

THE BOSTON COMPACT -  
PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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What a pleasure it is to be speaking to you here tonight in a building that has played such an important role in Boston's history. As most of you know, it was in this building that the verbal battles which culminated in the Declaration of Independence were born, and it was from the East balcony of this building on July 18th, 1776, that the Declaration of Independence was first read to the citizens of Boston.

Tonight I would like to speak to you about a more recent event in Boston's history, that bears on one of the most important issues facing our city and our nation's future: the quality of public education.

My address concerns the past, present, and future of the Boston Compact, a unique collaborative agreement between Boston's employers, schools of higher education, the Mayor, the Boston Public Schools, the teachers union and other community partners to improve the schools in the city of Boston and to provide college and career opportunities to its students.

The original Boston Compact was signed in 1982. It grew out of the recognition that the critical issues facing Boston could not be addressed effectively without a

successful public school system. The business and higher education communities needed a more qualified pool of workers and applicants if they were to meet the test of an increasingly competitive market place. They believed that school improvement would be motivated if a substantial commitment to the future of Boston public school students and graduates was made. They agreed to do so in exchange for a commitment to school improvement from the superintendent, the School Committee, and the Mayor.

Through the Compact, the business community committed summer jobs and priority hiring to Boston Public School students. Higher education pledged scholarships and priority admission for Boston graduates. And, in turn, the Boston schools committed to improve educational quality for its students, as measured by test scores, attendance, and a reduced dropout rate. In short, what the Boston Compact created was a system of "mutual accountability" among the signing partners of the Compact, born of their commitment to a common purpose, each pledging to do its part to improve public education in the city of Boston.

Of course, the Boston Compact did not arise in a vacuum. It had its roots in the aftermath of the crisis associated with busing and the desegregation of the Boston Public Schools in the late 1970's, when racial tensions in

the city reached a flash point. During this era, the use of busing to achieve racial balance between the city's public schools led to numerous incidents of violence. This created an atmosphere of confrontation and chaos within which educational priorities could fall victim to the day-to-day demands of enforcing desegregation. As numerous families fled the city, the elected School Committee had no choice but to focus almost entirely on the issue of busing.

But what about the quality of education for the students who remained? Were these students receiving the kind of education that desegregation was intended to offer? And what about the employer who looked to these students to fill entry-level jobs? And, more importantly, what happened to the fabric of the Boston community, with those students and families left behind in the public schools, composed largely of those without the resources to do anything else?

In 1979, these questions began to be addressed with the formation of Boston's Private Industry Council. Bill Edgerly, then chairman of State Street Bank, assumed the key leadership role. He became the driving private sector force behind the coordinated private/public sector approach to education reform that is the hallmark of the Boston Compact.

The goal of the first Compact was to motivate school improvement by offering priority access to jobs and higher education for public school graduates. The first task was to measure the depth of the problem. How many students were dropping out? How many found jobs after graduating? How many went to college? Once this was determined, the Compact sought to address these problems by developing partnerships between businesses and schools to give students greater incentive to stay in school and to graduate. With jobs awaiting them and preferential admission and financial aid to area colleges, the Boston Compact provided focus for those students who looked to education as a way to capture a bit of the American dream.

Following the signing of the first Compact, the partners launched various initiatives in support of the Compact goals:

- The summer jobs program, which has been a key initiative of the Mayor's office since its inception. Traditionally spearheaded by a key business person--Marshall Carter from State Street has performed this role for the last several years--the program has been vital in introducing Boston students to employment, and to filling potentially idle summer months with a paid work experience.

About 575 students participated in 1982; nearly 4,600 were employed last summer, making this program the largest private sector effort of its kind in the country.

- The higher education partnership which recruited substantial scholarship commitments for Boston high school graduates.
- The Boston Plan for Excellence in the Public Schools endowment created by the Bank of Boston to provide resources to high school teachers who were making innovative proposals for improving classroom instruction. John Hancock Mutual life and the Boston law firm of Goodwin, Procter and Hoar followed up with endowments dedicated to middle and elementary schools, respectively.
- New England Mutual Life (now New England Financial) and other leading businesses established the ACCESS fund to provide "last dollar" scholarships to college for graduating Boston students.
- The Alternative Education Initiative launched to address the dropout crisis by providing funding and support for community-based alternatives for those who were dropping out of school.

Clearly, the private/public partnership that was reflected in the Boston Compact had—and continues to have—much to contribute to the success of the public schools, and to the Boston community more generally.

The original Compact was designed to be redrafted every five years, in recognition of the fact that key leadership and key educational issues change over time. In 1987, Ferdinand "Moose" Colloredo-Mansfeld, Chairman of Cabot Industrial Trust, then Private Industry Council and Compact chairman, refused to commit private sector support to a second Compact without a deeper commitment to school reform. Boston's corporate leaders believed that real school change would result only by shifting power back to the local schools, and away from total control by the central school administration and the School Committee. School-based management was successfully negotiated, and the Boston Teacher's Union became a full partner in the second Boston Compact. However, the challenges of the local economic crisis of the late '80s and the politics associated with turnover in Boston school superintendents overwhelmed much of the progress anticipated by the second compact. Indeed, the major step forward during this period was Mayor Flynn's success in replacing the elected school committee with an appointed board in 1991. Clearly, the

time had come for a more unified public sector approach to the significant issues facing the Boston public school system.

With the improving economy, the stage was set for a more ambitious Compact, which was signed in 1994. This Compact was shaped around six major goals in support of the continuing improvement of the Boston Public Schools.

1. A recommitment by the private sector and the higher education community to better access to employment and higher education.
2. Commitment to innovation by the Boston public school system.
3. The development of a comprehensive curriculum and new standards by which to measure students educational achievement.
4. Better teacher training and professional development.
5. Support for parents and families through a commitment to involving them in school management; and,
6. The establishment of community learning centers at public schools through after-school programs and activities.

Thus, what began as a general mutual commitment among the private and public sectors in Boston to provide opportunities to Boston public school students in return for school improvements, became, by the signing of the third Compact, a real partnership in developing the means by which those improvements would be realized.

All of this was facilitated by other major changes: state school reform was well underway underlining the need for focus on curriculum and high standards; Mayor Menino was elected with education as his key priority; a new superintendent, Tom Payzant, the former Assistant Secretary of Education and long-time superintendent of the San Diego schools, was appointed and announced a new high-performance focus; and, finally, the appointed school committee showed itself capable of tackling tough issues. As those of us on the search committee for the new superintendent often said, the time was ripe--the stars were in alignment--or, if school improvement doesn't happen now, it never will. And, indeed, much of what has happened in the wake of the third Compact has been remarkable.

One of the major successes has been the School-to-Career program. Created by federal legislation in 1994 that was modeled after a pilot program in Boston known as Project ProTech, the School-to-Work program--or as we are

coming to call it, the School-to-Career program—is funded by the state of Massachusetts and the Boston Public Schools. It is managed by the staff of the Boston Private Industry Council, continuing the PIC's role as an implementing arm of the Boston compact. This program offers high school students paid internships in particular business areas—such as medical technology, or financial services—and redesigns the high school curriculum to take advantage of these real world learning experiences. We have seen that students learn the relevance of biology, or geometry, in a much more hands-on way when they see what they've learned the day before in the classroom in action in the workplace.

The interdisciplinary knowledge required for success at the workplace encourages teachers to work in teams that focus on career needs. These teams of their nature have created smaller learning communities within the large District high schools. Indeed the power of the School-to-Career model has become so recognized that 12 District high schools have chosen to restructure along its lines. The use of this model has the natural outcome of increasing attention on the individual student. Teachers become aware of workplace needs, often through summer programs and on-site visits, and adjust curricula to the standards of

employers. Supervisors in the workplace play a key role, and our School-to-Career efforts have expanded to provide evaluation tools to help them as well.

School-to-Career is not cheap; Boston alone spends over \$2 million per year for PIC staff to connect businesses and students. But such efforts do work to create a more highly skilled work force. How do we know this? Just take the New England Medical Center, which over the last several years has employed 50 or more School-to-Career students in various technical jobs at the hospital. Every single one of these students has gone on to college or university training. These are largely minority, inner-city students of Boston public high schools. Their peers have less than a 60 percent rate of post high school education. Yet somehow each and every one of the New England Medical Center students have gone on to college.

Perhaps it is because they have seen for themselves the connection between education and work, and have realized that improved skills are the path to better jobs and higher income. We also have statistically reliable evidence that School-to-Career students are absent less frequently, get better grades, and at least hold their own on the challenging new standardized tests—the Stanford 9's and now the MCAS—being introduced into the Boston Public

Schools. Finally, while this program had been originally conceived as one that would have a large concentration of Hispanic and African-American students, we now see applicants from other cultures as well. It seems that word has gotten around that School-to-Career is the pathway to higher education.

Now, some would argue that School-to-Career runs a risk of "dumbing down" the high school experience, with a focus on technical education rather than the liberal arts. This view simply does not square with our experience here in Boston. Rather, by lending relevance to students' education, and providing a hands-on educational experience as well as a strictly academic one, School-to-Career programs stimulate the drive for intellectual development, and encourage students to continue with their schooling.

A second clear success to arise out of the Boston Compact has been the fulfillment of the promise to achieve innovation through school restructuring. In a dramatic commitment to innovation, after the third Boston Compact was signed, the School Committee and the teacher's union agreed to establish pilot schools. These schools were free from contractual work rules and administrative constraints in areas such as hiring, job descriptions, and the amount of time in the school day and year. Currently there are ten

pilot schools—six high schools, one middle school, and three elementary schools—serving 1500 students in the Boston Public School system. However, both School-to-Career and pilot schools are programs that at least at their inception affected relatively few students and few schools. What was needed was the means to improve the entire system--whole school change for all schools not just a few. This came to Boston with the "Annenberg Challenge."

In 1996 the Annenberg Foundation offered a 10 million-dollar matching grant to the Boston Public Schools to support its efforts in school reform. This allowed Bill Boyan, Vice Chairman of John Hancock, Chair of the Annenberg Challenge and the leader of the Boston Plan for Excellence, to successfully raise over 15 million dollars in additional support of efforts to effect broad-based change. This financial support would not have been forthcoming, in my view, without the prior commitment to improvement outlined in the Boston Compact, and without the private/public sector cooperation embodied in the Compact process.

Of course, an important part of realizing success is to be sure that we are accurately measuring our progress in reaching our goals. Here our university collaborators have played an important role in providing evidence of our

progress. Prof. Andrew Sum, of the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University, has studied the graduating classes from the Boston Public Schools for more than a decade. His most recent study, following up on the Class of 1997, found that these graduates had better employment and college going rates than the national average for all students--urban, suburban and rural.

Some results of his study: 72% of Boston graduates who were not enrolled in college were employed, compared with only 63% in the nation. And when one accounts for the different demographic make-up of the Boston schools, the numbers look even better. African-American graduates of the Boston public schools were employed at a rate of 67%, compared with 47% for the country as a whole. For Hispanic students the figures are 71% compared with 47%. For Caucasians it is 84% versus 68%.

What about college attendance? Again, Boston graduates compare favorably. The college attendance rate for the class of 1997 was 68% from Boston, and 67% from the nation. And again, when one breaks out the numbers by race, we get an even more meaningful comparison of how we are doing. In Boston, 65% of African-American graduates of the class of 1997 went on to college, compared to 54% in the nation. For

Hispanics it's 58% compared to 55%. For Caucasians it's 70% compared to 65%.

These data on the relative success of Boston public school graduates does, I think, bear evidence to the power of the process engendered by the Boston Compact. But is "relative" success good enough? For our graduates to be successful, for our businesses to be competitive, and for our city to have a strong social fabric, Boston public school graduates need to have the skills to compare with the best. We need absolute success, not relative. And that means addressing the issue of high standards within the school system.

Despite all the progress working together, we know that the graduates of the Boston public school system do not have the skills they need. Our new superintendent, Tom Payzant, introduced tough new tests -- the Stanford 9's -- shortly after he arrived. These tests embodied the literacy and math standards widely recognized as critical to achievement beyond high school; about 35 percent of Boston high school students scored at a failing level in literacy, 70 percent in math when the tests were first administered in 1996; the results are not much different now. The new and more difficult MCAS tests began two years ago-- 57 percent of students failed literacy; 75 percent

failed math. And the results of the MCAS will begin to bite in 2003; at that time seniors unable to pass the test will not receive a normal state diploma. Clearly the efforts of all those involved in Boston public school reform must be focused on the challenge presented by these new tests which embody the high standards needed to achievement in the world today.

Some might argue that the realities of an inner city school system make implementing high standards impossible. Indeed, fully 36 percent of Boston public school students speak a primary language other than English--from Albanian to Cape Verde Creole, to Hindi and Urdu. Most also come from lower average income families, with few of the social and economic advantages that others have. But these are simply challenges that must be overcome. Adhering to high standards in urban public education ends up being the only fair way to prepare a diverse student body for what lies ahead. To do less is to rob those students of their very right to a future in U.S. economic life. Thus, we must meet the challenges presented by high standards--and by high stakes tests.

And, more importantly, we must meet the challenge of the increasing demands of the workplace of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Low-skilled jobs are already rapidly disappearing from the

market, replaced by technological innovation. The workplace of tomorrow will require an even more skilled workforce; one that is comfortable with technology, and has the analytical and conceptual skills to use it. With the advent of the "knowledge" based economy of the 90s and the new century, an increasing advantage will accrue to those who "think for a living." Boston public school students will need a better education to work in this environment; our industries will need better educated workers, and our city's health, as well as our state's and region's, depend on them.

How will we get there? I believe that we need a 4<sup>th</sup> Boston Compact; one which explicitly embraces the goal of demonstrable improvement in our schools as measured by tests embodying the highest standards. This will take a cooperative effort between the schools, business, and local government—just as in the original Compact in 1982—to help our schools and our students to succeed. We cannot expect the schools to meet the challenge of the MCAS on their own.

We must focus every available resource on improving instruction to help students prepare for the MCAS. In his State of the City address Mayor Menino called for a focus on teacher recruitment and preparation. The higher education community and the School Committee are

responding. But, as in 1982, there is a role for business to play in these efforts as well.

Let me close by sharing with you the story of one successful example in which business played such a role by providing remedial literacy instruction to students who were working at summer jobs. This past summer the "Classroom at the Workplace" program was sponsored by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, Bell Atlantic, and Gillette. This pilot program was designed to provide student-employees with a focused academic module during a part of their workday, in order to strengthen their vocabulary and test-taking skills. Students from South Boston High School and Dorchester High School participated in the program. The results for the 28 participants were stunning. On average those who participated improved their reading skills by almost two grade levels in just six weeks of participation in the program for about an hour a day!

In some ways it is not surprising that the focused attention on kids works; we know that kids want to succeed and when adults make it possible, when they overcome obstacles and make learning fun, as the three businesses did this summer, students can really blossom. The challenge is to take this effort to a much broader group, and have them succeed as well. Clearly there is a lot to

be gained from an even greater cooperative effort between business and schools.

The business leaders who signed the original Boston Compact understood the importance of a high-quality public school system. The benefits are a "win-win" situation, with businesses getting a more qualified pool of available workers, and students getting a better education. Surely the workplace of 1999 and beyond puts no fewer demands on public education. We have made some real progress in realizing our goals so far, but there is yet further work to be done. We need a new Boston Compact to get us there.