



Boston Municipal Research Bureau

SPECIAL REPORT

294 WASHINGTON STREET, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02108 (617) 482-3626

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REEXAMINING THE ROLE, COMPENSATION AND STAFFING OF THE BOSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE

What is the proper role of the Boston School Committee? Should it be responsible for establishing policy goals and holding the Superintendent accountable for their implementation? Should it become involved in the daily administration and management of the school system? The answers to these questions will determine the correct action to take on two current issues involving the School Committee. Should the School Committee members be paid a stipend and if so how much? Should the members have a personal staff and if so how large?

School Committee Compensation

Boston School Committee members are presently unpaid. Legislation passed in 1982 authorized Massachusetts school committee members to be compensated if approved by a majority of their local legislative body. Since the City's Charter does not allow compensation, paying a stipend to the School Committee members would require City Council approval and possibly a home rule amendment deleting the Charter's restriction. The City Council is considering a proposal to authorize the School Committee to be compensated. On March 13, 1984, the School Committee unanimously endorsed the Council's proposal and suggested a figure of \$15,000. That would make Boston one of the highest paid school committees in the country.

Eleven Massachusetts cities now compensate their school committees. All provide annual stipends of between \$1,200 and \$3,500, except Cambridge which pays \$10,000. Of the ten largest school systems in the Commonwealth, only three pay their school committees: Quincy (\$1,200), Springfield (\$1,200) and Worcester (\$3,500). According to the 1983 National School Boards Association (NSBA) study, 23 of 46 large urban school systems surveyed paid board members a salary or provided them a per meeting stipend. Only six systems paid a stipend in excess of \$5,000. The Bureau examined ten comparable systems within the survey and found that four school committees were not compensated, four received less than \$5,000 and two were paid above that amount.

Staff Allocation

The role the School Committee plays should determine the amount of staff allocation for each member. For years the members have received a staff budget of \$40,000. Typically, members hire a full-time administrative assistant and a secretary. Each member decides the number and salary of staff within the allocation. The lack of a standardized salary schedule results in administrative assistants being paid between \$18,000 and \$27,000. The absence of a formal job description has allowed some administrative assistants to become more involved with administrative and constituent matters than with educational policy issues.

The Boston School Committee's large staff allocation is in contrast to that of most other school committees. The Bureau's examination of the operation of other Massachusetts school committees found that most, if not all, do not receive any individual staff allocation. The Boston School Committee likes to compare itself with its Cambridge counterpart. While the Cambridge School Committee is paid a high stipend, the members do not have offices or any personal staff. The NSBA survey also indicated that most school committees utilized very small centralized clerical staffs and had no personal staff allotments. Of the Bureau's sample of ten comparable systems, only two committees employed full-time administrative assistants, one had a part-time staff assistant and seven had no personal aides.

The total appropriation for personal staff for the 13 Boston School Committee members was \$340,000 in fiscal 1984. This included a half-year allocation for the nine district members who assumed office in January. Not satisfied with this allocation, the School Committee, on June 12, 1984, voted to increase its individual staff allocations from \$40,000 to \$43,000 annually, a jump of 7.5% effective January 2, 1984. This raised the fiscal 1984 allocation by \$19,500 and will add \$39,000 this year. Since this increased allocation was approved too late to spend last year, the School Committee voted to carry these funds forward for staff this year. That vote was in direct conflict with the School Committee's policy to reappropriate all unexpended fiscal 1984 funds for 1984-85 educational programs.

The School Committee is considering a staff initiated proposal to increase each member's staff allocation to \$50,000, an increase of \$7,000 or 16.3%. Should the \$15,000 stipend and the \$50,000 staff allocation be approved, it would result in an additional \$286,000 or 51% in excess of the fiscal 1985 staff appropriation for individual School Committee offices.

Recommendations

1. The School Committee should define its role as the educational policy-making body for the school system. The Committee should establish policy goals and guidelines and evaluate the Superintendent's implementation of its guidelines. Administrative and management responsibilities should be left to the Superintendent. If the School Committee is to perform its policy role effectively, the Superintendent must respond quickly to legitimate Committee requests and keep all its members better informed of school operations and upcoming educational issues. The School Committee, with the assistance of the Superintendent, should focus its attention on approving and implementing the Long Range and Facilities plans.
2. A stipend of \$400 per month should be paid to the School Committee members to compensate them for the expenses of attending meetings. The stipend would provide each member \$4,800 a year for a total cost of \$62,000. Since the stipend has not been appropriated, if approved, it should be absorbed by the School Department and not be retroactive. The stipend amount is recommended after analysis of compensation programs for school committees in Massachusetts and comparable systems throughout the country.
3. The \$50,000 per member staff allocation should be rejected. Further, the Bureau recommends that the present staff allocation of \$43,000 per member be eliminated and that the clerical, receptionist and administrative needs of the Committee be provided by a strengthened School Committee Secretary's Office. As a result of City Council action, the Committee must cut \$1 million from its budget and this is a good place to start. The current Committee is strongly divided on this recommendation. If it is not adopted, the Committee should at least reduce its staff allocation to \$25,000 for the hiring of one administrative assistant each. The \$25,000 staff allocation and \$4,800 stipend for each member would produce an aggregate personnel cost for the School Committee of \$387,400, which is \$171,600 less than currently appropriated. In addition, members should comply with the December, 1983, State Ethics Commission opinion which stated that Boston School Committee members should not employ an immediate family member as their aide.

Samuel R. Tyler
Executive Director

BOSTON MUNICIPAL RESEARCH BUREAU
294 WASHINGTON STREET, BOSTON, MA 02108

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