External Actors and the Boston Public Schools:
The Courts, the Business Community, and the Mayor

In the last few years the Boston Public Schools have become a central part of city politics. Boston's Mayor Thomas Menino has joined the ranks of big-city mayors who have placed public education squarely on their agenda. In a 1996 "state of the city" speech, delivered at a high school that had lost accreditation, Menino pointed to the school system as the "hub" of the "urban wheel." He outlined a number of reform initiatives and concluded in dramatic fashion: "I want to be judged as your mayor by what happens now in the Boston Public Schools. I expect you to hold me accountable. . . If I fail, judge me harshly."[1]

Menino's call for action and accountability is indicative of a growing trend in which mayors, state officials, and other outside parties are intervening in urban school systems. In Chicago, the mayor has authority to appoint the school board and effective control over the appointment of top administrators. In Baltimore, the mayor also has extensive control over the public schools. In New Jersey, state officials have assumed responsibility for school systems in Jersey City, Paterson, and Newark, dismissing superintendents and school boards. And in Washington, D.C., a financial control board created by the U.S. Congress has appointed a new superintendent and board of trustees to run the school system.

Examples of outside intervention are often dramatic and quite extensive in scope. There are, however, less radical instances of external intervention in many urban schools: for example, private businesses enter into partnerships and other forms of involvement; universities work to shape and restructure urban schools; and, certainly, the courts play a major role, particularly through desegregation and fiscal equity cases.

To examine the effects of and the lessons to be learned from these experiences, I will consider three examples of outside intervention in the Boston Public Schools: (1) Federal District Court intervention, beginning in the mid-1970s, to achieve desegregation in the school system; (2) business involvement in the schools, beginning in the early 1980s, through such vehicles as the Boston Compact and the Boston Plan for Excellence; (3) and mayoral involvement, beginning in the early 1990s, including the adoption of a school committee appointed by the mayor.[2]

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1 Mayor Thomas Menino, "State of the City" Address, City of Boston Mayor's Office, January 17, 1996.

2 In Boston, the term "school committee" is used instead of "school board."

Each intervention brought a set of policies and practices into the school system. Court intervention was the most comprehensive of the three, affecting student assignment, building usage, and a host of other school matters. Business involvement began with an agenda more focused on school-to-work and school-to-college transitions, but later expanded into other aspects of the school system. And the mayor's involvement focuses on appointment of the school committee, but also extends into fiscal and other areas of school policy.

The challenge for outside interventions, however, is not how to bring forward a new idea or initiative but how to *extend* that idea or initiative throughout the school system, and how to *sustain* it in the future when competing demands are made on time and resources. Meeting this challenge involves two key tasks: developing a supportive constituency for reform, and creating an institutional arrangement to sustain reform over the long term. These are essentially political tasks, and they are formidable ones.

The first task, building a supportive constituency, can be quite difficult. Parents--and voters--do not always identify with the schools. In Boston, for example, only 20 percent of households have children in the public schools.[3] For many city residents, the public schools are little more than a fiscal drain on the tax base. Business leaders and state government officials also may have little interest in urban schools; many corporate executives no longer see them as a major source for new employees, and state officials are under pressure to distribute the benefits and resources of government statewide, without showing favoritism to urban centers. Even teachers are often cautious members of a school constituency; when outside interventions bring reforms into the system, teachers may retreat into a defensive posture to protect existing practices. Indeed, a supportive constituency must be carefully fostered and nurtured and must be constructed among a diverse range of individuals and organizations that bring different interests and goals into the process. These differences must be respected as common ground is sought. The ultimate the goal is a community of support that assumes responsibility for and ownership of the condition and future of the public school system.

The second key task is to institutionalize this community of support. One of the most problematic aspects of education reform is sustaining reform efforts over an extended period of time. Reform cycles often are no longer than electoral cycles; political pressures mount to try something else to "fix" the schools; and one reform replaces another before effects are even known.[4] An institutionalized reform, in

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[3] Philip Clay, "Boston: The Incomplete Transformation," in *Big City Politics in Transition*, edited by H.V. Savitch and John Clayton Thomas, *Urban Affairs Annual Reviews*, Vol. 38 (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1991).

[4] David Tyack and Larry Cuban, *Tinkering Toward Utopia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

contrast, is not dependent upon the favor of particular individuals, nor is it subject to shifting political winds. It has a base of support that allows it to endure changing times. This stability is critical for long-term success. As one Boston principal commented, debates over governance (discussed below) "mean nothing unless we institutionalize quality education for generations, not just for the moment."[5]

Institutionalization can take place in different ways.[6] Most often, it occurs through the establishment of formal structures and organizations that provide a platform for ongoing support. Formal organizations, such as nonprofit corporations that coordinate school-business partnerships, provide an established setting for the long-term support of school reform. State statutes, such as the creation of an appointed school board, offer another example of institutionalization. Institutionalization can also be normative and cognitive, involving the beliefs and values held by individuals; a widely held and strongly supported frame of reference or mind set, such as a belief in school-based learning, can sustain education reforms. While not as visible as formal institutions, this type of supportive culture can be equally important in sustaining long-term support for the public schools.

Boston Public Schools

The Boston Public Schools (BPS) include 117 schools, 63,000 students, 7,400 teachers, administrators, and staff, and an operating budget of $455 million. Students in the public schools come from diverse backgrounds: 48 percent are African American, 23 percent Hispanic, 20 percent white, and 9 percent Asian. Many students have limited economic means: almost 70 percent come from single-parent or foster-parent families, and 73 percent are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. In 1994, the annual dropout rate was 8 percent.[7]

There are also diverse educational needs within the schools. Based on the Massachusetts special education law, which is very broad in its definition of special needs, approximately 6,000 students are in special out-of-classroom needs programs because of physical, mental, or emotional disabilities. There are also approximately 10,000 students in bilingual programs that include instruction in nine different languages.[8]

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5 Quoted in Derrick Jackson, "Energized about education," *Boston Globe*, 1 November 1996, p. A27.

6 W. Richard Scott, *Institutions and Organizations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995).

7 Office of Planning, Research, and Development, "Annual System-Wide Report: Performance Indicators and Accomplishments, 1992-1993,":(Boston, MA: Boston Public Schools, October 1993); Boston Public Schools, "Fact Sheet-September 1994" (Boston: Boston Public Schools, October 1994).

8 Boston Public Schools, "Fact Sheet- September 1994."

The school system operates under a "controlled choice" plan of student assignment. Elementary- and middle-school children are placed in three geographic zones and parents can prioritize school choices within their zone. Student assignments are then made based on parental choices and racial guidelines. The system operates fifteen high schools that are open to students throughout the city, however, admission to three of the schools is based on examination scores.

Desegregation and the Courts

In the 1960s and 1970s, racial segregation was the most prominent issue facing the Boston schools. School officials, who opposed desegregation demands from state government, faced a lawsuit filed by black parents. The lawsuit proceeded through the courts and on June 21, 1974, Federal District Judge W. Arthur Garrity issued the first of his many desegregation orders. The judge concluded that the Boston School Committee and the school department "had knowingly carried out a systematic program of segregation affecting all of the city's students, teachers and school facilities, and had intentionally brought about or maintained a dual school system."[9]

In Phase I (1974-75) of the desegregation process the judge instituted a mandatory busing plan that included the controversial matching of South Boston High School, an almost exclusively white school, with Roxbury High School, a predominately black school. Phase II (1975-76) involved more extensive busing under an assignment plan organized around eight community school districts and one magnet district. An administrative structure of community superintendents was established to manage the system, and the judge ordered the closure of twenty-two schools.

Judge Garrity also established a number of community support structures for the public schools. A forty-member Citywide Coordinating Council was created to monitor school compliance with desegregation orders; district advisory councils were established in each community school district; and racial-ethnic parent councils were established for each school. In addition, Phase II established twenty partnerships between area colleges and individual public schools as well as twenty business-school partnerships.[10]

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9 379 F. Supp. 410 (1974) *Morgan v. Hennigan*, p. 410.

10 Although the judge identified these partnerships in his court order, they had their origin during 1974 when the Boston Chamber of Commerce and the National Alliance of Businessmen created the Boston Trilateral Council for Quality Education to support business-school relationships.

Court orders continued. In total, Judge Garrity issued over four hundred orders involving school closings, student assignment, personnel hiring, textbook adoption, community partnerships, and a host of other school matters.[11] In 1982 Judge Garrity removed himself from compliance monitoring, giving this authority to the state Department of Education, but he retained authority over a number of critical areas, including student assignment, faculty composition, and the condition of school buildings. The final court ruling was made in 1989 when the judge approved a voluntary "controlled choice" assignment process as an acceptable desegregation plan.

This was a difficult period for Boston. One participant recalled the 1970s as the "war years," while another likened this period to the "battle of Boston."[12] Yet, despite this divisive environment, many credit the court with forcing change in the school system. The court fundamentally reorganized the system, closed schools, and designed a new assignment plan; furthermore, the court pushed businesses, higher education institutions, community organizations, and parents to become more involved in the Boston Public Schools. The first executive director of the Boston Compact (formed in 1982, see below) noted that businesses, colleges, and the schools would not have joined forces without "the six or seven years of working together under the court order."[13] In a more pointed comment, one participant in the process wrote that a number of community institutions, such as colleges and businesses, were "dragged into the arena by court order."[14] Another observer confided, "there have been no genuine efforts to improve the schools without a court order."[15]

It could be argued, then, that the court played a critical role in creating a support structure for the Boston Public Schools. In both inside and outside arenas, the court fundamentally restructured Boston public education. Constituencies of support were targeted and institutional arrangements, such as the community districts and school-business partnerships, were established. However, the manner in which this support was created-- by court order--diminished the community-based, "home-grown" nature of that very structure. Interested parties did battle in the courts instead of engaging in the more deliberative process of negotiating

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11 Ronald Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

12 Ibid.

13 Eleanor Farrar and Anthony Cipollone, "After the Signing: The Boston Compact 1982 to 1985," in *American Business and the Public School* , edited by Marsha Levine and Roberta Trachtman (New York: Teachers College Press, 1988), p. 97.

14 Robert Wood, "Professionals at Bay: Managing Boston's Public Schools," *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 1:4 (1982): 464.

15 Author's Interview with School Committee Member, January 26, 1994.

differences, building coalitions, and creating institutional supports. The agenda for educational change was set in the federal courthouse rather than the school department or a community setting. Community and school leaders were involved in education reform, but many of their strategies and actions were in reaction to court orders.

As a result, support for reform and change in the Boston schools was conditional and often wavered because it was imposed rather than community generated. The exodus of white students from the schools, although not solely attributable to desegregation, was one sign of declining support.[16] To use a distinction emphasized by Clarence Stone, the federal court exercised "power *over*" rather than "power *to*."[17] In general, courts can be an important platform to force change, but they are less capable of generating political support and, when faced with opposition, are limited in their ability to foster significant social change.[18]

In Boston, court orders "shocked" the school system into addressing long-standing practices of segregation; without court action it is unclear when desegregation would have occurred. Court action, then, may be a prerequisite for the development of a community-based support structure. As one study of six big-city school districts found, building the community infrastructure for major school improvement efforts typically began only after desegregation battles had been resolved in the courts.[19] Judicial intervention can plant the seeds of change, but individuals and organizations within the community ultimately must build and sustain a structure of support for the schools.

Business Support for the Boston Public Schools

The business community is another outside actor with a long history of involvement in the public schools. The precursor to this involvement dates to 1959 when fourteen leading businessmen created the Coordinating Committee (popularly known as the Vault). The Vault supported downtown investment, helped shape public policies conducive to private investment, and provided fiscal support when the city faced financial troubles in 1976 and 1981. The business community was clearly vested in the economic and fiscal future of Boston.[20]

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16 Christine Rossell, "The Politics of School Desegregation Remedies," Paper presented at the Meetings of the Northeastern Political Science Association, November 16, 1996.

17 Clarence Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), p. 229.

18 Michael McCann, *Taking Reform Seriously: Perspectives on Public Interest Liberalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986); Gerald Rosenberg, *The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring About Social Change?* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

19 Paul Hill, Arthur Wise, Leslie Shapiro, *Educational Progress: Cities Mobilize to Improve Their Schools* (Santa Monica, California: Rand Corp., 1989).

20 John Mollenkopf, *The Contested City* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 159. See

The Vault, however, was much less visible in the area of education. The Boston Public Schools system was outside the control of city hall, and many business leaders had limited, if any, personal or professional contact with the schools. Furthermore, the school system had a negative image and reputation as a conservative, change-averse institution.[21] One observer described BPS as an “Irish-dominated, patronage-ridden, job-security-oriented institution.”[22] Perhaps most important, many in the business community were reluctant to become involved in controversies over desegregation and busing. Business leaders, who often lived in the suburbs, were hesitant to cast judgment on the busing of children within the city. As one businessman told a civil rights commission, the business community did not see itself as a "major actor in this situation [desegregation]," rather, its role was "supplemental."[23] Desegregation was an issue best left to the residents of Boston.

By the early 1980s, however, the passions around busing and desegregation had begun to subside, and the business community was prepared to make a more comprehensive commitment to public education. In 1982 the Boston Compact was established as a partnership between the business community and the public schools. In 1983 higher education joined the Compact, and in 1984 the Boston building and trades unions joined. The essence of the Compact was an agreement whereby the school system would work to improve education and learning outcomes, and in return, businesses, colleges, and labor organizations would provide jobs and postsecondary educational opportunities for graduates.

The creation of the Boston Compact can be attributed to several key ingredients. Leadership was one critical piece. William Edgerly, chairman of State Street Bank and leader of the Vault, took a personal interest in public education. Edgerly appealed to the corporate citizenship role of his peers as well as the economic link between successful public school students and employees of the future and convinced the members of the Vault to be the first signatories to the Compact.[24] On the schools side, newly hired Superintendent Robert Spillane was

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also, Boston Urban Study Group, *Who Rules Boston?* (Boston: Institute for Democratic Socialism, 1984).

21 Peter Schrag, *Village School Downtown: Boston Schools, Boston Politics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967); Jonathan Kozol, *Death at an Early Age: The Destruction of the Hearts and Minds of Negro Children in the Boston Public Schools* (New York: New American Library, [1967]1985); Martin Meyerson and Edward Banfield, *Boston: The Job Ahead* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966).

22 Robert Wood, "Professionals at Bay," p. 455.

23 U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, "Hearings held in Boston, Massachusetts," June 16-20, 1975, p. 184.

24 Sandra Waddock, "Public-Private Partnerships as Social Product and Process," in *Research in Corporate Social Performance and Policy*, Vol. 8, edited by James Post (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1986).

eager to work with businesses and other community institutions. Spillane improved the financial reporting of the schools and agreed to have the school system held accountable for the education it provided. He viewed the Compact as an opportunity to increase the support structure for the schools: "the major achievement of the Compact is a sense that everyone has a responsibility to this city and the schools."[25]

In addition, several organizations existed that could provide a support structure for the Compact. Most important of these was the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC). Created in 1979, the Boston PIC involved the business community in the design and implementation of government-funded training programs. The PIC was a forum for key business leaders and also provided staff capacity to implement new programs. Like other private industry councils around the country, the Boston PIC played a central role in implementing federal labor-training grants. The Boston PIC, however, went much further. It was incorporated as a nonprofit agency and assumed a major role in the overall development of jobs programs within the city. In 1981, with support from the city, the PIC developed a summer youth jobs program as well as job counseling services at several high schools. Both programs brought the business community as well as other community actors together with the school department. Most important, the PIC provided an independent umbrella for the development of business-school programs. This independence was important to many in the business community. Given the school department's reputation for patronage, politics, and poor management practices, business leaders were reluctant to grant school officials authority to oversee programs and monitor the flow of funds.[26] The PIC was more reliable and dependable; it became the institutional home of the Compact as well as the business-school partnerships begun in the 1970s.

Furthermore, the concrete and explicit provisions of the Compact appealed to the business community.[27] The school department would improve daily attendance by five percent each year, reduce the high school dropout rate by five percent each year, and improve math and reading scores of graduates. Boston businesses would increase the hiring of Boston public school graduates by five percent each year; colleges and universities would improve college placement rates by five percent each year; Boston building and trades unions would actively recruit graduates into apprenticeship programs.

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25 Alan Melchior, "The Boston Compact," Unpublished paper prepared for the Massachusetts Governor's Task Force on Private Sector Initiatives, February, 1983.

26 Eleanor Farrar and Anthony Cipollone, "The Business Community and School Reform: The Boston Compact at Five Years" (Madison, WI: National Center on Effective Secondary Schools, 1988), ERIC ED 34405.

27 Farrar and Cipollone, "After the Signing," p. 98.

The Compact was a major step in building a support structure for the schools, although its focus was limited. In particular, the emphasis on employment and college opportunities for public school graduates left elementary and middle schools untouched. This focus on jobs and employment reflected the dominant role of business leaders in drafting the Compact. Similarly, the premise of the Compact--that job opportunities for students would foster improved learning--was a relatively narrow view of education reform. A more comprehensive and systemic approach to school reform would develop in later years.

A second business-sponsored coalition, the Boston Plan for Excellence in the Public Schools, was a spin-off of the Compact. The Plan began in 1984 when the Bank of Boston, celebrating its 200th anniversary, established a $1.5 million endowment to support innovative teaching and curriculum in elementary and high schools.[28] The newly created Plan soon became the recipient of other corporate contributions, including one million dollars from John Hancock Financial Services for middle school programs and one million dollars from a law firm for professional teacher development.[29] By 1988, the Boston Plan had over $10 million in endowments to support programs in the public schools. The Boston Plan, like the PIC, provided a safe and reliable avenue for business involvement with the schools. Staff were independent of the school department and not subject to the political ventures of the Boston School Committee. Furthermore, the Plan provided a platform for corporate visibility and leadership; each grant program bore the name of its corporate sponsor.

During the 1980s business support for the public schools continued, although frustrations mounted with regard to the Boston Compact. Superintendent Spillane's departure in 1985 removed one of the strongest advocates of the Compact, and growing awareness that schools were not improving left nonschool parties to the agreement frustrated and disillusioned. In 1987 the five-year Compact was up for renewal, but business leaders were dissatisfied with the lack of progress in the schools. In 1987 and 1988 a Compact committee noted the increase in jobs for graduates and postsecondary educational opportunities, but less success on the part of the schools in lowering the dropout rate and improving academic achievement. The business community called for "fundamental change" in how the schools were run, emphasizing the need for more parental control in student assignment and the need for school-based management to increase the power of site-based professionals, particularly the principal.[30]

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28 Edward Dooley, "The Culture of Possibility. The Story of the Boston Plan for Excellence in the Public Schools: The First Ten Years" (Boston: Boston Plan for Excellence, no date).

29 Boston Plan for Excellence in the Public Schools, "1995 Annual Report." (Boston: Boston Plan for Excellence in the Public Schools, 1995).

30 Sarah Snyder, "Business to schools: we want results," *Boston Globe*, 25 October 1988, p. 33; Boston Private Industry Council, "Organizational Fact Sheet: History & Program Development," no date.

After lengthy negotiations Compact II was signed in 1989. Major goals of the agreement included the adoption of school-based management, an increase in parental involvement, implementation of the new controlled-choice assignment plan, expansion of postgraduate job search and college assistance programs, increase in the high school completion rate, and an improvement in overall academic performance. Each major party to the agreement--business, higher education, the mayor, and the school department--had a role to play in meeting the goals.

Compact II represented a step forward in business support for public education, but it was soon derailed by other forces.[31] An economic downturn that began in late 1988 removed the fiscal underpinnings not only of the Compact but also the recently negotiated teachers contract that included a number of the Compact's initiatives. City funding for the Boston Public Schools declined by two percent in FY 1992 and another two percent in FY 1993.[32] The cutbacks were relatively modest, but they effectively curtailed most new initiatives, such as school-based management and salary increases for teachers.

The economic downturn also took a toll on the business community's ability to focus on public education. The demise of the "Massachusetts Miracle" led many business leaders to focus more closely on their own balance sheets, and an increasingly large number of businesses were purchased by outside interests, which lead to moving corporate headquarters out of Boston. As a *Boston Globe* reporter concluded, "the Vault is not the close-knit group dominated by bank, insurance, and utility company chairmen it once was."[33] Changing fortunes and increased competition meant a changing of the guard that left a power vacuum; stakeholders were pulling-up stakes.

Governance Battles: The Mayor, the Superintendent, and the School Committee

Mayor Menino's 1996 call for education reform was preceded by almost a decade of dispute. At the center of the governance battle was the thirteen-member Boston School Committee.[34] This elected body was the governing organization for the school system, but it often was criticized for political infighting, racial discord, and fiscal mismanagement. The charge of fiscal irresponsibility was, in part, a reflection of the structural division of financial power between the school committee and city hall. The school committee controlled the allocation of resources *within* the school budget, but the

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31 Charles Stein, "A Compact unfulfilled," *Boston Globe*, 19 October 1993, p. 43.

32 Boston Municipal Research Bureau, "Facts and Figures, 1995 Edition" (Boston: Boston Municipal Research Bureau, 1995), p. 57.

33 Snyder, "Business to schools," p. 37.

34 The thirteen-member committee consisted of nine members elected by district and four at-large. All committee members served two year terms and chose a president from among their ranks. Salary compensation was $7,500 per year with an office/staff allowance of $52,000 per member. Adopted in 1984, this committee structure replaced a five-member, at-large elected committee.

mayor and city council set the *total* appropriation for the school department. Not surprisingly, the school committee often decried city hall for not providing adequate financial resources to operate the school system. Between 1986 and 1990 the school department ended each year with a deficit, requiring a last-minute appropriation from the mayor and city council.[35] Newspaper stories would capture the ensuing debate as the mayor and school committee traded accusations of fiscal mismanagement and failure to adequately support education for the youth of the city.

Racial divisions were also prominent. In 1989, for example, the committee approved a controlled-choice busing plan by a 9-4 vote with all four black members in opposition. In the following year the committee voted 7-1 to fire black superintendent Laval Wilson; prior to the vote the four black members of the committee walked out in protest. Racial divisions were commonplace; indeed, one political analyst referred to race as the "killer virus of Boston politics."[36]

The media were frequent critics of the school committee. A *Boston Globe* editorial, for example, described the school committee as "a disaster. Infighting, grandstanding, aspirations for higher political office, and incompetence have become mainstays of the 13-member committee. The system is floundering."[37] In 1991, the *Globe* ran a five-part series--"Boston Schools on the Brink"--that traced the plight of the schools as well as the dysfunctional nature of the school committee.[38]

Similarly, several blue-ribbon commissions recommended major changes. A mayoral-appointed commission declared that "frustration with school performance had reached an historic high" and that a flawed governance system meant that "the buck does not appear to stop anywhere."[39] A study by the Boston Municipal Research Bureau, a business-sponsored municipal watchdog agency, also decried the poor performance of the school committee. As the director of the Bureau noted in a committee hearing, "The inherent flaw of the current school governance structure is that it does not insure accountability, especially fiscal accountability."[40]

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35 Boston Municipal Research Bureau, "Facts and Figures, 1992" (Boston: Boston Municipal Research Bureau, 1992), p. 56.

36 Jon Keller, "On Harrison-Jones: Another look at who said what," *Boston Globe*, City Weekly edition, 22 January 1995, p. 3.

37 Editorial, "Shortchanging the school children," *Boston Globe*, 30 August 1990, p. 26.

38 Muriel Cohen, Brian Mooney, and Diego Ribadeneira, "Boston Schools on the Brink," *Boston Globe*, 19-23 May 1991.

39 Mayor's Advisory Committee on School Reform, "The Rebirth of America's Oldest Public School System," pp. 1 and 37. (Boston: Office of the Mayor, May 1, 1989).

40 Samuel Tyler, "Statement of the Boston Municipal Research Bureau Before the City Council Committee on Public Education," April 8, 1991, p. 2.

Pressures mounted to change the make-up of the committee. Mayor Raymond Flynn (1984-93) was a leading proponent of abolishing the elected committee and replacing it with an appointed body. Many business leaders supported Flynn's position. The elected committee, however, had many supporters, particularly in the minority community where it was seen as an important means of enfranchisement for the residents of Boston.

The debate continued until 1991 when the city council, the state legislature, and the governor approved the creation of a seven-member appointed school committee. Under the new system, a thirteen-member nominating committee would be appointed by the mayor to review applications and recommend three individuals for each open committee position. Later that year Mayor Flynn appointed seven individuals to begin terms in January 1992. A new committee was on board, but it had been a long and difficult period for public education in Boston.

A second key actor--the superintendent--was also deeply involved in the governance debate. Boston has a history of high turnover in the superintendency; between 1972 and 1992, there were six superintendents and four periods under an acting superintendent. Laval Wilson, the city's first black superintendent, was hired in 1985 when Robert Spillane left Boston. By 1988 Wilson was under frequent attack for his reluctance to adopt school-based management, which was viewed favorably in the business community, and for a variety of planning initiatives that failed to take root. In February 1990, the racially divided committee fired Wilson, appointed an interim superintendent, and initiated a search process. As the state education commissioner noted about the "leadership crisis": "there is great turmoil over the management of the Boston school system. It is quite clear we have a problem."[41]

The process of choosing a new superintendent became controversial, particularly when the first list of finalists included no women or Latinos. Furthermore, one nationally known candidate withdrew from the process, complaining that local politics had become more important than educational policy.[42] The search process was repeated and Lois Harrison-Jones, a black female with experience in Virginia and Texas, was hired in May 1991. Although a new superintendent was finally in place, governance issues were hardly settled. Within six months the committee that hired Harrison-Jones was replaced by the appointed committee, none of whom had been involved in hiring the new superintendent. She now faced the task of establishing a working relationship with a new set of educational leaders.

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41 Diego Ribadeneira, "City schools face fund cutoff for lag in assigning plan," *Boston Globe,* 24 January 1990, p. 17.

42 Diego Ribadeneira, "Boston schools candidate quits race, citing politics," *Boston Globe,* 30 November 1990, p. 1.

A third actor--the mayor--was also part of the governance debate. Boston is a "strong" mayor city, but by institutional design the mayor has a limited role in the schools. As Mayor Kevin White (1968-84) noted, the school department is "probably the only branch of the city government in which the mayor has virtually no authority or influence, except budgetary."[43] Administrative control of the schools rested with the superintendent and school committee and, as noted earlier, the allocation of funds within the school budget was outside the formal power of the mayor.

Historically, then, Boston's mayors have kept at arm's-length from the public schools.[44] Mayor White played a cautious role in the desegregation debates, and his successor, Raymond Flynn, was also hesitant to become involved in school politics, particularly during the early years of his tenure. As Flynn admitted in remarks prepared for the business community, "public education is an area that can swallow up the most promising career and politicians are counseled at every step to 'stay away from the schools'."[45] By 1989, however, the mayor was more openly critical of the school committee and failures in the school system. He criticized the elected committee for budget deficits and an inability to act on major education issues, and was a leader in the move to an appointed committee. While still tentative at times, Mayor Flynn pointed to changes in school governance as critical to the future of Boston's schools.

The battle over governance was a major preoccupation of civic leaders during this period. In one series of elite interviews, issues of leadership and governance received the single largest number of mentions as "challenges" or "obstacles" facing public education in Boston.[46] Business, political, and community leaders frequently cited the need for stronger leadership and a better working relationship among the school committee, the superintendent, and the mayor. The media presented a similar concern. Based on an analysis of education articles in the *Boston Globe*, governance as a topic was most prominent among all education articles from 1989 through 1991 and was the most frequent topic of education editorials by *Globe* editors between July 1990 and June 1992.[47] The *Globe*'s call in January 1991 to abolish the school committee and its subsequent support for an appointed committee capped the steady media criticism of school governance.[48]

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43 U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, "Hearings," p. 510.

44 Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, "Hearings;" Martha Weinberg, "Boston's Kevin White: A Mayor who Survives," in *Boston 1700-1980: The Evolution of Urban Politics*, edited by Ronald Formisano and Constance Burns (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991).

45 Mayor Raymond Flynn, "A Vision for Public Education Reform," Prepared for Presentation to the Boston Business Community, January 29, 1993, p. 19.

46 John Portz, "Problem Definitions and Policy Agendas: Shaping the Education Agenda in Boston," *Policy Studies Journal* 24:3 (Autumn, 1996): 371-86.

47 Ibid.

48 Editorial, "Time to abolish the School Committee," *Boston Globe*, 16 January 1991, p. 10; Editorial,

This was a period of instability in educational politics in Boston. The Boston Compact was renewed in 1989, but progress was small. An embattled school committee provided limited leadership and was finally replaced; controversy and turnover in the superintendents's office weakened leadership of the school system; the mayor challenged both the school committee and the superintendent, but lacked direct authority over the schools. Some in the business community were prepared to abandon the public schools, advocating instead a school choice policy to bring the marketplace to public education.

The Emergence of Leadership and Institutional Support

The appointment of a new school committee in 1992 marked the beginning of a transition period for Boston. Over the next few years a structure of support for public education developed in two critical areas. First, educational leadership emerged as new individuals assumed positions on the school committee and in the offices of superintendent and mayor. This leadership helped build an important base of support for the schools. And second, considerable progress was made in institution building; the Boston Compact was strengthened and the Boston Teachers Union became partners with the school system in a wide range of educational reforms. By the end of this period, Boston was poised for a substantial effort in improving public education.

Educational leadership did not come easily. Even with an appointed school committee, governance battles continued, only now they took on a more personal tone. Mayor Flynn and Superintendent Harrison-Jones disagreed often, and the executive secretary of the new school committee was also in frequent disagreement with the superintendent. Partial resolution came in 1993 when the executive secretary resigned and Mayor Flynn left Boston to join the Clinton administration as ambassador to the Vatican. Tensions continued, however, between Superintendent Harrison-Jones and the new mayor, Thomas Menino, and the appointed school committee.

"For an appointed School Committee," *Boston Globe,* 10 April 1991, p. 18.

The final step came in early 1995 when the school committee declined to extend Harrison-Jones's contract. A search process was initiated by the school committee, and Mayor Menino made it clear that he would take a central, albeit less public, role in the process. In July and August three finalists were interviewed and an offer was extended to Thomas Payzant, assistant secretary in the US Department of Education and former superintendent in San Diego and Oklahoma City. With the hiring of Payzant in September, the stage was set. Successful school reform requires the mayor, the superintendent, the school committee, and school administrators be in accord; all the planets have to be lined-up. Finally, after many years of policy disagreements and personal clashes, leadership on the public side of the ledger was in place.

Leadership is important and essential, but equally critical is an institutional platform upon which reform efforts can be sustained. Fortunately for Boston, at the same time that governance battles were being resolved, key actors were expanding and strengthening existing institutional arrangements to support public education. This process was most apparent in two areas--the Boston Compact and negotiations with the teachers union.

Boston Compact III, signed in January 1994, fared better than its 1989 predecessor that fell victim to an economic downswing and governance disputes. Compact III offered a comprehensive agenda for reform. Five major goals were outlined in the agreement: (1) to increase access to employment and higher education for BPS graduates; (2) to expand innovation within the school system, including the extension of school-based management to all schools and the establishment of at least six "pilot" schools (within-district charter schools); (3) to develop new school curricula and assessment standards; (4) to establish a Center for Leadership Development to strengthen professional development; and (5) to enhance support for parents and families, while expanding early childhood opportunities.[49]

The signing of Compact III was an important event for the city. The signatories included the mayor; the chair of the school committee; the superintendent; the chairs of the Vault, the Higher Education Partnership, and the Private Industry Council; and the president of the Boston Teachers Union. Plans were made to include representatives from parents, cultural institutions, and human service providers. Three committees--a working group, steering committee, and measurement committee--were established to handle the ongoing activities of the Compact, and support would continue to be provided by a person in the superintendent's office and staff at the Private Industry Council.

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49 Boston Compact Steering Committee, "Strategic Plan for the Boston Compact," June 1994.

Adoption of Compact III coincided with an intense period of collective bargaining negotiations between the Boston Teachers Union (BTU) and the school committee. The June 1994 contract included salary increases as well as many of the reform initiatives outlined in the Boston Compact: school-based management, pilot schools, learning standards, and a professional development center. The contract also included a career ladder for teachers, a new teacher evaluation system, and school improvement awards. The union was prepared to play a major role in reform. As Mayor Menino was widely quoted in announcing the new contract, "We have no more excuses."[50]

Indeed, the pieces are falling in place. Political and educational leadership are closely aligned. Mayor Menino, as noted earlier, asked the voters to "judge" him by the success of the Boston schools, and public education is clearly among his top priorities. The Boston School Committee, although still subject to periodic criticism for its appointed nature, passed a major hurdle in late 1996 when it survived a voters' referendum. With strong support from the mayor, business community, and many community leaders, a return to an elected committee was rejected by 53 percent of the voters; only 23 percent of the voters favored an elected format and 23 percent left the ballot question blank.[51]

Within the system, Superintendent Payzant has taken a strong and visible stand in a number of areas. In February 1996, for example, he initiated a major reorganization of the school department that replaced a three-level structure of high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools with ten clusters, each with schools from all grades.[52] He also has established citywide learning standards, a five-year improvement plan, and new testing tools.

Equally important, there is a growing realization that education reform must be broad-based and systemic in character. As Mayor Menino emphasized, public education is the "hub" of the urban "wheel," with economic security, good jobs, safe streets, quality of life, and public health as spokes in the wheel. The Boston Compact and teachers union contract also present quite comprehensive views of education reform, recognizing the need to address such areas as curricula, assessment, standards, professional development, parental and community involvement, and student opportunities in the worlds of work and higher education.

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50 Editorial, "A contract full of promise," *Boston Herald*, 23 June 1994, p. 30.

51 Karen Avenoso, “School board stays the same,” *Boston Globe*, November 6, 1996, p. B1. The referendum was required under the state law that created the appointed committee.

52 Boston Public Schools, "Reorganization Plan for the Boston Public Schools," Boston School Department, February 1996.

The Boston Plan for Excellence offers another example of institutional support. Abandoning its ten-year practice of providing relatively small grants to educators throughout the system, the Boston Plan launched its 21st Century Schools Program in which grants of $25,000 for each of four years will be made to twenty-four schools to support a process of self-assessment, planning, and implementation for the sole purpose of improving teaching and learning.[53] Each school will look at the totality of its needs when designing a program of change and improvement. The recent receipt of a $10 million Annenberg challenge grant will be used in part to expand this program of whole-school change.[54]

These are important steps down the path of education reform, but the challenges are many. A number of schools, for example, lack the physical infrastructure, materials, and staff needed to support a sound educational program. At the high school level, one school lost accreditation in 1995 from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges and among the remaining fourteen, four are on probation and three are under warning.[55] A schedule of improvements in both physical plant and staff is in place for each school, but the costs are significant.[56]

Another area of concern is the school bureaucracy, perceived by many long-standing observers of the system as inflexible and dysfunctional. Past teachers' contracts and administrative reforms have made some progress, but the system is still handicapped by inadequate performance evaluation procedures, excessively rigid seniority and other hiring and dismissal practices, and a weak professional development system. The teachers' contract, which expired in August 1997, was seen by many as the primary venue to address these issues.[57]

And finally, mayoral involvement in public education raises political concerns. Mayor Menino is publicly committed to supporting the school system, but future mayors may think otherwise. The interest and support of the mayor's office for public education are heavily dependent upon the incumbent in that office. A mayor could turn the schools into a political "commodity" for patronage and other political purposes.[58]

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53 Boston Plan for Excellence, "21st Century School Grants: A Framework," February 1996.

54 Karen Avenoso, "Schools to get $10 million for reform," *Boston Globe,* 29 October 1996, p. A1.

55 Karen Avenoso, "Brighton High is close to regaining accreditation," *Boston Globe,* 26 September 1996, p. B4.

56 Memo, "High School Accreditation," from Superintendent Thomas Payzant to Mayor Thomas Menino, February 7, 1997.

57 Hubie Jones, "At last, stars are in alignment for school reform in Boston," *Boston Globe,* 5 April, 1997, p. A11. Alan Lupo, "Advocates weigh in on teacher pact," *Boston Globe,* 13 April 1997, p. City 1.

58 Richard Hunter, "The Mayor Versus the School Superintendent: Political Incursions into Metropolitan School Politics," *Education and Urban Society*,29:2 (February 1997): 217-32.

The challenges are significant, but Boston is well positioned to meet them. External actors, particularly the mayor and business community, are aligned with educational leaders. Institutional capacity in the form of the Boston Compact and a teachers contract provide an important structure and network of resources for the implementation of school reform. Success is far from guaranteed, and there is much work to be done, but an important support structure exists to improve education in the Boston Public Schools.

Lessons of External Interventions in the Schools

The history of involvement by external actors in the Boston Public Schools points to several effects, three of which are outlined briefly below.

Shock Effect. Intervention by an external actor can have a major shock effect that breaks a pattern of existing school policies and practices. In the case of Boston, intervention by the Federal District Court directly attacked segregation practices in the school system. Judge Garrity's orders dramatically transformed the system and raised to the highest level the community's awareness of the problems it faced. The court's intervention was critical in changing policies and practices in the school system.

External interventions, however, particularly those that take on this role of shocking can alienate many in the community, thereby decreasing the general level of support. Judge Garrity's actions in Boston angered many school constituents, even in the minority community. The exodus of middle-class children and whites from the public school system accelerated. For many parents and students who remained, learning and achievement for a number of years would be overshadowed by anger and resentment over the court's intervention. Contending with this loss of support is an important issue facing external actors who introduce dramatic changes to a school system.

Balancing Act. Addressing the loss of support created by an external shock points to a general challenge for external interventions: balancing externally derived reform with the need for support from internal, school-based constituencies. Introducing externally generated change, although *also* empowering school constituencies, is truly a challenge. If an outside actor fails to find this balance, reform will be short lived. Ownership of and support for reform efforts by teachers, administrators, and parents is essential for long-term success.

The courts and business community attempted to reach this balance, albeit with mixed results. Judge Garrity established numerous advisory bodies at the district and individual school levels to incorporate parents, and he outlined individual school partnerships with businesses and universities in an effort to bring these actors into the

fold. Although support for these groups was limited, they did represent an attempt to involve parents and other community members. In the business community as well, there were efforts to incorporate different school and community constituencies into the process of externally driven change and to bring other stakeholders into the process. The first Boston Compact included only business, the mayor, and the schools, but by the signing of Compact III universities and teachers were major participants, and plans were underway to include parents, cultural institutions, and human service providers.

Mayor Menino also has made progress in finding this balance. In contrast to the elected school committee, mayoral appointments to the committee better reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the school system, particularly with respect to the Latino and Asian populations. Appointees may lack the electoral connection of the previous committee, but they have worked to represent the different constituency groups in the system. The mayor has also emphasized school-based management as an alternative to the elected committee, and indeed, and a more meaningful way for parents to become involved in their schools. Both are part of a strategy to empower existing school constituencies while introducing external changes through the mayor's office.

Legitimacy Challenge. External actors are often suspect. Their interests and motivations are challenged, and their legitimacy to intervene in the school system may be questioned. Federal courts, for example, are often portrayed as outsiders, and the business community is seen as a private, profit-driven group with little understanding of the problems faced in an urban school system.

Meeting this legitimacy challenge can be achieved in different ways. Perhaps most commonly, outside actors point to their legal authority to act. Judge Garrity, for example, acted with the authority of the courts to interpret and apply protections granted under the U.S. Constitution. Although challenges can still be made, and they certainly were in Boston, the courts have a legal basis for their intervention.

If legal authority is not used to establish legitimacy, external actors often turn to a political process to convince school constituencies that they share a common set of interests. Mayor Menino, for example, articulated a vision of the city in which education is at the center: the "hub" of the "urban wheel." From this perspective, it is legitimate and appropriate that the mayor--as political leader of the city--play a major role in shaping education policy. In short, the interests of Menino as mayor of the city are similar to the interests of school supporters. The business community also often establishes legitimacy by aligning its interests with those of the schools. An educated workforce and a safe city speak to the interests of business as well as parents and other school advocates. This common agenda can legitimize business involvement in the schools.

School reform requires the support of *both* internal and external actors. Leadership is critical, but it must be accompanied by support from school constituencies. In Boston, the current "alignment of business, educational and political leadership" is an important step, but leadership alone will not transform the schools.[59] Education reform also must be supported and "owned" by teachers and parents. As one observer of urban schools concludes, “to ignore the intimate connections between school and community in the reform and restructuring of urban schooling is to condemn such attempts to almost certain failure."[60] For Boston and other cities, building a support structure that incorporates both internal and external actors is a prerequisite for a successful school system.

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59 Editorial, "At last, schools that mean business," *Boston Globe,* 1 November 1996, p. A26.

60 Kenneth Sirotnik, "Improving Urban Schools in the Age of 'Restructuring'," *Education and Urban Society* 23:3 (May 1991): 256-69.