

Bureau Brief



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September 6, 1996

BB96-2

History Of The Boston School Committee Structure

- 1635** Boston Latin was founded and in this year the Town of Boston first assumed the care of the schools and a "schoolmaster for the teaching of children among us" was chosen. This is the first recorded action of the Town of Boston concerning the government of the schools.
- 1647** The General Court of the Colony enacted the first law requiring the establishment of schools. The responsibility for the schools was given to "no existing body of officials but charged the Town as a whole with this important duty."
- 1679** Two free schools were established in Boston to "teach children to write and to cipher."
- 1644-1689** Town records of Boston indicate that during this time, despite no official school body, the Selectman conducted all school affairs either on their own initiative or as instructed by citizens.
- 1709** The Town proceeded to "nominate and appoint a certain number of gentlemen, of liberal education, together with some of the Reverend Ministers of the Town to be Inspectors of the School." These inspectors were to visit schools annually.
- 1712** The Town voted to create a Committee that will "inspect the free writing schools which are supported at the Town's charge."
- 1721** The Town voted that the "Selectmen and such as they shall desire to assist them be Inspectors of the Gramer and Wrighting Schools for the year ensuing."
- 1789** The General Court granted authority to "trust to appoint School Committees for the control of the schools." The first School Committee for Boston was chosen in October of 1789. The Committee consisted of 21 members elected annually. The 21 included nine Selectmen and one member from each of the twelve Wards. Also, girls were admitted to the Boston Public Schools for the first time, but only from April to October of each year.
- 1822** Boston became a City and the City Charter changed the School Committee slightly by requiring that the 21 members include the Mayor, eight Aldermen and a member from each of the twelve Wards.
- 1835** The City Charter was further amended to provide that the School Committee should consist of 26 members, including the Mayor, the President of the Common Council and 24 Ward Members (two from each Ward). The Aldermen were no longer members of the School Committee.

(Over)

- 1851** The first Superintendent was appointed, but he had little or no executive authority.
- 1854** Another revision to the City Charter gave Boston a School Committee made up of 74 members which included the Mayor, the President of the Common Council and six members from each of the twelve Wards.
- 1875** The School Committee had grown to 116 members because of the annexations of Roxbury, Charlestown, Dorchester, West Roxbury and Brighton.
- 1875** An act of the legislature during this year reduced the number of School Committee members to 25, which included the Mayor as ex-officio and 24 members elected At-Large and to staggered terms. The School Committee established a Board of Supervisors which consisted of the Superintendent and six Supervisors. This Board was to serve as the Executive Board of the Committee and carry out the administration of the schools as directed by the Committee.
- 1885** The City Charter was once again revised, which at this time eliminated the Mayor as a member, keeping the School Committee at 24.
- 1905** School Committee was further reduce to consist of five members elected to four-year staggered terms. The members were uncompensated.
- 1924** The City Charter was amended and confirmed the School Committee structure at five members.
- 1949** A referendum was approved by the voters providing for the election of five members At-Large for two-year terms beginning in January 1952.
- 1981** A referendum was approved by the voters calling for a 13-member Committee, nine elected by District and four At-Large for two-year terms.
- 1989** A non-binding ballot question asked voters if the School Committee structure should be changed to a seven member board, appointed by the Mayor with approval of the City Council from a list of Boston residents selected by a nominating panel. This non-binding question was approved: 37.3% in favor of the appointed board and 36.2% against.
- 1991** A home rule petition establishing an appointed School Committee was approved by both the Mayor and the City Council and enacted into law (Chapter 108) by approval of the Legislature and Governor.
- 1992** The first appointed School Committee took office in January.

Source: *A Municipal History of the Town and City of Boston*, by Josiah Quincy, 1852, *The City Government of Boston*, by Nathan Matthews, Jr., 1895, *Report of A Survey of The Public Schools of Boston, Massachusetts*, by George D. Strayer, 1944, *Handbook for School Committee*, Office of the Secretary of the Boston School Committee, 1983, and *The Boston Municipal Research Bureau Research Files*.