

An Overview of the Boston Compact: 1982-2010

In 1982, Boston business and higher education leaders joined the Boston Public Schools and Mayor Kevin H. White to draft and sign the first Boston Compact, a collaborative school improvement agreement. From its inception, the Compact emphasized aspirational **goals**, visible **measures** of progress, and specific **commitments** from each partner. Almost thirty years later, the Compact's spirit and formula continue to define the mutual accountability that drives collaboration in Boston.

The first Compact generated a number of initiatives and organizations, which proved to be strong, contributing partners throughout the next three decades.

- The Boston Private Industry Council (PIC) launched the first summer jobs campaign, which grew into the nation's most substantial commitment to employer-paid jobs and internships and a school-to-career system that has documented an extraordinary increase in the school district's college-going rate, from 50% in 1985 to 63% in 1993 to 78% in 2007.
- The Boston Higher Education Partnership organized area colleges and universities to offer priority admissions and scholarships for Boston high school graduates, as well as college-bound programs in the city high schools to identify and prepare participating students.
- The city's largest bank and other corporate partners endowed the Boston Plan for Excellence to support teaching innovation and higher academic standards, which inspired the creation of public education foundations across the country that focus on instructional excellence and teacher development.
- A major insurance company founded ACCESS, a last-dollar scholarship program that deployed privately-funded financial aid counselors in each of the city high schools.
- Mayor Raymond L. Flynn and the Boston School Committee created and funded the Alternative Education Initiative, which authorized community-based organizations to develop diploma-granting alternative education programs, leading to a substantial reduction in the dropout rate.

There have been three subsequent Compacts negotiated among the partners – in 1989, 1994 and 2000. The 1989 Compact moved in the direction of school reform, at the insistence of Mayor Flynn and the business community. The Boston Teachers' Union joined the discussion and eventually signed the agreement. The Compact became the context for a new teachers' contract that featured school-based management and shared decision-making. Dramatic state budget cuts prevented full funding of the contract, which then deterred the 1989 Compact from reaching its potential. Nevertheless, this period resulted in the dramatic changes that set the stage for impressive alignment and progress in the 1990s - a new assignment system that allowed all parents a choice of schools, an appointed school board, and eventually the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993, which led to high-stakes testing and charter schools.

The election of a new mayor, Thomas M. Menino, in 1993 opened the door for a new Boston Compact. The spirit of collaboration returned when Mayor Menino welcomed the signing of the new Boston Compact, just one week after his first inaugural. The Boston Public Schools and the Boston Teachers' Union agreed to create in-district charter schools or "pilot schools" as part of the new Compact and a new teachers' contract. The Boston pilot school network remains strong today, supported by the Center for Collaborative Education. The business community added school-year internships (ProTech) and school-to-career activities to its list of commitments, evolving into a model for the federal School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994. The school system and the teachers' union developed a "Center for Leadership Development," and Mayor Menino launched his Read Boston early literacy initiative and the Boston 2:00-6:00 After-School Initiative, which almost doubled after-school participation, from 27% to 52% over the next decade. Schools kept their doors open so that community partners could provide education and enrichment programs, while the Boston After-School for All Partnership raised \$30 million to support access.

The fourth Boston Compact, signed in April of 2000, served as an expression of the school reform agenda of Superintendent Thomas W. Payzant, whose eleven-year tenure culminated with the Broad Prize, recognizing Boston as one of America’s top urban school districts. Throughout this period, the alignment of business, higher education, the teachers’ union and the community was cited as the reason for major investments from national foundations, such as Annenberg, Carnegie and Gates.

Though the Boston Compact is less visible today as a formal agreement, its collaborative formula of goals, measures, and commitments is on full display within various high-profile initiatives.

- In October of 2004, Mayor Menino convened the **Youth Transitions** dropout reduction initiative, featuring a strong collaboration among school officials, social service agencies, community organizations convened by the PIC, and the city’s workforce investment board. The Youth Transitions process led to the hiring of PIC outreach workers to re-enroll high school dropouts, as well as the city’s new Re-engagement Center to examine the needs of returning students and place in them in the programs best positioned to ensure their success.
- In November 2008, Mayor Menino released a study by the PIC and the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University documenting that a disturbingly low 35.5% of the college enrollees from the BPS Class of 2000 had attained a college degree or postsecondary certificate within seven years.

The Mayor challenged the BPS and its business and higher education partners to double the college graduation rate for the Class of 2011, while showing measurable improvements for other graduating classes. This challenge led to the launch of the *Success Boston* college completion initiative, initiated with a \$5 million investment from The Boston Foundation to hire community-based “transition coaches” for BPS graduates attending local colleges and universities.

In addition, the local foundation community has coalesced around various shared strategies and now seeks to fund an “opportunity agenda” to mobilize the next phase of school improvement in Boston.

In the years to come, under the leadership of School Superintendent Carol R. Johnson, Boston remains well-positioned alongside Los Angeles to pursue school and career success for all students, as measured by increases in the high school graduation rate, higher rates of college enrollment and degree attainment, as well as workplace and career connections. Ultimately, success in these areas will lead to financial security for all our public school graduates, highly productive and diverse workforces that contribute to economic growth, and more prosperous communities within each of our respective cities.

Postsecondary enrollment rates, BPS graduates

