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Brighton public, charter, Catholic schools sing praises of \$3.25m grant to aid year-old partnership

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT DECEMBER 06, 2012

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About 100 students from three schools in Brighton – the Edison K-8, Conservatory Lab Charter, and St. Columbkille – performed a series of instrumental and vocal pieces for classmates, teachers, parents, and local leaders Wednesday morning.

The concert not only showcased the young musicians’ talent but also illustrated results of a historic, year-old partnership of Boston’s public school system, charter schools, and Catholic schools.

The gathering celebrated a major financial boost for the innovative collaboration: On Wednesday, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation announced it will give a \$3.25 million grant to foster the partnership, which is called the Boston Compact. Only seven US cities received the competitive grants in this round, officials

said.

“The purpose of this compact is to educate all of the students of the city of Boston,” Kevin Andrews, the compact’s cochairman and headmaster of Neighborhood House Charter School in Dorchester, told the crowd after the students performed.

“We don’t have to compete anymore,” said the Rev. Gregory G. Groover, chairman of the Boston School Committee. “We don’t have to feud. We can fuel each other.

“It almost brought tears to my eyes,” Groover said after the concert.

Using a variety of wind, string, brass, and percussion instruments, the students with varying experience levels played songs such as Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy” and John Higgins’s “Hard Rock Blues.”

Officials said the compact is advancing education, and students said it is fostering new friendships.

Edison eighth-graders Mohamad Okar, who plays bass and drums, and Sun-Hei Bamfo, who plays flute, said they have made a few friends who attend the charter school and St. Columbkille.

Okar has applied to Boston Arts Academy, where he hopes to attend next fall. He said he has especially enjoyed being able to meet with students at the music-focused Conservatory Lab Charter School.

“I like working with them to make music,” he said.

The Edison principal, Mary Driscoll, told the audience that the partnership has helped boost arts opportunities at the the school. “The arts are not just an extracurricular,” she said. “The arts are how we are going to move our students forward.”

Since the compact’s launch, all 128 city-run district schools, the city’s 16 charter schools, and 22 Catholic schools have signed on to the partnership, which represents 88 percent of schoolchildren in Boston, city officials said.

The Gates Foundation grant will allow the compact to train 250 teachers and administrators to improve instruction for English language learners, which city officials said is the fastest growing population of students in Boston.



The grant will also support efforts to accelerate performance for black and Latino boys, and it will support an effort to coordinate and simplify school enrollment, officials said.

The funding will help launch three more partnerships, such as the one linking Edison, Conservatory Lab, and St. Columbkille, which plan to share in professional development, techniques of analyzing student data, and other initiatives.

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