

School Committee Answers

October 13, 2015

QUESTIONS FROM SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Dr. Uriarte:

1. What type of organization is the Compact?

Established in 2011, the Boston Compact brings together the City, Boston Public Schools, Boston Charter Alliance and Boston Catholic schools to improve equitable access to high-quality schools and excellent instruction to all students.

In terms of structure, the Boston Compact is a multi-organization collaborative, driven by practitioners who serve on our Steering Committee and run by a two-person staff. Like many other unincorporated coalitions, we have a fiscal sponsor. Our finances were first handled by the Boston Educational Development Foundation, then Wheelock College and now the Boston Private Industry Council. In each of these fiscal sponsorship relationships, the Steering Committee has continued to operate independently of its sponsors, who do not participate on any of the committees. Boston is home to many multi-organization collaboratives, including Thrive in 5, Success Boston, and Youth Transitions Task Force. Oftentimes, such organizations have fiscal sponsors in order to minimize overhead costs and focus on the organizational goals. Our status as a multi-organization collaborative with a fiscal sponsor allows the Boston Compact to focus on the cross sector collaboration that will lead to better education opportunities for all of Boston's children.

2. Why is it appropriate for districts [BPS and charter LEAs] to collaborate with Catholic schools? Why has the Boston Compact not yet collaborated with other religious schools?

The operating strategy of the Compact has been to work with the greatest possible number of schools serving Boston's children. We are able to do so by gathering representatives from each of the sectors that together serve the vast majority of Boston's student population. Between BPS, charter and Catholic schools, the Compact serves more than 90 percent of the city's K-12 students. Participation from these sectors has allowed us to bring high-quality professional development, such as WestEd's Quality Teaching for English Learners (QTEL) program, to BPS, charter and Catholic school teachers and administrators. It has enabled educators from all three sectors to collectively run cycles of inquiry and share effective practices. The Catholic schools have been enthusiastic partners in these initiatives.

Catholic schools, unlike other non-public schools, have a representative body through the Catholic schools office. Catholic schools also educate about ten percent of the student population, in many cases enrolling populations that are demographically similar to the BPS student bodies.

That said, your inclusive values align with our own, and we would like to invite other schools to learn about what's happening in Boston and take part in conversations about effective practices. In order to foster those relationships, we will invite all Boston schools to our first annual convening this spring.

3. How will collaboration take place without having an impact on the broader public system?

Our hope is that collaboration *will* have an impact on the broader public system. The impact will be positive, as we create a space for educators to identify, share and scale effective practice for closing achievement gaps as well as coordinating and leveraging resources. We have seen that each sector benefits from sharing best practices.

When it comes to collaboration on enrollment, our aims are simply to create an equitable system where families have easy access to all of our great schools, with information about their school options readily available, and to establish one set of enrollment policies for all public schools. We are aware that a unified enrollment system is but one step on the path and take Mayor Walsh's remarks about each of us having responsibility to ensure all our schools improve seriously.

4. How will we measure apples to apples? What platform will we build that allows us to measure across schools?

The proposed compact suggests building consensus for a common set of measures that are publicly and readily available to families as they determine the appropriate schools for their individual children. Currently, we are limited in apples to apples comparisons. We can consider MCAS growth and performance data or very narrow formative data about particular standards and content areas, but no holistic measure exists.

BPS's School Quality Framework differs from the metric that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education requires charter schools to follow. That said, thanks to relationships built through cross sector collaboration, some charter representatives have expressed a willingness to publicly share data such as school climate surveys, even though it is not part of the state's tiering system. The compact is working toward an agreement in the next few years for a shared tiering system, which would require School Committee, DESE and Archdiocesan approval.

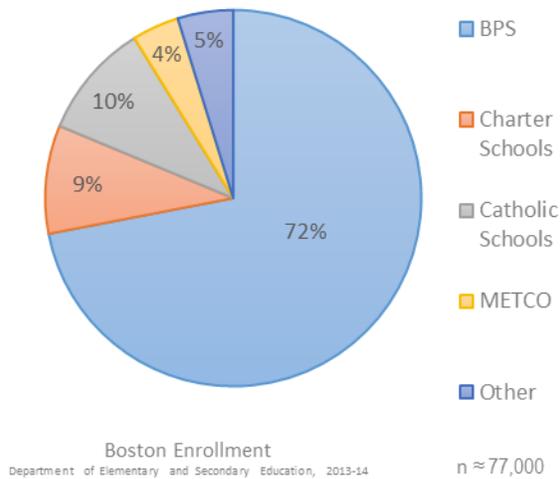
Chair O'Neill:

5. Please provide data on total population of school-age students in Boston. Breakdown by type of school students attend: district, charter, METCO, Catholic, other religious.

In 2013-14, about 72 percent of Boston students were educated at BPS schools. Another nine percent received education through charter schools. Catholic Schools served slightly more students than charter, reaching about ten percent of the total student population. Another four percent of Boston school-aged children attended schools outside of the city through METCO.

An examination of schools the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education identifies as

“private schools” that are within Boston and not part of the Archdiocese documents 25 schools. Of these, five are Christian schools and there are no schools affiliated with a religion other than Christianity listed. This leads us to believe the list is not exhaustive of all private schools, as we know of a Muslim PreK-8 schools as well as an Orthodox Jewish high school. That said, the DESE list does include two schools affiliated with medical institutions, two with universities and two international schools.



The following is a breakdown of student demographics (updated with 2014-15 numbers in the BPS and charter schools) within each of the three sectors with which we work. The data available for students with disabilities and English language learners are combined and breakdowns by level of need are not public and would have to be provided, as permitted, by district and charter authorities.

Boston Public Schools ¹ (Including in-district charters)	Commonwealth Charter Schools ³	Boston Catholic Schools
<p style="text-align: center;">126 Schools 57,000 Students</p> <p>Student Demographics 9% Asian 36% Black/African American 41% Hispanic 13% White</p> <p>49% Economically Disadvantaged²</p> <p>29% English Language Learners 20% Students with Disabilities</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">24 Schools 8,700 Students</p> <p>Student Demographics 3% Asian 53% Black/African American 34% Hispanic 9% White</p> <p>43% Economically Disadvantaged</p> <p>13% English Language Learners 15% Students with Disabilities</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">26 Schools 7,706 Students⁴</p> <p>*Boston Catholic schools do not currently have a uniform definition for English language learners or students with disabilities.</p>

¹ Boston Public Schools at a Glance, June 10, 2015

² BPS figure for economically disadvantaged students does not include in-district charter schools

³ Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2014-15 Report

⁴ Number of Catholic school students is from 2013-14, the most recent year for which data is available

Ms. Jeri Robinson:

6. How does METCO factor in?

METCO serves four percent of school-aged children in Boston. Incorporating METCO into a compact would be logistically difficult, as it would require working with individual districts that do not have a centralized representative body outside of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. That said, we will seriously consider how to include the voice of METCO at the collaborative table. Beginning with an invitation to the Compact’s first annual convening in the spring, may be a good start.

Ms. Tapia:

7. Can we ask all compact partners to adopt the BPS Code of Conduct?

School discipline, particularly as it impacts black and Latino boys, has been a focal topic of the Compact's Teaching and Learning Subcommittee this year. As we have done with other subpopulations in the past, our subcommittee will analyze data together to identify where Black and Latino boys are thriving and how our broader community of schools can learn from these exemplars.

Our approach goes beyond academic performance to look at school culture. The subcommittee will jointly analyze school climate as well as suspension and expulsion data.

The Boston Compact has also sponsored the December 14 regional convening of the Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color. COSEBOC's standards emphasize school environment and climate and we've shared the compact's interest in discipline with the organization in hopes that either the December convening or subsequent local professional development offerings will provide additional opportunities for cross-sector exploration of effective practice. (The Compact has worked closely with COSEBOC in the past, engaging the organization's Executive Director, Ron Walker, to lead a year-long tri-sector cohort of principals and aspiring principals in strengthening the equity lens they to bring to their work.)

In terms of requiring charter schools to adopt the BPS Code of Conduct, each of the charter schools operates under a code of conduct previously submitted to and approved by DESE. That said, we believe the Compact is a vehicle to discuss and explore different approaches.

8. Will there be opportunities for the School Committee and other signatories to revise a new compact?

The intent is to see the three sectors adopt the shared goals and commit to working collaboratively towards them. Naturally, the work plans would evolve during the three-year period, but our hope is the policy makers on the School Committee, Boston Charter Alliance and in the Archdiocese would hold steady on the proposed goals.

Mr. O'Neill:

9. The proposed Compact aligns well with the School Committee's strategic plan. BPS has taken many ideas from charters. Might we see expertise flowing in the other direction, particularly with regards to ELL, SWD/inclusion, and Restorative Justice?

Absolutely. Already, charter and Catholic schools have been learning from BPS colleagues about their practices with English language learners and students with disabilities, among other topics. Central to the Compact's shared vision is maintaining the table where we have conversations, learn about effective practices from all sectors and work together to improve schools across the city.

Dr. Uriarte

10. Will there be translators at the community meetings on unified enrollment?

As part of a full faith effort to include all of the community, especially the folks who most often do not have a voice at this table, we will be providing translation at all of our community meetings. We have determined the languages in which we can offer translation based on community demographics. We will provide translation for the following languages at the following community meetings:

October 8, 5:30-8 p.m., Kroc Center Boston, Spanish and Cape Verdean

October 20, 5:30-8 p.m., East Boston Library, Spanish

October 21, 5:30-8 p.m., Mattapan Library, Spanish and Haitian Creole

October 27, 6:30-9 p.m., Condon Community Center, Spanish and Somali

Nov. 5, 5:30-8 p.m., Grove Hall Community Center, Spanish

Nov. 12, 6:30-9 p.m., First Church of JP, Spanish

Nov. 17, 5:30-8 p.m., West End Boys and Girls Club, Spanish

We also may work with community groups to add first language only meetings conducted in languages other than English.

QUESTIONS FROM PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Kim Janey:

11. What impact has the new home-based plan had on equitable access to quality?

BPS has been told that an external analysis of the impact of home-based assignment on equity requires three years of data. Therefore, we expect a report in late 2016.

12. Under unified enrollment, will the quality of the Commonwealth charter schools be measured under the School Quality Framework that BPS has developed? How will you ensure apples to apples comparison? Also, will charters adhere to the home-based assignment process? Will they be able to opt out of various aspects of a new assignment system?

Please see question four, above, about the School Quality Framework.

In terms of whether charter schools would be able to opt-out of various aspects of a unified system, the Compact leadership believes we should co-create one set of policies under which all public schools can operate. Any school that signed the MOU to participate in the system would have to abide to all aspects of the system.

Where there might be exemptions, the same rules would apply to BPS and charter schools. For example, a dual-immersion school or arts-based school might suggest it offers unique programming in the city and request to be permitted to enroll citywide. Similarly, as is done now in BPS, if there is a high-performing school that is unable to fill its seats within its immediate catchment area, it might be permitted to be on lists for families further away. We are currently seeking community input on what characteristics should be considered in an exemption to be citywide.

But it is likewise important to note that we believe the Compact is the vehicle to continue these discussions and the best path toward getting all sectors to adopt best standards and practices is by continuing to collaborate and move boldly together to improve all our schools.

13. Which entity will be responsible for implementing this new system? Will it be housed at BPS? Somewhere else?

This is an open question with many possible answers. The BPS currently operates and maintains the home based assignment system and could continue as additional schools join. It could also be managed by the City itself or via a third party such as a university, nonprofit or other external entity. This is among the areas we are seeking public input as part of our citywide community meetings which began last week.

14. How would the lottery assignment process serve special populations, like English language learners and students with disabilities? Are charter schools equipped to serve additional special education students or students with more severe disabilities? Could a student be assigned to a charter school through the IEP process?

The current BPS assignment system ensures that the vast majority of students participate in the general lottery, including most English language learners and students with disabilities. We have convened both BPS and charter educators with deep knowledge of SPED and ELL and have begun conversations about how the new enrollment process could work for students with higher levels of need. We are continuing to explore the options. Here too, we solicit input, particularly from families whose children have greater needs.

In terms of charter school capacity for students with more severe disabilities, just as is true in the BPS schools, capacity varies between individual schools. The Mayor's proposal suggests

that while one school, be it district or charter, may not have expertise in educating students with every type of disability, across each sector there would be proportional and coordinated sharing of these responsibilities.

15. What about ELL? Many agree that language specific SEI serves ELL students better than multi-language SEI. If a charter school, or any school for that matter, does not have enough students to form a single language group to implement language specific SEI, what happens to those students?

Excellent question. As suggested for SPED, we will want to consider coordinating programming across the two sectors. We request community feedback here, in addition to the educators who are thinking about the details of potential mechanics for this system.

16. Regarding discipline, will the Boston charters adopt the BPS Code of Conduct? Will they adopt their own? How will they comply with Chapter 222? Or will some students continue to find their way back into BPS? And if a student leaves a charter school, for whatever reason, will the charter fill that seat with another student from the waitlist?

Please see question 7 above regarding the Code of Conduct. Since each charter school is its own LEA, they each have plans for complying with Chapter 222. As we co-create a set of policies for all public schools, part of the proposal is to centralize assignment of students who arrive or transfer mid-year.

17. How do we eliminate racial and programmatic achievement gaps once and for all?

This is obviously a complicated question and one that reaches far beyond unified enrollment. We have to be clear on the things that unified enrollment can address (like access to quality schools for parents and ease of the application process in enrollment) and the things it doesn't address directly (like achievement gaps). We can certainly make the argument that unified enrollment would provide students and families with more equitable access, and that is one important piece in tackling the gaps. But Mayor Walsh said at the outset and it is important to keep in mind that unified enrollment is not a panacea but one step in the process of reform.

Ms. Kalise Osula

18. Is it a good idea to move forward without addressing funding issues between district and charters?

We want to be clear on the things that unified enrollment can address (like access to quality schools for families and ease of the application process in enrollment) and the things it doesn't address directly (like school financing). Unified enrollment does not directly address tensions related to school funding. As mentioned above, the Mayor made clear there is no silver bullet for the many issues facing our city schools. That said, building a stronger, more collaborative, more locally accountable partnership between BPS and charter schools has the potential to lead to innovative solutions.

19. Philadelphia signed a compact in 2011 and closed down 44 schools 2 years later. Will this lead to school closures?

Boston is not Philadelphia and unified enrollment itself cannot cause any kind of dramatic turn such as this. Either/both BPS and DESE could decide to close district and charter schools respectively, but that would be true regardless of what system families use to apply to schools.

Ms. Megan Wolf:

20. Racial and economic impact analysis?

Please see the answer to question 11 above.

21. Will BPS finances suffer under a unified enrollment plan that endorses and encourages charter enrollment?

No, charters already fill their seats so this will not impact the number of students attending charters, it will simply make it easier for all families to apply to all public schools in one place. We believe that this will end up saving the district money not just on transportation, but in the long-term also in planning strategically with a deeper understanding of charter school plans (and Catholic school plans).

22. Accountabilities to guarantee data from charters or changes made based upon what's learned?

By signing the Compact, BPS and any charter which signs would commit to "sharing demographic analysis of existing and projected enrollment by neighborhood, grade and level of need with its partners while transitioning to a citywide database." We anticipate that an MOU for unified enrollment would define additional data points required from any and all participants. This is part of the information we are seeking in our public meeting process.

23. What happens if students with greater needs are steered to BPS and students with less need are steered to charters?

One of the core principles agreed upon by the BPS and charter leaders drafting the outline of the proposed plan was that all schools would share responsibility for educating students with greater needs. If a unified enrollment MOU does not include this, we expect partners will not sign on. Similarly, we expect part of the MOU would spell out a process for addressing any imbalances.

24. What power would be retained by the School Committee when another body handles enrollment, facilities and transportation?

To clarify, there is not another body that would handle all operations. The School Committee (and charter boards and Archdiocese) would retain policymaking authority over their respective schools. The Compact partners simply make recommendations to the School Committee (and other sector leaders). Specifically regarding unified enrollment, an MOU might direct a joint group of BPS and charter leaders to oversee implementation and propose any changes, which would have to come before the policymakers for approval.

Mr. John Mudd:

25. How do we have a different kind of public conversation with a level of detail that gets up beyond ideological answers?

We also want a different public conversation than we've had over the years. Please join us at the citywide community meetings (listed in question 10) to have a dialogue about the concept of unified enrollment (not district versus charters).

Thank you for your consideration of the Mayor's proposal and for the opportunity to answer your questions to the best of our ability at this time. We look forward to continued dialogue and partnership.