

# SPECIAL



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# REPORT

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## COMPARING BOSTON'S SCHOOL COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

This year, the appointed Boston School Committee began its sixth year of operation. This mayoral appointed governance structure was reaffirmed decidedly by the vote on Question 2 on the November 5, 1996 ballot in which continuation of the appointed Committee was approved by a 70%-30% margin. A key issue during the campaign was how to ensure direct accountability for school performance and fiscal stability. How a school board is held accountable is usually determined by how the members are selected and how the system is funded. Based on a Bureau survey of 30 large urban school districts, Boston's mayoral-appointed committee structure, which is dependent on the City for funding, is one of the two most common approaches to ensure direct accountability. The appointed structure allows the voters to hold the Mayor accountable for school matters. Overall, 13% of the districts surveyed use this approach. The second approach is an elected committee that is fiscally autonomous, responsible for raising its own local revenues for both operational and capital expenses. This structure, used by 60% of the districts sampled, places accountability fully on the board. Another structure found in the survey is an elected board which is dependent on the city for funding, Boston's system prior to 1992. This structure is found in 17% of the districts surveyed. The fundamental flaw of the elected-dependent board is that it provides no direct accountability. The survey also indicated that the typical school board consists of seven members elected to staggered four-year terms. The findings of the survey are described below.

### *Number of Members*

The typical large urban school board consists of seven members. Board membership in the thirty districts range from five to twelve members. Overall, 20 boards, or 67% of the sample, have seven or fewer members. It should be noted that in each of the 30 districts sampled, the Mayor/Manager does not serve as a member of the school board.

### *Term of Office*

Most school board members serve four-year staggered terms. In fact, the members of 22 boards in the sample serve four-year terms and those on four other boards serve terms of five or six years. Only on four boards, or 13%, do members serve less than four-year terms. In addition, all sampled school board members except two serve staggered terms. Only in Atlanta and Chicago do board members serve concurrent terms. Staggered terms provide greater stability which supports long-range educational and fiscal planning.

### *Selection of Members*

The predominant method for selecting members of a large urban school board is through an election. Most of these boards have independent budget authority. Overall, 23 districts elect their boards and seven appoint them. Ten elected boards serve at-large, seven serve by district only and six serve by a combination of at-large and district. Out of the seven appointed boards, five are chosen by the mayor and two are chosen by the city council. In four of the five mayoral-appointed districts, nominees are presented by an educational nominating panel. In the two remaining appointed districts, the city council serves as the nominating panel and appoints school board members.

### *School Budget Authority*

Large urban school boards are generally autonomous of city government and exercise independent budget authority. These boards are empowered to raise funds for operational expenses and may also issue debt for capital expenses with voter approval. Nineteen boards in the sample exercise independent budget authority, while eleven districts are dependent and generally rely on the city for their resources. Of the eleven dependent districts, six are appointed and five are elected.

### **BOSTON'S APPOINTED SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

Number of Members .....	7
Who Appoints.....	Mayor *
Term of Office.....	4 Years
Term Type.....	Staggered
Compensation.....	\$7,500/year
Budget Authority.....	Dependent
Staff Allocation.....	3 Full-Time

\* From list of names presented by  
Nominating Panel.



## Staff Allocation and Member Compensation

Generally, large urban school boards maintain a small central staff who are assigned to the whole board rather than to each member exclusively. Only in Los Angeles do members have personal staff. Compensation for serving as a school board member varies widely from district to district. In eight elected and three appointed districts, no compensation is provided. In the remaining nineteen districts, compensation is provided through a combination of annual salary and meeting and travel stipends. In 1996, the average annual compensation, excluding districts where members are not compensated, was \$8,680.

### SCHOOL COMMITTEE COMPARISON OF 30 LARGE URBAN SCHOOL SYSTEMS

School District	1993 [1] Enrollment	Members	Compensation Annualized	Staff [2] Allocation	Type of Term	Term of Office	How Chosen	Budget Authority
1 Atlanta, GA	59,244	9	\$10,692.00	FWC, 1FT	Concurrent	4 Years	Elected	Independent
2 Baltimore, MD	113,354	9	\$240.00	FWC, 2FT	Staggered	4 Years	Mayor Appoints [3]	Dependent
3 Birmingham, AL	42,097	5	\$4,200.00	None	Staggered	5 Years	City Council Appoints	Dependent
4 Chicago, IL	409,499	5	\$0.00	SRA	Concurrent	4 Years	Mayor Appoints	Independent
5 Cincinnati, OH	52,381	7	\$1,920.00	FWC	Staggered	4 Years	Elected	Independent
6 Columbus, OH	63,877	7	\$2,880.00	SRA	Staggered	4 Years	Elected	Independent
7 Dallas, TX	142,652	9	\$0.00	FWC, 1FT	Staggered	3 Years	Elected	Independent
8 Denver, CO	62,673	7	\$0.00	FWC	Staggered	4 Years	Elected	Independent
9 Detroit, MI	173,295	11	\$720.00	SRA	Staggered	4 Years	Elected	Independent
10 Fresno, CA [4]	76,349	7	\$18,000.00	SRA	Staggered	5 Years	Elected	Independent
11 Indianapolis, IN	46,656	7	\$16,216.00	FWC, 3FT	Staggered	4 Years	Elected	Independent
12 Long Beach, CA [4]	76,783	5	\$18,000.00	SRA, 2FT	Staggered	4 Years	Elected	Independent
13 Los Angeles, CA [4]	639,129	7	\$24,000.00	FWC, Pers., 10FT	Staggered	4 Years	Elected	Independent
14 Memphis, TN	105,978	9	\$5,000.00	FWC, 1FT	Staggered	4 Years	Elected	Dependent
15 Mesa, AZ	67,639	5	\$0.00	SRA, 2FT	Staggered	4 Years	Elected	Independent
16 Milwaukee, WI	95,259	9	\$7,200.00	FWC	Staggered	4 Years	Elected	Independent
17 New Orleans, LA	85,983	7	\$9,600.00	FWC, 2FT	Staggered	4 Years	Elected	Independent
18 Norfolk, VA	35,255	7	\$0.00	FWC, 2FT, 1PT	Staggered	2 Years	City Council Appoints	Dependent
19 Oakland, CA [4]	51,748	7	\$8,250.00	FWC, 4FT	Staggered	4 Years	Elected	Independent
20 Philadelphia, PA	207,667	9	\$0.00	FWC, 5FT	Staggered	6 Years	Mayor Appoints [3]	Dependent
21 Pittsburgh, PA	40,107	9	\$0.00	SRA	Staggered	4 Years	Elected	Independent
22 Portland, OR	54,073	7	\$0.00	FWC, 2FT	Staggered	4 Years	Elected	Dependent
23 Providence, RI	22,832	9	\$3,500.00	FWC	Staggered	3 Years	Mayor Appoints [3]	Dependent
24 Rochester, NY	35,568	7	\$15,000.00	SRA	Staggered	4 Years	Elected	Dependent
25 Seattle, WA	45,159	7	\$0.00	SRA	Staggered	4 Years	Elected	Dependent
26 St. Louis, MO	41,213	12	\$0.00	FWC, 2FT	Staggered	6 Years	Elected	Independent
27 St. Paul, MN	39,239	7	\$10,800.00	SRA, 2FT	Staggered	3 Years	Elected	Independent
28 Toledo, OH	39,238	5	\$0.00	FWC, 1FT	Staggered	4 Years	Elected	Independent
29 Tulsa, OK	41,341	7	\$1,200.00	SRA, 1FT	Staggered	4 Years	Elected	Dependent
30 Boston, MA	63,738	7	\$7,500.00	FWC, 3FT	Staggered	4 Years	Mayor Appoints [3]	Dependent
Typical City	101,001	7	\$8,679.89	FWC, 2FT	Staggered	4 Years	Elected	Independent
	(Average)	(Mode)	(Average)					

[1] Source: 1993 enrollment figures compiled by US Department of Education

[2] SRA indicates staff resources are available but staff does not work exclusively for the board. FWC indicates general staff where employees work for the whole board. Pers. indicates personal staff.

[3] Nominating panel presents names of final candidates to the mayor prior to appointment.

[4] California school districts receive most operational funds via state appropriation. However, boards may exercise taxing authority to assess educational sales taxes and user fees. Predominantly, tax power subject to voter approval and state limits.

Sources: Bureau survey of district school board, superintendent, budget, and finance office officials. Further information provided by California Taxpayers Association, Minnesota Taxpayers Association, National School Board Association and Council of the Great City Schools.