

Boston

Overview of the District

Rank among U.S. School Districts (by size):	67
Number of Schools:	145
Number of Students:	57,900
Number of Teachers:	4,733
Annual Budget:	\$712.4 million

Superintendent: Dr. Thomas W. Payzant, appointed in 1995, served until 2006. His prior 30-year career in education included a 1993 appointment as assistant secretary for elementary and secondary education at the U.S. Department of Education and serving as superintendent of schools in Springfield, Pennsylvania; Eugene, Oregon; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; and San Diego, California.

Interim Superintendent: Michael G. Contompasis was appointed by the Boston School Committee in June as interim superintendent of Boston Public Schools. Before taking on the role of interim superintendent, Contompasis served for eight years as chief operating officer of Boston Public Schools and 22 years as Headmaster of Boston Latin School, the first public school in the country.

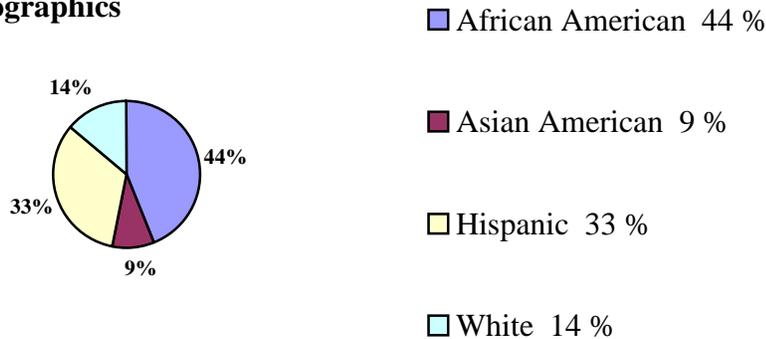
Governance: Appointed board. Seven members appointed by the mayor for four-year terms. Replaced a 13-member elected committee in 1992.

Teachers Unions: Boston Teachers Union
Massachusetts Federation of Teachers

Student Characteristics

Percent of Students Eligible for Free/Reduced-Price School Lunch:	73 %
Percent of Students Designated as English Language Learners:	17 %

Student Demographics



STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Consistent High Performance while Reducing Achievement Gaps across Ethnic Groups

- ✓ Since 2002, student achievement has been on the rise in Boston, making Boston Public Schools a Broad Prize finalist for the fifth year in a row.
- ✓ Each school year from 2002 through 2005, using The Broad Prize methodology, Boston has consistently outperformed other Massachusetts districts with similar low-income populations in six out of six areas (elementary, middle and high school reading and math).
- ✓ Boston has demonstrated greater improvement by African-American students compared to similar districts in the state in five out of six areas (math at all levels, elementary, middle and high school, and reading at the middle and high school levels).
- ✓ Boston has reduced achievement gaps for Hispanic students when compared to their white counterparts in elementary, middle and high school math. Boston is closing the Hispanic achievement gap at a faster rate than the state in middle and high school math.
- ✓ On the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA), Boston's fourth and eighth grade reading and math scores improved at a faster rate than other large American cities on average, as well as faster than the national average.
- ✓ Boston has seen a stark increase in the number of Advanced Placement mathematics and English exams taken by Hispanic and African-American students, up 237 percent and 78 percent, respectively, since 2002.

RESEARCH-BASED BEST PRACTICES

Curriculum and Academic Goals

- ✓ All district activities center on the unifying goal of Focus on Children II, a five-year plan that was implemented in 2001 “to accelerate the continuous improvement of teaching and learning to enable all students to meet high standards.” The two main goals of the plan are to move students to proficiency and to close achievement gaps among ethnic and income groups.
- ✓ Teams of district and school staff expanded the rigorous state standards from grade-level expectations into specific performance standards by grade and subject. The district provides pacing guides, course descriptions, instructional activities and sample formative assessments.
- ✓ District specialists work with schools to build a curriculum calendar with benchmarks throughout the year. All teachers receive district-wide curriculum standards and pacing guides at the beginning of the year. The district expanded its assessment program this year to include more district-wide year-end, mid-year and end-of-chapter tests.
- ✓ The district conducts curriculum implementation reviews of the middle and high schools that are similar to “mini accreditation visits.” Deputy superintendents observe one academic department at a time to give feedback to every teacher on his or her classroom instruction. These visits also review how well campus administrators support and monitor instruction.
- ✓ The district sets four to six goals each year for the entire system and for individual schools, providing a template for the creation of each school’s Whole School Improvement Plan. The school plans reflect district and state goals for performance. This year, the schools and district were required to submit implementation benchmarks for the curriculum and outcome benchmarks tied to academic goals.

Staff Selection, Leadership, and Capacity Building

- ✓ Boston has significantly improved its human resources practices. With streamlined electronic hiring processes (previously, all application and hiring processes were paper-based), an earlier teacher hiring timeline and regular customer service surveys, the district has been able to hire better principals and teachers and provide improved HR services to schools and employees.
- ✓ The deputy superintendent positions have been redefined and now directly support schools and principals, and this modification has helped connect schools and support positive change throughout the entire system.

- ✓ The district is training and developing new principals through its School Leadership Institute. New principals receive targeted support and professional development during their first year as BPS school leaders. Aspiring principals train to become school leaders in the Boston Principal Fellows program, which involves a year-long residency where participants work as apprentices alongside veteran school leaders. Both programs are cited as an important source of support for new and prospective principals and have helped the district develop administrators who are instructional leaders.
- ✓ The district increases the availability and preparation of teacher candidates in hard-to-staff subject areas through the Boston Teacher Residency Program. Candidates are hand-selected to participate in a one-year internship with one of the district's best teachers, and at the end of the residency, participants are ready to teach in Boston schools. A district partnership with the state department of education and the University of Massachusetts allows the district to issue certification to Boston Teacher Residents.
- ✓ The district's new online application and hiring system has tripled the number of applications for teaching positions. To help principals more easily screen these candidates, the district requires new teacher candidates to take an online interview that assesses a candidate's innate talent for teaching. This enables principals to determine which applicants to interview first. Principals and school-based teams make final hiring decisions through intensive interviews that often include performance-based tasks.
- ✓ The district is working to retain new teachers by offering a number of new teacher support services. A New Teacher Support Team provides "red carpet treatment" to new teachers during their first two years and is available at any time to provide resources, advice and support. Boston also has provided novice teachers with full-time New Teacher Developers who work in their schools to provide "over the shoulder" mentoring and targeted professional development. The district has ensured common planning time for colleagues to collaborate and observe other teaching practices, and provided useful curriculum documents to aid instruction.
- ✓ A change in the teacher's contract now gives principals the opportunity to fill some teacher vacancies with teachers of their own choice. Previously, principals were required to take surplus teachers or teacher transfers, even if an individual was considered a poor fit for the school.

Instructional Programs, Practices, and Arrangements

- ✓ Instructional program selection is done through a district-wide process called the Collaborative Coaching and Learning (CCL) model, through which educators work with coaches and one another to frequently adjust their teaching methods to best suit students' learning needs, develop rubrics describing those needs, conduct research on programs that match needs based on rubric scores and evaluate the suitability of various educational vendor programs.

- ✓ For program implementation, the CCL model involves an eight-week teaching cycle where teachers work in study groups that meet weekly to set goals and expectations for the following week. Teachers who have trouble meeting a specific goal can have a coach observe their lessons, give feedback and offer support. Coaches meet with individual teachers and observe several classrooms per day.
- ✓ The district's current focus on instructional programs includes creating a more inclusive special education model, developing a more aligned English as a Second Language (ESL) program, creating more high school academies and creating 400 pre-K seats for three- and four-year-olds by 2010.
- ✓ The district mandates the amount of time spent daily on instruction in two core academic subjects. Elementary schools have 120 minutes a day of language arts and 70 to 90 minutes a day of mathematics. Double blocks of math and reading in transition grades 6 and 9 exceed instructional time required by the state. Readers and Writers Workshop, an inquiry-based model, and Collaborative Coaching and Learning (CCL) are among the programs or models mandated across the district.
- ✓ All high schools, except three high-performing "Exam" schools that are granted autonomy from typical district requirements, eventually will be converted to small learning communities, a process that is currently underway. The purpose of the smaller format is to create more personalization within the high schools.

Monitoring: Compilation, Analysis, and Use of Data

- ✓ The district monitors the entire system through the Whole School Improvement Plan and the web-based MyBPS electronic data system. A new system to monitor dropouts, attendance and suspension is being implemented this year.
- ✓ While walk-throughs are conducted at every school by principals and teachers to share best practice instructional strategies and view model programs, the district identifies struggling schools for more frequent observations and targeted interventions by district administrators.
- ✓ The district requires quarterly assessments in all subjects and grade levels and provides mid- and end-of-year open response assessments. The district retains students in grades 3, 6 and 9 unless they have mastered the standards assessed in the district reading and mathematics benchmarks by the end of summer school. Teachers and administrators review benchmarks every four to eight weeks.
- ✓ The MyBPS data system is accessible to administrators and teachers. The system offers query-friendly state assessment results, report cards, pop-up boxes with tips on how to use and interpret the data, links to state standards and skills tied to questions and a PDF with each student's writing composition and score. Interactive graphs linked to each assessment question are also available. High school formative assessments and student demographic and dropout information are available online, as are benchmark assessments.

- ✓ Teachers use data in grade-level meetings to review results from both formative and summative assessments. Instructional coaches from the district help determine alternative instructional strategies.

Recognition, Intervention, and Adjustments

- ✓ Schools that the state identifies as under-performing are involved in an intensive performance improvement mapping process. Through this process, district and state officials carefully review data and build a detailed improvement plan, focusing on achievement gap issues and identifying interventions based on a “root cause analysis.”
- ✓ Teachers develop customized success plans for students who do not meet proficiency standards on the state norm-referenced test. The district mandates summer school for students in grades 3, 6, 7 and 8 who do not meet benchmarks in reading, writing and mathematics. School interventions include tutoring, support from instructional specialists and regrouping of students.
- ✓ The district offers numerous options for struggling students, including tutoring before or after school or even during school.
- ✓ The district offers an Advanced Work Class Program (AWC) for eligible students in grades 4 through 6 based on results of a standardized test given in the fall of grades 3, 4 and 5. The AWC provides an accelerated curriculum based on the state standards and district standards.
- ✓ Students who score high on the Independent School Entrance Examination (ISEE) in grades 6 and 8 are invited to attend one of district’s three Exam Schools, which administer particularly rigorous curricula that go more in-depth in each subject and offer additional courses.

Influential Factors

- ✓ The school district is a city department and has strong support from the mayor’s office. The district’s budget is a line item in the city budget, and the superintendent is a member of the mayor’s cabinet.
- ✓ The Boston School Committee (school board) is appointed by the mayor. In a November 1996 referendum, voters chose to retain the appointed committee rather than return to an elected governance structure.
- ✓ The Boston Plan for Excellence (BPE), a local education fund endowed by regional businesses and foundations, works in close partnership with the district to refine professional development for all teachers and principals and to improve literacy instruction in all classrooms. The Boston Plan plays two roles: to test new ideas that hold promise for accelerating improvements in schools and to press the district to look at its own policies and practices that slow reform.

- ✓ The district created a deputy superintendent position in 2003 to lead a new family and community engagement initiative. Boston is expanding this initiative to install family and community outreach coordinators directly at the school sites to help build a bridge between parents and schools. Currently, the program supports 15 coordinators in 17 schools, and there are plans to bring on two additional coordinators in 2007.