

THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF THE CITY OF BOSTON



English Language Learners (ELL) Task Force Remote Meeting

June 30, 2020
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 pm

MINUTES

ATTENDEES

ELLTF Members and Staff: Janet Anderson, Farah Assiraj, Angelina Camacho, Jen Douglas (ELLTF Coordinator), Geralde Gabeau, Suzanne Lee (ELLTF Co-chair), Katie Li, John Mudd, Lorna Rivera (ELLTF Co-chair), Maria Serpa, Fabian Torres-Ardila, Rosann Tung

BPS Staff: Dr. Brenda Cassellius, Superintendent; Faye Karp, Interim Assistant Superintendent, Office of English Learners

Public: Eduardo Rojas, teacher at East Boston HS

HANDOUTS

Office of English Learners

- “OEL Director’s Report — Presentation to the EL Task Force,” Faye Karp, Interim Assistant Superintendent Office of English Learners, June 29, 2020

ELL Task Force

- Minutes of the ELL Task Force Meeting, June 2, 2020
- Excerpt from the Draft of the Official Minutes of the Boston School Committee Meeting for June 10, 2020

CONSOLIDATED FOLLOW-UP LIST

Members to follow up

- How would ELLTF members like to plug into the community outreach effort this summer?
Ideas for how members could contribute included:
 - Importance of BPS working with and being supportive of community partners; communicating to BPS what is needed in the partnership
 - Holding outreach events in languages other than English
 - Boosting community participation in the equity roundtables
 - Doing summer outreach to students
 - Reaching out to retired teachers of color to engage them in supporting families with remote learning

- ELLTF members are encouraged to log into some of the district-wide Equity Roundtables. Very informative.

Coordinator to follow up

- Request the new organizational chart.
- Ask about the rationale for moving diversity to Grandson’s office. See whether there is opportunity to comment / share concerns.
- Ask Janet Anderson to share the list of participating schools (she had that list).
- Karp will send Jen the list of open positions at OEL.
- Figure out how to notify teachers and parent councils about meetings.
- The ELLTF should have members on the screening/search committee for the Assistant Superintendent of OEL.
- The follow-up with Charles Grandson for the ELLTF on the Strategic Operational Plan needs to be scheduled.
- Confirm that arrangements have been made for Eileen de los Reyes to lead the development of a LOOK Act strategic plan; confirm that the ELLTF will be involved in this LOOK Act planning.
- There are concerns about plans for Transportation and the issue of neighborhood schools, letting students choose a school close to home. The ELLTF needs to track this planning.
- ELLTF wants to learn the rationale for the elimination of Academic content leaders.

DISCUSSION

1. Welcome

Roll call.

| First | Last | Present? |
|----------|------------------|----------|
| Janet | Anderson | yes |
| Farah | Assiraj | yes |
| Angelina | Camacho | yes |
| Paulo | De Barros | no |
| Geralde | Gabeau | yes |
| Lisette | Le | no |
| Suzanne | Lee, Co-chair | yes |
| Katie | Li | yes |
| John | Mudd | yes |
| Lorna | Rivera, Co-chair | yes |
| Maria | Serpa | yes |
| Marie | St. Fleur, J.D. | yes |

| First | Last | Present? |
|-----------|---------------|----------|
| Alejandra | St. Guillen | no |
| Fabian | Torres-Ardila | yes |
| Rosann | Tung | yes |
| Miren | Uriarte | no |

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes from June 2, 2020

Mudd: Please continue to highlight follow-up issues. Please send compendium of follow-up items immediately following the meeting.

Motion to approve by Mudd. Seconded by Tung and Camacho. Approved.

3. Chairs' Report

Rivera: She reported on BSC vote to renew a charter. She expressed concerns with how poorly ELs are served by the UP system. She reported on restructuring that resulted in removal of two colleagues who were working on Ethnic Studies. The removed staff members testified that the decision was unfair. It is overwhelmingly people of color who have been let go in that process. Rivera raised concern and questions about that as a BSC member. She confirmed that Zayas has not yet presented to the BSC the rationale for that restructuring.

FOLLOW UP: ELLTF wants to to learn the rationale for the elimination of Academic content leaders.

Reflecting on the ELLTF's 6/10 presentation to the BSC, she said her personal opinion is that the presentation was influential in shifting mindset there. She is talking with BSC members Jeri Robinson and Dr. Hardin Coleman about collaborating between the ELLTF and other task forces—School Quality, OAG—and that will be discussed at their strategic planning retreat in August.

Mudd: At the 6/10 presentation from the ELLTF to the BSC, I thought that Miren and Marie and Suzanne got through to the BSC in a way I've never heard before. I want to thank them.

Lee: I spoke with Grandson. He has been trying to schedule a meeting and is waiting to be able to get different stakeholders committed; difficult to get people due to the high demand on people during COVID-19. They moved the diversity, hiring, capacity building under Grandson. We can now ask him for data and the path forward about how the district is moving on that. Things are coming so fast with the restructuring in the district that I don't even know who to go to, to ask for certain things. We need to have an updated chart, and there may be one coming out on July 1 (tomorrow).

FOLLOW UP: Request the new organizational chart.

FOLLOW UP: The follow-up with Charles Grandson for the ELLTF on the Strategic Operational Plan needs to be scheduled.

Mudd: I think it is a very serious concern to move diversity to that location. It moves it from a line item position to a staff responsibility. I think it is a serious, serious move. Diversity has been divorced from the schools within HC and from the assistant superintendents (the people who boss the principals).

FOLLOW UP: Ask about the rationale for moving diversity to Grandson's office. See whether there is opportunity to comment / share concerns.

Lee: I hear from some principals that they are very concerned about the questions they are being asked about their planning for September. There are a lot of moving parts.

- **Invite John to report-out on conversation with new OSE director**

Lee: Mudd and Serpa met with the new Assistant Superintendent of the Office of Special Education, Ethan d'Ablemont Burnes. I know Ethan well; he has always been an advocate for special education. It is a huge learning curve for him but once he figures it out, he will do a good job.

Mudd: He was open to meeting and heard our concerns. We talked about how 1/3 of special education students are English learners. He heard our priorities around access to native language, IEPs, professional development, staffing and language capabilities in the system. He is open to meeting more and we want to follow up with him. It is a huge leap for him to go from a school with 150–200 students to managing a large and highly technical program.

Serpa: A lot needs to happen to figure out how to move the work that has been idle for a long time. I want to thank John for his work to educate staff and leaders about the importance of access to native language.

- **Invite Faye Karp to share a short update about what OEL is working on.**

Karp delivered "OEL Director's Report — Presentation to the EL Task Force," Faye Karp, Interim Assistant Superintendent Office of English Learners, June 29, 2020. Notes included below reflect information not directly visible on the slides.

Karp: The goal of 9,236 students engaged in summer learning reflects an ambitious goal and there will likely only be enough teachers to support 2,000 students.

FOLLOW UP: Ask Janet Anderson to share the list of participating schools (she had that list).

Karp shared some information about staffing:

- There are a few vacancies on the EL Instruction team. It can be challenging to attract candidates because the salary tier is below that of a teacher’s salary.
- There are also vacancies on the Translation and Interpretation team. Challenges in this area include assessing candidates’ literacy skills for written translation.
- The position of Director of EL Program Planning and Implementation, now filled by Daphne St. Germain, is critical to LOOK Act implementation. OEL sees staffing in this area as important to support LOOK Act work. This team is working to create language-based ELACs (English Learner Advisory Council) within the framework of the LOOK Act.

Related to key points in Slide 4, focused on the LOOK Act: OEL will be seeking involvement from key stakeholders including the ELLTF. They also will be learning from experiences in other districts. Robust engagement to understand families and respond to what they are asking for will be a priority. There will be an internal LOOK Act Work Group, which is a key element of the superintendent’s Operational Plan.

Related to Slide 7, regarding School Requests for Program Modifications: OEL has been working very closely with schools that find they are out of balance in SEI classroom configuration, helping schools to make changes to meet the 3-pronged Castañeda test and focusing on their family engagement. It has been very challenging and time-consuming work for OEL, and is not sustainable. OEL sees addressing this issue as key to LOOK Act implementation.

Superintendent Dr. Cassellius joined the meeting and was invited to make comment.

Cassellius: Really enjoyed the ELLTF presentation at BSC. Great guideposts as we move forward, especially after OEL leader hired. Most emergent need has to do with what we can do with COVID for ELs. How can we ensure they are getting what they need? We need your help and partnership. We know this has not worked for all kids and has been especially hard on families who are not able to access the same resources as all other families. That’s where I want some guidance and support from this group.

Rivera: Concerns about OEL office staffing—it’s hard to do this work without the capacity there. I understand from Zayas that the JG Consulting Firm has been hired to do the national search for the director. We want two members from the TF to serve on that committee. Yes, it is challenging filling those positions now too. If there are other ways we can help with the hiring and filling of these positions we are here for you.

FOLLOW UP: The ELLTF should have members on the screening/search committee for the Assistant Superintendent of OEL.

Cassellius: That would be incredibly helpful. As you can see from Faye’s org chart there are too many vacancies and that hurts us in terms of doing the work we want to do. And now within COVID we have the urgent issues of responding nimbly of responding to student needs, make sure they’re getting the right number of minutes and the right interventions. And then quickly putting in supports. Our school leaders just have not had a process for that. I think that’s the work ahead.

Rivera: Just a clarification. All of these open positions—are they all cleared to be filled? How can we help to advertise those postings?

Cassellius: We had a little bit of a soft freeze that we put in place prior to the budget passing. I still have to meet with my IT team to release some of the vacant positions. It was a short, two-week window. Translators are absolutely essential; we need to get those positions hired. I know our team has been working hard with teachers remotely.

St. Fleur: Can we get a list of the positions that are open? I want to understand what you mean when you are seeking our help related to COVID. What are the top three concerns that have bubbled up for students and families, and what’s the current intervention and how can we help fill the gap?

FOLLOW UP: Karp will send Jen the list of open positions at OEL.

Cassellius: First, supports to families. Families have been disproportionately impacted by COVID, whether a family member getting ill or the loss of a job. There are evictions coming, unemployment ending at the end of July.

St. Fleur: Is there a place where families to reach out? A phone number?

Cassellius: There is a homeless liaison in Engagement and a helpline in general that has multilingual supports. The city also has 311 too to directly get supports. I tell principals to lift up concerns to me and I’m texting the mayor and saying we need to help this family and just rally .That’s not the most efficient way of course. But families can talk with their principal who maybe hooded in with faith partners or other groups in the community. Sometimes there is a temporary concern that we can respond to. That’s one of the highest things. The other is around family support for parents to know how to help their children with remote schooling. I think we are completely missing the ball on how to help families help their kids at home with remote learning and making it manageable. We need to figure out how we deputize our parents. Third is the barrier around the content and the accessing of the content for students, in terms of the language acquisition and translation for kids to be able to access remotely all the opportunities they may have in the school.

Lee: We are also concerned about discussion we are hearing about moving toward walk-to-school and students being placed in schools closer to them. We have real concerns about that.

FOLLOW UP: There are concerns about plans for Transportation and the issue of neighborhood schools, letting students choose a school close to home. The ELLTF needs to track this planning.

Cassellius: Transportation is my number one concern about reopening. We simply do not have all the buses that would be required to do that and maintain physical distancing. We need to get our buses down to half the capacity of what they are normally doing. We are looking at numerous options including letting parents choose a school closer to home, either for everything or for some things while they still choose remote learning at a

different school. There are other options like paratransit vans for students with disabilities; asking some of our charter partners to take on responsibility for busing some of their students. We are really vetting all the consequences; the equity impacts of all this—who benefits? What are the learning impacts? Also are we on all-remote? Only EL and SPED students go to school? Half days? One or two week(s) on / one or two week(s) off?

We have now received the state's guidance and that is helpful except that they didn't provide any guidance around transportation. They didn't say we couldn't run full buses, but I'm not sure the drivers will drive full buses. There are no winning options here—having that honest conversation with the public requires us to have really sound data, that we've vetted. We have 125 schools that are highly complicated in terms of their readiness, their water, HVAC systems, radiators that will work, windows that will open, entrances, outdoor spaces for outdoor learning—all of that data has been collected over the past 6 weeks; walking the facilities; looking at maps; looking at our water; looking at the cost of ordering hand sanitizer and piping in clean potable water.

And at the same time, we know school is the safest place for children, we need children in school for their mental health for their social emotional and academic learning. What is the right balance? That is what we are going to be bringing to the community every week. No matter what we do there is going to be risk; we have to be willing to live with some level of risk and we have to ask our community, "what is that amount of risk that we're willing to live with?"

Lee: As you're collecting data, are immigrant communities engaging in that process?

Cassellius: We are collecting logistical data. I've had various community encounters, but the data collection so far has not been specific to any one interest group. Tuesdays and Thursdays and every other Saturday from now until school starts will be devoted to inform and understand what the community needs and see what good ideas are out there. It's such a short timeline; I don't see how we can do it for September. If that's not realistic then what are the implications of that decision? We all have to feel comfortable and have to check these boxes off before we reopen. I have said I will not reopen until we all feel comfortable.

Li: A lot of what you brought up I think actually goes through teachers. The family situation, whether parents understand, all that stuff—parents don't feel comfortable with the system; don't know if there will be translation if they call. So, a lot of it has to do with the teachers' relationship. In some cases, the student load is quite large; you can have up to 150 students easily. And they are mixing all day into different groups. I'm wondering if you've thought about different models where you take one class for 5 weeks, and then move to another subject for another period of time.

Cassellius: Yes, we are looking at pods of students, like family groups, where they are not doing the kind of interacting they typically would; they are not having a bell ring and then go out in the hall. It will be either a push-in model with a team of teachers; or students will switch classes remotely with one teacher who facilitates their learning. And there is also looking for the best teachers, having them teach more and having school without walls with more district-wide options, for example an AP teacher who might teach 200 kids

across the system regardless of what school they go to, with smaller discussion groups. That's built into our high school redesign to allow students to take classes virtually at any school. But now we have 6 weeks to build these schedules.

Camacho: We have to be clear that we are building on a history of mistrust while we're trying to build trusting relationships. We have a history of trying to disqualify families for transportation even if they do actually need it, so families are pushed to find an option on their own or not use it. Or the policy to edge kids out early. It's all focused around transportation. There's also a deferred cost to what we have been doing — when we talk about deputizing parents, we also have a history of parents having to fight to be recognized as the children's first teacher, when we haven't been building a relationship that provides those tools to parents up to this point.

Gabeau: Has there been anything done to understand when people leave if those departures have anything to do with the culture of the place, whether people feel BPS is a welcoming place for them to be?

Cassellius: That has not been done in the past but is our policy now.

Gabeau: My biggest concern now is the summer. People are going back to work and we are dealing with so many parents who have young kids, as young as 3. Now that they have to go to work the kids are at home. We are trying to do online with them, but the question is who is at home with them? Especially immigrant parents who do not have any choice other than to go to work. There are so many children who are going to be left home alone with no parent to support whatsoever. Especially when you are talking about newcomers who do not have an email address. So, when we are asking them to step in to support children it's something that we should not even ask them.

I'm asking BPS to be very intentional about partnership. We hear so many good words about community partners, but we do not see BPS extending a hand to help them. This is the time for BPS to take advantage of all of the assets in the community—the churches, the organizations, etc. How can we access what we have in the community and support those partners?

Cassellius: All very valid points. I would like to know what that meaningful partnership looks like? What are we not doing that we should be doing? How can we be better partners? What can we do within the current tight timeframe?

If we go on an alternate schedule, let's say one day on and one day off, the children still have to go somewhere. We have to be sure they are following the same protocol with handwashing, masking, wiping surfaces, security and background checks, all of those things. If it can't happen in September can it happen in October? November?

Mudd: There's a tendency in the past in BPS for the system to feel like it has to come with all of the answers and the community feels the end result is sprung on them. I encourage you to bring people in earlier on your thinking. Some of us came away earlier with the feeling that Eileen de los Reyes might be able to contribute her expertise.

Cassellius: Zayas and I have talked about that and would like for her to be able to contribute her guidance.

FOLLOW UP: Confirm that arrangements have been made for Eileen de los Reyes to lead the development of a LOOK Act strategic plan; confirm that the ELLTF will be involved in this LOOK Act planning.

Mudd: We need more coordination between OSE and OEL to support ELSWDs. We need leadership to ask, “how are we approaching this population?”

Cassellius: I appreciate the urgency of that and the urgency of the community knowing what is happening. Our equity roundtables are very well-attended. We are out there. But getting it on paper and more formalized, and getting response, and putting in place those action steps is ahead.

Karp: Ellen Kelleher occupies a position that is split between OSE and OEL; that position is still on the organization chart.

Rivera: I would love when we do these community meetings to have them in people’s native language and have the interpretation be for us, the school leaders. I think that it sends a message of respect and welcome. Often when we do interpretation it is English dominated. Also know that members of this task force have very significant relationships with targeted communities; I’m sure we could all play a role in involving communities.

Cassellius: Yes, that kind of interpretation sounds good. MWF will be internally-focused and TT will be on Zoom and out in the community.

Assiraj: What can we do to get a community response to some of the needs? There is a huge concern about flight, about families leaving, all kinds of interrelated issues. When we get back in the fall and there are high school students in particular who have not logged on; I really hope that we’re not waiting until September. I’d be happy to go and knock on doors and check.

Cassellius: It’s obviously a very large scale with 51,000 students. We’ve tried to put in an equity roundtable [missed a portion here; listen to recording]. I think the equity roundtables are where we’ll see the greatest impact. At the district level as we look at our dashboard, we will look at that. Equity roundtables are taking place at the district level and at the school level. We are focusing on kids who have had a Success Plan written, following up with families, trying to see who is and who is not registered for school from an equity lens. We are looking at EL students and SPED students, seeing who is registered. We can see that data by neighborhood.

FOLLOW UP: Lee encourages ELLTF members to log into some of the district-wide Equity Roundtables. Very informative.

Cassellius: Superintendent affirms that these roundtables are where she is going to get her major feedback. She will also be coming to SPEC-PAC, ELLTF, and a couple of other groups

to get her major feedback. We put in place Equity Roundtables and there are some schools just flying off with it and there are others who are trying to get in place continuous improvement, problem of practice.

St. Fleur: Really good teachers are a great idea, but really good teachers are going to need support moving from the classroom to the technology. I just want to make certain that is part of the plan.

Cassellius: We will continue to give them remote learning professional development. That is going to be a continual process of support and training and reteaching for our professional staff.

St. Fleur: “Deputizing parents” kind of ranked me because parents are already in charge of their children. And then how about retired teachers, particularly retired Black and brown teachers? I think they’d love to be supportive and would welcome that type of intervention. I know that’s one more thing we’re asking you to do and I would help with that. I’ve talked to parents and to parents with degrees who are going crazy.

Cassellius: If you have recommendations, please send them to Faye or to me directly.

FOLLOW UP: How would ELLTF members like to plug into the community outreach effort this summer? Ideas for how members could contribute included:

- Importance of BPS working with and being supportive of community partners; communicating to BPS what is needed in the partnership
- Holding outreach events in languages other than English
- Boosting community participation in the equity roundtables
- Doing summer outreach to students
- Reaching out to retired teachers of color to engage them in supporting families with remote learning

4. Debrief after presentation to the BSC

- What opportunities?
- What next steps with the Superintendent?
- What next steps related to the search for new, permanent OEL leadership?
- What other follow-up steps?

Portion skipped.

5. New directions in the coming year

- ELLTF community engagement
- Understanding the moment

Portion skipped.

6. Membership

- Departures?

- **Recruitment**

Portion skipped.

7. Public Comment

Eduardo Rojas, teacher at East Boston HS: It is important for teachers to have their voice heard. This is the first I have heard of the ELLTF. You spoke about very important things, and in some cases I think the missing perspective is that of teachers.

Assiraj: We should send an email to teachers to tell them when our meetings are.

Camacho: And the parents councils.

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| Follow up: Figure out how to notify teachers and parents councils about meetings. |
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8. Adjourn