

Boston aims to be first to erase gender wage gap

By [Katie Johnston](#) | GLOBE STAFF OCTOBER 31, 2013



WENDY MAEDA/GLOBE STAFF

Augusta Nichols-Even (right), shown with Jesse Banhazi at Green City Growers, recently left the male-dominated technology industry.

Boston has the best-educated women of any major US city, and now Mayor Thomas M. Menino is trying to make it a better place for them to earn a living. The goal: to make Boston the first city to eliminate the wage gap between men and women.

Menino plans to announce this ambitious initiative on Thursday, when he rolls out a compact signed by 38 employers that have committed to ending pay disparities. Nationally, women earn 77 cents for every dollar men make. In Boston, it's 83 cents to the dollar — a difference of almost \$10,000 a year, or about \$400,000 over a career, according to a report by the city's newly formed Women's Workforce Council.

Menino has made working women a cornerstone of his agenda in his last year in office, creating initiatives for small business owners, girls and technology, and wage negotiation. By the end of the year, he hopes to have at least 50 companies dedicated to learning the causes of the wage gap, putting measures in place to equalize pay, and participating in a biennial review of their progress.

The mayor's interest in the issue is personal. He has four granddaughters, ages 12 to 15. "I'm thinking about what kind of city I want for them, and for their daughters, too," Menino said.

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Eliminating the wage gap is not just about equality, compact supporters say, it's an economic imperative. In a city driven by knowledge and innovation, with a greater share of young women than any other city, equal pay will help retain and attract the best and brightest women to the Boston area and its companies.

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Three-quarters of the Boston area workforce at Partners HealthCare are women, and with many in management or nursing jobs, they earn more than their male counterparts by 13.5 percent, said chief executive Gary Gottlieb. Still, Gottlieb wanted his company, the largest private employer in the city, to be part of the movement.

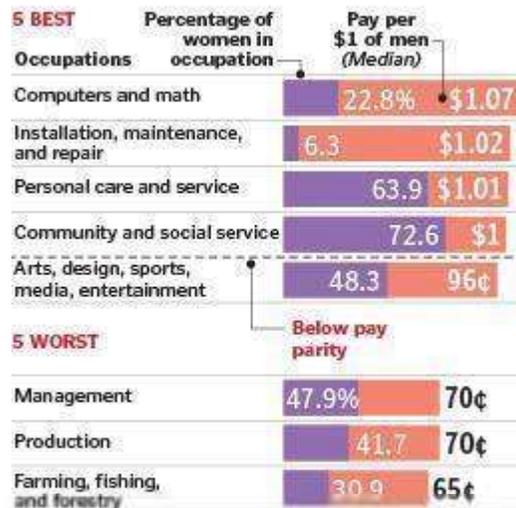
"It's in our self interest because it creates larger pools of highly skilled and well-paid women," he said.

Many thought the gulf between men's and women's salaries would disappear as more women entered the workforce. The gap has shrunk from the gaping 59 cents to the dollar in the early 1960s, but even now, with women making up about half the labor force, the divide is still stark.

"When I graduated college in the dark ages, in 1968, you thought, these problems are going to take care of themselves," said Cathy Minehan, dean of the management school at Simmons College and chair of the Women's Workforce Council. The thinking, she said, was "All you need is a few people getting ahead

MINDING THE WAGE GAP

In 18 of 22 different occupations in Boston tracked by the Census Bureau, women make less than men. The occupations with the greatest and least pay parity:



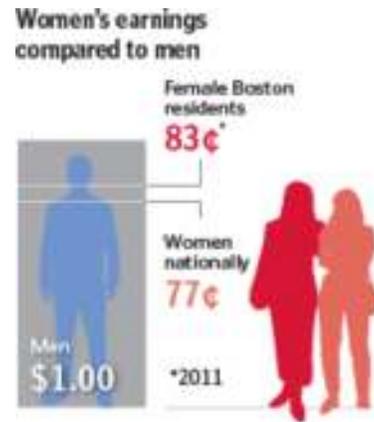
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Some of the disparity can be explained by career choices women make, with fewer going into higher-paid occupations like engineering or technology. Many women also take time off or cut hours when they have children, slowing their career trajectory.

But such choices don't fully explain the salary void. When pay is adjusted for these factors, women still only make 91 cents for every dollar a man earns, according to the Women's Workforce Council report.

That 9 cent difference is due to an implicit gender bias, said Victoria Budson, council member and director of the Women and Public Policy Program at the Kennedy School.

Mothers earn roughly 10 to 15 percent less than working women without children, for instance, even when controlling for experience and education, according to the council report. Fathers, on the other hand, earn 10 to 15 percent more than men without children.



The reason: Mothers are seen as less engaged and therefore not given challenging assignments that can lead to promotions, Budson said. Fathers, on the other hand, are viewed as more committed.

“When people walk by a woman’s office and don’t see her,” Budson said, “they assume she’s at home with the kids, even if she’s down the hall negotiating a deal.”

Augusta Nichols-Even recently left the technology industry to pursue lower-paying but more satisfying work at Green City Growers in Somerville, an urban farm developer. She recalled tech workplaces dominated by men, many in upper management or programming positions, while women, just as educated and experienced, were relegated to “softer,” lower-paying jobs in administration or marketing.

“Part of it’s just the mind-set of what we think we deserve as women,” she said. “And part of it is the mind-set of breaking into the boys’ club.”

Suffolk Construction is also part of an industry dominated by men. But chief executive John Fish, who joined the compact, said he has found that bringing more women into his company

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“Women have a tendency to approach things in a more thoughtful, I would say non-emotional manner,” he said, “whereas men in the construction business have a tendency to be a little bit more verbally aggressive and overly reactive.”

Companies signing the compact will receive guidelines and share ideas to help close wage gaps. State Street Corp., for instance, trains managers to overcome unconscious biases that may place men in certain occupations and leadership roles when hiring and promoting. And yet for all the work the financial firm has done to promote gender equality, upper management is still dominated by men.

“If these things were simpler, we all would have figured it out by now,” said Alison Quirk, chief human resources officer at State Street and a member of the workforce council. “We just can’t continue this way forward that really only is conducive to the other half of the population.”

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WENDY MAEDA/ GLOBE STAFF

Augusta Nichols-Even examined a planter bed at Green City Growers in Somerville last week.

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