etc. in the school. They don't want to link schools that have different models (e.g. dual language vs. inclusion model).

All of these discussions are still in the planning/exploratory stage. There will be public presentations and discussions on all of these topics. Parent engagements will be critical to any successful reconfigurations in the district.

## **Human Capital Discussion**

Emily Qazilbash and Chelsea Banks from OHC shared information about the diversity and language capacity of new hires. OHC presented to the Boston School Committee on October 4<sup>th</sup>, sharing information on 20 schools where there was large number of teacher openings and there was a gap between demographics of students and teachers. As part of this conversation, there was also an overall discussion of the overall diversity and language capacity of the new hires in the district.

There were 1,105 hires for 2017. Of these only 368 were external (new hires). The remainder was internal teachers that changed schools. The external hires were more diverse than in 2016 with 2 points higher proportion of Asian teachers, 4 points higher proportion of Latino teachers, 2 points higher Asian, but also 9 percentage point higher proportion of new teachers who had “other” as their self-identified ethno racial category. Additionally, 41% of new hires are fluent in another language, same percentages in 2017 and 6 points higher than the rate in 2015. OHC found that in the 20 schools in the initial pilot program, the teaching force is more diverse and has increased language capacity.

Q: [Samuel Hurtado] Where the new hires with language proficiency hired to fill specific positions that necessitated language fluency? Or is this just a new hire that happens to be fluent in another language?

A: [Chelsea Banks] That is information that they do not have readily, but could calculate.

A: [Emily Qazilbash] All language fluency and ethno-racial category are self-identified. OHC does screening for the language fluency of paras, but not for teachers.

Q: [Miren Uriarte] Are the teachers with language fluency going to schools where they are needed?

Q: [Cheng Imm Tan] Is there an effort to match the language needs of schools with new hires?

Q: [Suzanne Lee] We tried to get this language proficiency information 3 years ago. We need to have this data to build on. We aren't even in a place to identify what the level of need is. Is there a way of using the information provided in Probable Org to understand if the language needs at a school where met by the new hires? Who houses the Probable Org data and how can we use this?

Q: [Miren Uriarte] What languages did the new hires speak? Would it be possible to get the language fluency breakdown of the new hires over the past three years?

One major impediment to providing clear data on the match (or mis-match) of student language needs and teacher language fluency capacity is that students and teachers are in different database, which are not easily linked. OHC uses PeopleSoft, because they are City of Boston and deal with adults in the system.

Q: [Janet Anderson] Why do you think there was an uptick in the diversity and language capacity of new hires?

A: [Emily Qazilbash] They are still reviewing the work done by the 20 schools, but speaking system-wide, the BPS Teaching Fellowship has been an effective program at keeping teachers in the program that they can identify, especially teachers with ESL licensing/experience especially those that are Spanish-speakers. OHC has also worked to match applicants to the correct opening. Recruitment Fellows have helped tap into some of the local universities. There has been an increase in targeted outreach to get licensed teaches that fit the needs of the schools in the district.

Q: [John Mudd] The biggest representation gap is still Latinos. The programs created by OHC are creative and probably effective, but they are small. Is there a way to reprogram or rethink the system?

What is the ethno-racial breakdown of the applicants? Is there a gap in the percentage of teachers hired by race?

A: [Chelsea Banks] This is a major concern. The district has to hire teachers who are qualified and licensed. We know that there are differentiated outcomes for prospective teachers of color on the MTEL. This contributes to the gap. Overall, the ethno-racial breakdown of the pool of applicants matches the breakdown of the new hires. This means that there wasn't disproportionate hiring from one racial group.

Q: [Samuel Hurtado] How are we making sure that schools share the same priorities as the district?

A: [Emily Qazilbash] It is the job of OHC to send the best candidates to schools. They can help influence the schools by sending the best candidates.

The ELL Task Force discussed the creation of the new Human Capital Subcommittee, which will tackle many of these data questions. The Subcommittee will help create the baseline to evaluate the effectiveness of increasing language capacity of teachers in the district. The Subcommittee will be effective if they can bring people together across departments. This includes Academics (OELL and SPED) and Instructional Superintendents.

The meeting was adjourned.