

**Board Special Meeting**  
**Oversight Work Session: English Learners**  
April 1, 2020, 4:30 – 6:00 p.m.  
*Meeting held remotely*



**Minutes**

**Call to Order**

Director Rankin called the meeting to order at 4:36 p.m. Directors DeWolf, Hampson, Harris, Hersey, Mack, Rankin and Rivera-Smith participated with Microsoft Teams or by phone.

**Oversight Work Session: English Learners**

This Work Session was staffed by Superintendent Denise Juneau, Chief Academic Officer Dr. Diane DeBacker, and Director of English Learners Michelle Ota.

Director Rankin thanked people for calling in and explained that no public comment would be taken during the meeting. She said Ms. Ota's PowerPoint presentation is posted on the SPS Board website. She explained that this is first Oversight Work Session done remotely. Director Rankin asked that Directors send her any COVID related questions which would then be consolidated for Ms. Ota to respond to at a later time.

Director Rankin said there will be two opportunities to pause during the presentation for questions.

Ms. Ota introduced herself and provided information on her background and history with Seattle Public Schools. Ms. Ota then provided more information about several of the acronyms mentioned in the presentation.

Ms. Ota showed a photo collage of the employees of her department. She spoke of their extensive education, experience, and diversity. Ms. Ota also provided relevant statistics, including that Seattle Public Schools has approximately 6,500 EL students, or about 12% of our student enrollment; more than 150 languages are spoken in the district; the top five languages are Spanish, Somali, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Amharic.

Next Ms. Ota discussed the various functions of the department. She said the main focus is to provide language acquisition support through professional development, instructional coaching, and ensuring the department's work is aligned with the strategic plan.

Ms. Ota provided an overview of the department's evolution over the last decade. At Superintendent Goodloe Johnson's request, the Council of Great City Schools conducted a program review of the EL department. There were 72 findings, which ranged from having more professional development opportunities for all staff, both general education and EL staff, to changing the delivery of how we serve EL students from "pull out" to more "push in" support. A new director for the department was then hired to put systems and structures into place to address the findings. Approximately eight years ago, OSPI mandated that the district offer EL services at every school. Previously EL services were offered in

specific schools within each region. Currently, we have EL services delivered by an EL certificated teacher at every school that has English Learners. The challenge is staffing FTE for those schools with a small number of EL students.

Ms. Ota then discussed the strengths of the department. She said her team believes the best way they can impact student achievement is through high quality instruction. She said the team takes an asset-based mindset and focuses on what our students bring to the table such as perseverance, multi-lingualism, and resourcefulness. The team believes if they provide strong professional development followed by application and feedback, they can strengthen instruction. Ms. Ota described Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD<sup>®</sup>) professional development that is the backbone of their professional development offerings.

Ms. Ota said that one weakness of the department is consistently implementing compliance requirements across 104 site-based schools. However, in the last audit the department had zero findings. Ms. Ota said another area of weakness might be ensuring that people understand the difference between language acquisition and literacy, which can lead to staff thinking that students need literacy intervention when in reality they might need more time and more targeted instruction around language acquisition.

Ms. Ota said the opportunity that she is most excited about is the SEA-SPS work group that has been formed to look at how we deliver EL services and how we staff to meet student needs. Ms. Ota said a threat for the department is fluctuations in funding based on enrollment.

Ms. Ota then discussed the accomplishments of the department. She explained that English Learners are not a homogenous group, but are made up of newcomers, long-term English Learners, students who have had no formal education and students with a range of language proficiencies. She said she likes to look at how former English Learners are performing. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade ELA SBA, former EL students are performing at the same level as students who have never received EL services. And former English Learners have the highest proportion of 9<sup>th</sup> graders on track to graduate when compared to all other groups.

Another accomplishment for the department has been getting information to EL families in a language they can access. She also highlighted the collaboration between the EL Department, World Language and College Career Readiness to apply for and receive a small grant to work on creating a pathway for high school students to “grow our own” culturally and linguistically diverse teaching corps.

Ms. Ota provided information on the various roles of each group on the organizational chart. Instructional coaches provide professional development districtwide, school-based professional development and/or coaching cycles for general education and EL staff, and collaborate with other content departments in CAI, Title and Satterberg. The translation team are skilled in oral and written translation. They not only provide translation and interpretation support, but they fulfill compliance requirements, like screening incoming students for EL eligibility. Student & family advocates assist with outreach to the community, offer information and support to parent/guardians, assist with staffing and communication with schools and lead professional development courses for IAs.

Ms. Ota paused to take questions.

Director Rankin acknowledged that it is challenging to give a presentation without the feedback of an audience. She assured Ms. Ota the information was appreciated, and they were all listening.

At 5:15 p.m., Director Rankin noted that Director DeWolf had to step away from the meeting.

Director Hampson said Ms. Ota spoke of multilingualism as a strength but listed “mindset around language as an asset” on the SWOT Analysis slide as a weakness. Ms. Ota clarified that it is listed as a weakness on the slide because some staff may not see language as an asset. Folks have good intentions, thinking they are advocating for their EL student, but the staff might have a deficit-based mindset, rather than an asset-based mindset. Ms. Ota said they have work to do around moving toward an asset-based mindset. Director Hampson agreed that she has also noticed a deficit-based mindset regarding English Learners.

Director Hampson discussed the district’s use of Dual Language programs as an enrichment activity rather than using it to close the gap. She said it seems like English Learners and Dual Language would be more connected. She asked Ms. Ota how she views the collaboration going forward? Ms. Ota explained that Dr. Thad Williams is the Dual Language manager whom she works closely with on this issue. Historically, the district has not been able to use Dual Language as an intentional EL strategy. Dr. Williams and Ms. Ota have been having conversations about how the department can formalize it and utilize the gains by including heritage speakers in Dual Language. Director Hampson asked how the Board can support the EL Department on those efforts? Ms. Ota said she would need to discuss this with Dr. Williams, but there are ideas they are looking at, which need to include an analysis of populations/models.

Director Harris asked Ms. Ota if teachers are required to take the professional development that is offered? Ms. Ota responded that the professional development offered by the department is not required. But because GLAD is highly regarded, the department has a waiting list. She said that GLAD training is a huge commitment, requiring six days outside the building. She said the department was in the midst of offering their third training when the virus closed schools.

Director Harris asked how we track the number of teachers and staff in each school, and do we use a “teach the teacher” model? Ms. Ota responded that her department uses a spreadsheet to track the teachers who have been trained on GLAD and they know who in the district has been trained. She said the department’s goal is to have a GLAD trained teacher in every school. The agreement between the school and the department asks for a team of 3-4 teachers from the school, including an EL teacher and a Gen Ed teacher, and then follow-up learning walks conducted to demonstrate what they have learned. This allows the Instructional Coaches to observe and give feedback in a non-evaluative way.

Director Harris asked how the EL Department includes the ED Directors to ensure the district maximizes its benefit, and how does the department encourage schools who are not taking advantage of these opportunities? Ms. Ota responded that the directors of schools have been great and usually are aware of what schools are taking the professional development. Often times the Ed Directors will join on the planning end or problem solve issues like substitute teachers, etc. As far as the second question, it is her hope that when there is great professional development, word travels quickly and when you see results, other teachers want that, too. Ms. Ota said she truly believes teachers want what is best for students.

Director Harris asked Ms. Ota to provide more information on the SEA-SPS work group. Specifically, how is it organized, the timeline, and what are they working on? Ms. Ota explained that under the last bargain, the district formed 22 work groups. Human Resources Director Dr. Clover Codd and SEA President Michael Tamayo agreed to bring in an outside facilitator from NEA. The purpose of this work group is to look at the delivery model of how we are serving English Learners, and how are we staffing

certificated teachers and bilingual instructional assistants. Are we staffing schools based on student needs? The group was meeting once a month, with the hope of having an agreement by January 2021. The work is now on hold.

Director Harris commented that she is impressed by the longevity of the team and of the EL staff she has met.

Director Hersey commented that Ms. Ota's presentation was well done. Director Hersey asked if there is any overlap in the services the EL Department provides in the Seattle Teacher Residency (STR)? Are they receiving GLAD training or any other EL training as they matriculate through their process? Ms. Ota responded that one of our coaches advises STR and she is one of our key GLAD trainers. The residents are not receiving formal GLAD training, but our Coach has that strong lens. Ms. Ota agreed that could be an opportunity we should look into. Director Hersey added that teacher prep program at UW may also include an opportunity.

Director Hersey asked about data and who is receiving PD. Specifically, where is the concentration of teachers who receive PD and concentration of EL students? Are we seeing those teachers teaching in those buildings? Are our resources going where to they are needed most?

Ms. Ota said that her department offered GLAD training to the Top 13 schools first, and then uses equity tiering to help determine which schools receive GLAD training. She agreed this is something that should be tracked.

Director Hersey commented that he uses GLAD strategies in his classroom. He has access to resources and teaching examples online and can watch on shared drives. Director Hersey asked if SPS has something similar to that? Ms. Ota elaborated that SPS utilizes Schoology, but that she is unsure about videos. Ms. Ota will check on that. She explained that there may be a compliance issue with Orange County (entity that owns GLAD) about videotaping the training. However, Coaches do upload complete units for others to see.

Director Hersey prefaced his comment by saying while this isn't specific to EL, he is interested in looking at more passive PD opportunities. He said educators want bite size pieces that are district approved. He said he is blown away by the lessons that have been provided by SPS TV and would like to know if the district can leverage something similar for our new teachers to access.

Director Mack asked if the district publishes enrollment data, specifically the number of EL students by grade level, school, language? Ms. Ota responded that she isn't aware of public data, but the EL data analyst can run that data.

Director Mack discussed the connection between dual language programs and their potential for being gap closing measures. Students who have a massive gift of another language are likely going to lose it while they are at SPS because we are not continuing to foster that. If we were to actually support dual language, we need to increase and offer what we don't offer, and we need to include languages in the top five languages. She said that SPS does not offer Somali, Vietnamese, Amharic, and doesn't have dual language programs for those languages. She said the Board may want to do more to support those efforts. She said that in order to get there, the Board may need to do some analysis around what would make it effective to do a dual language program in Amharic or Vietnamese and look at enrollment policies to support that effort.

Ms. Ota responded that OSPI looks at enrollment and considers whether a certain school should have a dual language program. She said she and Dr. Thad Williams have looked into this. Finding staff is a challenge. She said it is difficult to fill bilingual instructional assistant positions in Spanish and Somali, which is why the department is trying to “grow our own.” She said they also consider the sustainability of such a program.

Harris added that Japanese is also included in Dual Language program.

Director Rivera-Smith agreed she would like to do more for dual language in Somali. She asked how the district determines which students go into EL programs or a Dual Language program? Specifically, is the decision up to the family, or is there criteria? Ms. Ota responded that for the English Learners program, eligible students are determined by language proficiency and then attendance area.

Director Rivera-Smith said Directors have been looking at how students are assigned to schools. Parents would have to be knowledgeable regarding Dual Language opportunities versus a neighborhood school and they would have to choose. Director Rivera-Smith asked how the district works with families on that issue? Ms. Ota replied that with the online enrollment process, most families enroll at home and then are assigned to a school in their attendance area. In the past, when families enrolled in person, the bilingual enrollment staff acted as an advisor to the family.

Director Rivera-Smith commented that it was a great presentation.

Ms. Ota continued with her presentation. She spoke to the department’s goals and objectives. She said the department’s efforts include increasing our diverse work force by actively recruiting candidates in schools and in the community. She said her team will take the time to assist with navigation of the system, including giving guidance on the application and interview process.

Ms. Ota addressed the Key Performance Indicators for the department. She said that instruction for EL’s has to be explicit and meaningful and connected to students’ personal, social and cultural world, backgrounds and experiences. She said there needs to be explicit instruction in language development, and we know that we need to have a shift where all teachers see themselves as teachers of EL’s. The department believes impacting all teachers, general education teachers and EL staff, through GLAD professional development will build strong pedagogical knowledge amongst our teaching staff so that we can offer high quality instruction to all students. She said the department’s target is to have a team of teachers GLAD trained at every elementary school.

Ms. Ota explained that the department is funded with a combination of grants and supplemental funds from the district’s general fund. Ms. Ota noted a mistake on Slide 11. The line regarding “L4 expenditures” should be \$707,365 with 50.3% remaining at this time.

Comparisons to other districts is a challenge because there are a variety of factors that will vary from district to district such as size, the size of the EL population, and the range of languages. The biggest difference is the number of full-time employees (FTE) compared to other districts. She said this is because of the ratio within the CBA for certificated teachers and for IAs. She said very few districts staff instructional assistants. Kent’s staffing ratio for certificated staff is 90:1 (elementary) and SPS is 70:1; and Kent’s staffing ratio is 75:1 (secondary) and SPS is 45:1. Some districts take only the state and federal allocation and fund their programs based on those set dollars. We are fortunate that the EL Department receives supplementary funds from the SPS general fund to enhance support.

Ms. Ota said there are three main policies and procedures the department follows: Language Access Policy 4218 (Speakers of Diverse Languages); Racial Equity 0030; and SP Department of English Language Learners and International Programs 2110. Ms. Ota said the two big controls for the department are the Collective Bargaining Agreement and grant guidelines. Ms. Ota said Linguistica for “over the phone interpretation” is the department’s only contract. The key systems used by the department are: PowerSchools, state systems like Tide for testing, and MSDR to track migrant students.

Looking forward, Ms. Ota said the department will continue to find ways to increase family engagement and to ensure our families have information they need to make decisions for their student. She said one of the changes she planned to make this year was to offer EL eligibility screening for kindergartners at community-based organizations and Saturday testing at public libraries around the city. She said she hoped that it would be more convenient and responsive to the families’ needs, rather than only offering screening at the John Stanford Center. The department already tests Head Start preschoolers at their schools and planned to start testing City of Seattle funded preschools. In a normal year, the department will screen nearly 2,000 incoming kindergarten students.

After each year the EL Department reflects on how they do business and thinks of ways they can improve our systems, professional development, or communication so that they can better serve students, teachers, staff and leaders. Ultimately, ensuring academic excellence through language acquisition instruction is our primary strategic focus. By focusing on service alignment, an academic delivery model that is grounded in language acquisition through the application of the Common Core State Standards and English Language Proficiency Standards we will strive for excellence in every classroom for each EL student across our 104 schools.

Ms. Ota said that Director DeWolf had previously asked her if she had a magic wand, what would she wish for. Ms. Ota said she would love to see the district move toward more co-planning, collaborating, and co – teaching. She said she wants educators to see ELs as everyone’s student, to move from “deficit mind set” to “asset mindset,” and to make sure teachers have the tools to inspire our multilingual learners.

Director Rankin asked if there were any further questions. Director Rankin thanked Ms. Ota for her leadership in this area. She said she appreciated the way the presentation was structured, and the level of thoughtfulness. She said hearing about the work of the EL Department is exciting and in particular efforts to “grow your own” educators.

Director Rankin said she wanted to follow up on what Director Hersey discussed about tracking professional development. She asked if educators with GLAD training match or mirror where the EL students are? She would like to have a system to track who has taken professional development by school building. That data could be considered in addressing equity issues.

Director Rankin said she found it interesting that OSPI mandates EL services in every school, but for example, the district isn’t able to provide services at every school for special education students?

Director Hampson asked a question about the formula to determine IA staffing levels. She asked if that is driven by the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). She asked if Ms. Ota had any comments about staffing numbers, specifically what would be the ideal deployment versus how IAs are currently staffed. Ms. Ota replied that the both certificated and IA staffing levels are driven by the CBA, and those ratios have been there for a long time. Neighboring districts like Kent have moved away from including a ratio in the CBA. Ms. Ota said she doesn’t know what the best answer would be, which is why she is excited

about the SEA-SPS work group. Her goal is to focus more on student needs. Ms. Ota said the needs of 35 newcomers is different than the needs of 35 other EL students. Director Hampson commented that it was a dynamic that was driven not by a holistic concept of what kids needed.

Director Rankin reminded the Board to send to her their questions related to the COVID response for consolidation.

### **Adjourn**

This meeting adjourned at 6:11 p.m.

*This meeting was held remotely per the Governor's [Proclamation 20-28](#), prohibiting public agencies from conducting meetings subject to the Open Public Meetings Act in-person to curtail the spread of the COVID-19, and consistent with [School Board Resolution 2019/20-29](#). Public access was provided remotely through Microsoft Teams and teleconference.*