

Safal Partners | Webinar Exploring the Role of the SEA in Promoting Local District Charter Collaboration

LOURDES

Hi, everyone. Good afternoon. My name is Lourdes. I work here at the Department of Ed. I

RIVERY:

work really closely with other staff here on the team, recently taking on the role of working with the SEA team. So I'm excited that you are here and that we're going to be sharing this webinar with you. So thank you for making time in your busy days to attend.

Thank you Safal, for helping us put together this webinar. You'll learn a little bit more about what Safal Partners does for us here at the US Department of Education and for the charter schools program specifically. And thank you for CPRE as well for joining us on today's call. So without further ado, I'm going to pass it over to Alex, and he's going to take it away.

ALEX MEDLER:

All right, thank you very much, Lourdes. This is Alex Medler. And as Lourdes explained, I'm with Safal Partners, which is a education management firm that operates the National Charter School Resource Center for the US Department of Education. If you're not familiar with the Resource Center, for those of you who are listening, I encourage you to check us out on the web.

It's a federally funded resource that's designed to help everybody like folks on this call help make the charter school world be more successful. There's a lot of resources, a lot of things you should check out, including videos, materials you can download-- and for those of you who work on the grants-- chances to interact with your peers. So Safal was proud to do that for the department. And this webinar is one of the examples of the things that the National Charter School Resource Center can do to be useful to you.

Today, we're going to be talking about the SEA role in supporting charter district collaboration. I'll be your moderator. But the meat of today's presentation will come from The Center for Reinventing Public Education, a national leader in researching and supporting collaboration between charters and traditional public schools. From CRPE, we have Sarah Yatsko and Jordan Posamentier sharing their research on this topic.

I'm going to just introduce this briefly and go over a little bit of the logistics for the call. Then I will briefly outline how the federal charter school program anticipates that states might help with charter district collaboration. Then Sarah and Jordan will share their review. They've been researching this for a while and have some really interesting findings. And then we will have time for discussion.

In terms of the logistics for the day, we have quite a few people registered. And unfortunately, as all those who have worked on webinars know, if we all have our phones on, it's really quite disruptive. But at the same time, we're trying to make it as interactive as possible. So please keep your phones or your audio muted. We'll do that on this end as well.

If you have any technical problems, use the chat feature. If you look in the upper right box, you'll see chat participants Q&A. Use the chat feature if you're having a technical problem, and my colleague Sarah can help straighten that out while we're on the call. If you want to raise a question, the best thing to do is to type a note into the Q&A box, and we'll see that. Sarah will bring it to our attention, and we will also see it as the panelists and we incorporate it into the answer.

We can also call on people to speak, and join us, and raise their questions and comments during the discussion part. So one of the things you can do in the Q&A is say, hey, I'd like to comment on that. Can you let me raise a question or an issue?

So we'll try to make it as interactive as possible, but we recognize webinars can be hard to do that. Also, the webinar is being recorded. So this is available on the resource center website, probably within the next week or so. And finally, we really appreciate everyone's feedback. When you log off, you'll get a brief survey, and we encourage you to go ahead fill out that survey.

So I'm going to now switch to a little bit of background on the role of collaboration within the federal charter school program. Number one, the national charter school program is controlled by legislation from Congress. When it was reauthorized under ESSA, it has many purposes. There's like eight listed but two of them that speak to today's topic.

Number one is that the whole thing is supposed to support public education more broadly in America. The CSP is not just to make charter schools be good, but it's first purpose is to make public education in America-- in all settings-- be better. And then another purpose specifically gets at the sharing of best practices between charter schools and public schools. And I should add, that's between, not from, charter schools just to public schools. So that's to be two-way communication of best practices and learning on all sorts of topics.

We're talking today about the state role. Because a lot of people have focused on what should charter schools do, or should districts do, or what can traditional schools do. But what has

been less explored is the state role.

Every state that applies for a charter school grant actually in their application is supposed to explain what they will do to support collaboration between charter schools and local districts for sharing best practices. But once they've explained it, it's not necessarily a high priority of where the resources go.

So I would say that charter district collaboration is a soft aspect of the charter school program. It was under NCLB. It still is under ESSA. Dissemination activities provide an opportunity for collaboration that in addition, states can work to support lots of aspects of the charter sector that will include support for collaboration. And I think this overlaps with the agenda for similar work.

You can see resources on district charter collaboration at the resource center from a link there at the bottom of this page. So this is a topic that's come up. It will continue to come up. But it really will rely on state leadership and initiation to make it happen more. And that support is pretty collaboration.

I think you're going to see a couple of things going on. One is the description of how they'll share practices, but also that the state entity may use its best practices to support struggling schools as well is something that will come up in the future. So I don't want to belabor that point.

Mostly I want to say that CSPs can support strengthening and authorizing. They can support access to facilities and funding. They can support enrollment and increased access for services for disadvantaged students, including kids with disabilities or English learners. And they can support the expansion and replication with ties to their state accountability system. These are all things that the CSP can lay a hand to support, and they should also be things that then would make a better context charter district collaboration.

So I know I rushed through that, but I really wanted to make sure to get to the meat of Saran and Jordan's piece. So I'm going to turn it over now to our colleagues from CRPE.

**LOURDES
RIVERY:**

All right, thank you very much, Alex. Hello, everyone. There's 33 people on this webinar, which is fantastic. I will begin, and I'll pass the baton momentarily over to Jordan who's done the lion's share of this work on looking at the state's role in district-charter collaboration.

So just briefly for those of you on the call who don't know, CRPE, the Center on Reinventing

Public Education, is an education research and policy center. And we have a 20 year history of paying attention-- mostly at the district level but increasingly at the state governance level-- to changes in policy and practice and then the realm of education or public education. So we strive to follow data to understand the impacts of those changes.

And recently, probably most recently, we've paid attention to personalized learning-- we have some major studies going on around that-- and new approaches to special education that are being tried in districts, the use of discipline, and then the impact-- one thing we've always been interested in since they've been around is the impact of charter schools and how they become incorporated into cities. So it's an obvious and natural progression that we would then specifically take time to make sure we understood how district and charter schools are interacting. And that has been my role at CRPE for the last five years.

My slide shows something that I know none of you on this call need to be reminded of, and that is that there has historically been pretty strong animosity between district and charters. That's just been the norm since charters came into the picture. But what some of you-- you probably all know this too-- but I think when you look at this closely, it's interesting to see that the new normal may be collaboration.

And this has been a long time coming, and it's fits and starts. But there is increasing evidence that district and charter schools view the value in coming together. And although it's been difficult, and although-- as you'll see in a later slide-- progress has been shaky, we basically see the trend in one direction, which is toward more collaboration.

So why do I feel like I have the authority to talk about this? Because we have been in a five-year partnership with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to track the progress and monitor the progress, or lack thereof in some cases, in the now 25 cities that are compact cities. And those are the cities that got a \$100,000 grant to collaborate across sectors. So we have a grant from Gates, and we've had it for five years. And we are watching how that work unfolds pretty closely.

So out of those observations, we have written quite a bit, done webinars like this one, we've presented in a lot of places. We have a monthly newsletter. We track collaboration in the media. So in short, we pay a tremendous amount of attention to this issue beyond just the work in the 25 cities.

We also track the portfolio strategy, which is a strategy that views public education as a citywide endeavor. And obviously, within that strategy, it necessitates some working across the two public education sectors.

So what we found in a nutshell, is that cities, as I said earlier, are recognizing that the need is urgent around being able to coordinate across these sectors. However, as many things in public education, the collaboration is often treated as this well, we'll implement this reform or this change, and then we'll move onto the next thing.

So in cities where this has been the case, as you would predict, those collaborations haven't taken deep root, and they don't seem to show lasting changes. It's only in the cities that say, this is the new way to be. This is how we now think about education across this city. Those are the places where the collaboration is sustained.

Obviously of no surprise to any of you on the call, it's abundantly clear that local context, especially the political context in each place that tries this, has a huge impact on the ability to succeed for these places. And we're writing now about politics. And what we're finding is that there is really no politics-free zone anywhere in any city in the United States in terms of district-charter collaboration.

But what there are are actors who are more or less able to read what the politics are and to react accordingly. So in certain cities, we see actors who are able to navigate those politics and use them to their advantage. And in other cities that's just, for whatever reason, not something the leaders have been able to do.

We also see that there are-- I guess this is in iterations, a point I just made-- where there are cities making progress. They work within the local constraints. And they often make choices about when and what to collaborate around. So there are many different options. And we've seen leaders be choosy about those options to success or not.

So this chart was in our most recent report. And it illustrates how collaboration in many cities is moving forward. But then there are also cities where it's actually moving backwards. And this is most of the time driven by a change at the top.

So you have a leader come on board, maybe a superintendent, maybe some charter school large CMO leaders who are fully invested in the idea of collaboration. And then you see turnover of those leaders. And the folks that replace them had much less of an interest in

working across sectors, and you see the work ratcheted back.

Sometimes there's changes in laws that mean a ratcheting back. But most often it's the leadership at the top. And I should note that New Orleans here looks like a blue candy cane because in New Orleans, the collaboration was different than in other places, primarily because New Orleans is predominantly at this point over 90% charter schools. So the collaboration there looked a little different, because it was a charter-to-charter collaboration. In all these other cities, we are referring to charter and district collaboration.

And my last slide is about why we see collaboration as a necessity and not a nicety. I think we all started out back in 2010 and 2011, when all these cities signed these Gates compacts, with a lot of lofty language about how this was the right thing to do and we all cared about the education of children. And it seemed like a nice city.

And now we see, with the growth of the charter sector, in many cities-- and this chart illustrates all the cities above 10%-- that the charter sector is no longer just a side project that can sort of chug along on its own. It's become a major part-- in some cities over 50%-- a major part of the public educational landscape in the city and no longer is something that really these sectors can efficiently and effectively operate alongside one another without really considering the impact one has on the other. So we see it as a necessity, and we see it as an absolute requirement for cities to undertake.

So with that, I'm going to hand it over to Jordan, and he will--

ALEX MEDLER: Let me let me also say-- this is Alex. As we move through, we're going to continue to share interesting information. But please remember you can post questions as we go. Don't save your questions until the end if there's something you want to bring to the speaker's attention as we move along. OK, go ahead, Jordan.

SARAH YATSKO: Thanks, Alex.

JORDAN
POSAMENTIER: Thanks, Alex. Thanks, Sarah. Good morning or afternoon to everybody. There are now about 33 people on the call. And I just want to take a moment to recognize that you are the ones who are front and center doing this work every day, and I can appreciate from the research your standpoint that this is challenging work. But it really matters.

And I just want to say thank you for the work you're doing and keep going. It's appreciated from over here in Seattle. With that, I might be calling on some of you-- that's prisoner

prerogative-- because I know that some of your states are doing particular work that's relevant to the work that I've been doing, studying the state's role, which leads me to this slide-- why should states be considering this, beyond what Sarah and Alex said?

My bottom line is the top line. Kids lose opportunities with the sector divide. And we see this play out in a number of ways. There are disjointed information systems, fragmented busing services, misalignments in enrollments between the charter sector and the traditional districts in public schools, not to mention you have the opportunity to leverage principal and teacher networks.

We know that talent and workforce challenges are considerable for both sides of public education. And the state really has an opportunity in a number of ways to move the needle on some of these more challenging issues to help students and their families navigate what are becoming more and more complex choice environments in public education.

As Sarah was saying, sectors historically have resisted coming together on their own. We know there's infighting. Sarah showed that there's a lot of progress being made on a local level. But as she also mentioned, that's very much led by really strong leadership insistent on forging ahead together into sometimes really politically challenging locales where, again, the state has an opportunity to think differently about its interface with those locales.

Collaboration is a seedbed for potential turnaround and improvement strategies under ESSA. We'll talk about that a little bit more. But really, following our contacts work, what we've seen-- that states have largely stood on the sidelines where these intersector conflicts have come into play, not taking the lead role or fostering cross-sector problem solving as much as we think the opportunity is presented for that.

So how can states help? I took calls with SEA leadership across nine states. And what became apparent very quickly was that states are already much more involved than we previously thought. We don't hear about that a lot.

But you're all fostering shared problem solving between the sectors in a concerted fashion in a way that I'm trying to taxonomize, get my handle on, and sort of identify commonalities and trends. The states that I talk to include Arizona, Georgia, Massachusetts, Nevada, New York, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, and DC as well, because it's essentially a state-like entity.

So the three takeaways-- the three buckets-- that I saw, that I heard on my calls, can be categorized as states adopting particular mindsets, states being strategic with the use of grants and funding cross-sector, and then states coming in and resolving tough conflicts to make room for more productive local district-charter relations. Let's dig into each of those.

The first thing-- and you can actually see how mindset matters permeating through the other issues we'll talk about today-- state philosophies, legislative frameworks-- I didn't have the best word for it. So if you have a better word, shoot me an email and let me know what you think. But for now, I'm going to stick with mindsets.

Because what I heard on my calls is that the way the state thinks about district-charter relations, problem solving, collaboration has a trickle down effect for the local level. And I might call on Mark Francis and Ruth Hirsch about this. Mark's out in Arizona, and Ruth is in Massachusetts. And those two states actually are good opposite examples of how a state can approach a mindset that has an effect on a local level.

So Arizona-- when you look at their public education mindset, it's very much based on a market-based or competition-based philosophy, where the two sectors are meant to be independent, competing with one another. And you can see that in a number of ways how it plays out. But when you look at the local level, there's actually very little collaboration.

It's not really the type of thing that Arizona is doubling down on. And there are other examples in Arizona that suggest that market-based philosophy is driving a lot of public education there, with ESAs-- the new voucher provision that was recently enacted. Mark, am I describing that in a way that makes sense? If you could unmute your phone for a second, share with us what you think.

MARK: You nailed it.

JORDAN
POSAMENTIER: Yeah. And Mark, could you just talk a second about the structure, how the SEA functions are structured differently? You're fairly independent from the purview of the traditional, is that right?

MARK: Correct.

JORDAN
POSAMENTIER: Yeah. And how would you describe the communication or interaction between you and the folks who work over the traditional public school?

MARK: Very little. We have tried, and people just pretty much stay in their own lanes.

JORDAN
POSAMENTIER: Yeah. And to me that, again, just reinforces that competition is meant to be the driver for improvement in public ed.

MARK: I will say that the Charter School Association in Arizona is unique among associations. And they have actually become a school improvement approved vendor by the Arizona Department of Education. And they actually now have contracts in two or three urban districts, two Navajo reservation schools, and another rural district where they are actually trying to share charter school best practices. But that's being-- it's approved by the state of Arizona, the Department of Education, but it's actually being initiated by the Association. And then, of course, we have our own school improvement program that works both with district and charter schools that runs out of the agencies.

JORDAN
POSAMENTIER: Thinks for that, Mark. It almost sounds like you're outsourcing collaboration to a third party to help address some of those challenges.

MARK: Well, it is a way in which the state is supporting charter district collaboration that is not necessarily being embraced by two separate, discrete systems.

JORDAN
POSAMENTIER: I appreciate that. And now, let me switch and look at Massachusetts as a contrasting example. So Massachusetts charters were envisioned more as the research and development department for the traditional sector. And they actually built, as many states did, disseminations into the charter statute, requiring charters to share out promising practice. That, by the way, that hasn't always happened, but the sentiment is there.

And Massachusetts' SEA is structured in a way that puts charters and traditionals very close to one another with more informal organic communication pathways. And while aspects of competition between sectors are contentious in the state, and maybe, Ruth, you can share a little, the there has been a really strong concerted drive toward collaboration between the two sectors. And I'm going to call on you, Ruth, and get your take from the first-hand perspective.

RUTH: Hi. Good morning, everybody. Yeah, I mean, I would say that it has been in our law for many, many years, encouraging dissemination and having charters disseminate. But it has not been very effective, and we've tried a variety of different things to support it. But now we're really trying to step it up. And not only do we have it in our charter school performance criteria, a whole set of expectations around dissemination.

This year-- well, in particular, our office includes charter schools and some other school redesign initiatives, including the state-funded Expanded Learning Time Grant schools. Those are 22 additional schools in districts, and as well as the Innovation Schools, which are district schools that have a variety of autonomies. So just the fact that our office kind of came together across the sector was a way that structurally changed how we did business. And I think it will, over time, affect the field.

This past year, we had a dissemination fair in the late fall where we had over 240 people from charters and district schools come together. And there were panels that had a diversity of participants on every panel. And it was all topic-oriented, not the kind of school they were oriented, and that really was a good way to focus it.

I'd never seen-- I mean, you know Boston, Massachusetts is very contentious between districts and charters. This was the first time I'd ever been in a room with so many diverse educators who-- never once, there was no-- I did not see conflict. It was all about sharing, about best practice.

And I think that really got me thinking about is that particularly in very hot political climates when everybody is so fear-based around money, that when it's on a school-to-school level, it actually makes a level of relationship building easier. And it makes partnership more accessible. And it makes respect easier to develop among and between, rather than if you're dealing with a district leadership, it's different than if you're dealing with school leadership. So it was just very interesting.

And now we're also, of course, going through the dissemination grant process with our CSP grant. And today's the due date for the dissemination RFP, yeah, the proposal. So today's an exciting day. We're getting some interesting stuff from the field.

JORDAN Well, good luck to you on that, Ruth.

POSAMENTIER:

RUTH: Thank you.

JORDAN And thank you for insight. Actually, you've set up this next point well. Which is, what we see in
POSAMENTIER: states that are kind of moving forward more aggressively in collaboration is this sector neutrality mindset, a what works mindset, kind of like what you were explaining with the fair that had a diversity from both sides. The focus being on what works rather than who's working

seems to be a pretty good Teflon for the kind of collaboration that I'll keep talking about here.

And I noticed that in Georgia. I noticed that in Massachusetts and Nevada and Rhode Island and Tennessee. Rhode Island's an interesting example. They're framing their philosophy in their ESSA plan around personalized learning, with sector affiliation as more and more incidental to that approach. So a charter school here or a traditional school there are just options in a buffet of choice students can take along their personal life pathway.

So you can see that shift towards neutrality with respect to the sectors. And actually, Nevada is a really cool other example I'd just like to share with you. They're doing something similar, but they're prioritizing the family's role as a partner in public education.

So the state's doing a lot of outreach directly with families to not only explain their school options but also enlist families as partners in shaping those options. So whether those options are traditional or charter, it's becoming more of a side issue to whether the schools are-- and the priority issue is whether the schools are responding to family needs. So bottom line on this one is, state mindset matters.

And now let's talk about a little bit of what Ruth was just hitting on, which is grants can create positive incentives in capacity, so state-level grants. And there are a couple of ways that I heard the lay out.

We'll talk about dissemination grants first, which I was surprised to hear many of you are working very closely on. I heard conversations in Massachusetts, New York, Georgia, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee. All have these productive competitive dissemination grants. Many of you reported these grants serve as springboards to future collaborations from the grant itself.

So that's one interesting idea, is to think of these grants as leveraging future collaborations beyond just the element in the grant. And there are a couple of things I've heard that some really promising in how those grants could be structured to further enhance collaborative opportunities.

So in New York and Rhode Island and Georgia, we understood that dissemination grants actually have more productive results when learning isn't just unilateral from the charter over to the traditional. Rather, a bilateral approach seems to have a better base for productive learning. And there are things both sectors can learn from one another. We know that.

And while the original inception of the grant might be toward just unilateral charter dissemination, entering the exchange with a bilateral learning approach seems like it could be quite promising. And it's the type of thing that you could probably build into your RFP. I heard New York, actually, was prioritizing, in terms of scoring the competitive grants, whether there's a demonstration of existing strong partnership between the traditional and the charter.

And this is almost common sense. When you think of putting a dissemination grant down on two sides that are fighting like mad with each other, well, maybe that's not going to lead to the most productive result. A better option might be for them to already have some establishment of trust, an acknowledgment between the leaders that this is a good idea, shared understanding of the vision and the problems they have to tackle. And so being really careful with how you structure these grants could be a way to front-load success early.

Some of our work-- and Sarah and Alex know a lot more about this than I do-- took place in Florida with a really interesting kind of grant established there. And Adam Miller is on the phone, too. And Adam, I don't know if you have access to audio, but it'd be great to hear your insights from Florida's perspective on how you structured some of your competitive grants, getting started with collaboration there.

And I'll give you a moment, but I have a feeling you don't have access to audio.

SPEAKER 1: Jordan, can you say the name again?

JORDAN Adam Miller in Florida.

POSAMENTIER:

SPEAKER 1: Yeah, we don't have him on audio right now.

JORDAN OK. Well, let me ask Alex and Sarah a little bit about the Florida competitive grants. And if you
POSAMENTIER: could talk a little bit about the way that was structured and shed light on that for the audience, that would be helpful.

ALEX MEDLER: This is Alex. I would emphasize the broader mix of things that the Florida Department of Ed has been doing. So they've been doing quite a bit to support the compacts in the local areas in the state. They're also trying to get to in the next section really talk about strengthening the authorizing where districts do all the authorizing, and that's one of the key things that can complicate collaboration, because the district is also the top or the monitor as well as the

potential partner.

So Florida's done a lot to facilitate clarification about what the district's role is while also providing resources to the districts to help them do the collaboration. And one of the things Adam Miller, Emerson were able to get on, it was talked about, part of the desire there is also to use that collaboration as a chance to bring in new operators as well, as part of those sort of city-driven-- emphasis has been partially about bringing in new, high-quality operators into the mix. Sarah, how would you describe it?

SARAH YATSKO: Yeah, no I think that's a really helpful context, sort of the broader strategy and also some of the underlying motivation for the SEA in Florida. I would say that one of the things-- I was on many of the calls with Jordan as he was talking to folks at the SEAs around the country, and the phrase kept coming up over and over again, the carrot versus the stick-- and nearly everyone said, you know, we don't do, in terms of how you encourage district charter collaboration.

And no one really talked about much of a stick. But I'd say Florida is probably the biggest carrot that we saw out there in that they were willing to drop a considerable amount of money into the hands of the district and charter leaders in a city, or a county, in the case of Florida, to encourage the sectors to come together and work together. So it was a big funding opportunity.

And, you know, even for some places in Florida, that wasn't enough to overcome some of the political hesitations in places. But for other places, it really was. It really did help spur new thinking on the cross-sector work.

JORDAN

POSAMENTIER:

Yeah, thanks for those insights. People who are listening, so just real quick, to capture your attention, I would ask you to reflect on the first two buckets that we've gone over. Think about your state's mindset, whether it's competition or whether you're using the sectors to collaborate, or is incidental toward a larger picture like personalized learning. And then the next thing is, as you're thinking about dissemination grants, whether you're being intentional with a bigger tent or preexisting representation of trust and mutual respect between the sectors.

And now let me just pivot to the last point on this slide. There's an opportunity under ESSA to use your 7% set aside as Title I funding for turnaround or improvement efforts, which could include issuing competitive grants that foster deeper collaboration. I heard a couple of states

thinking about this. It's all tentative until, of course, review and approval by the federal government.

But it's something to consider, especially when you see that one side has figured something out and the other side needs help. And that's actually happening in Georgia. And I don't know if Lou has access, Lou Erste from Georgia.

There's a really interesting matching program between struggling schools and successful schools in particular areas that are similarly situated. And they're being paired not by whether they're a traditional or a charter, but whether they're knocking it out of the park on a particular issue and struggling on that same one, regardless of sector affiliation. When Georgia's matching program goes live, it'll be really interesting to study and see who's being paired and how those relationships play out.

But there's also a chance to strengthen existing partnerships, or opportunities for some of those partnerships. For example, in Massachusetts, we see a pretty strong partnership between charters and traditionals in places like Springfield and Lawrence. In New Jersey, we see Camden with its Renaissance Schools, which is very closely associated with its strategies for revitalizing that city.

And then Charleston, South Carolina, for example, actually even been partnering with, technically, an independent school with its public schools, just to figure out who's got the best thing going. Can it patch into an area that's in need? And can we leverage that with additional federal dollars? So--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Yeah, go ahead.

ALEX MEDLER: Well, I was going to say, in terms of leveraging and getting stuff done in this, we have a question from Kristin in Illinois, who was talking about a local partner that has actually helped a lot with sort of the teacher level of this interaction. But it's a nonprofit, not a charter school, not the district, but it's a third party. And she wanted to know what kind of grants are open to nonprofits versus the charters or the districts to work with us.

And I would probably expand it beyond grants to think about like, well, what are the ways the states can support these other entities to participate? And I think about in Colorado, Peg could

talk about partnering with CACSA and with the Colorado League of Charter Schools. But in other places, there's these different intermediaries, foundations, nonprofits. Can you speak a little bit about their role and how they might get help?

JORDAN That question is to me, Alex?

POSAMENTIER:

ALEX MEDLER: Yeah, that, or for you and Sarah to talk about-- and maybe it's in the portfolios, you know, where you see the harbormasters and other people playing a role. Do you see these third parties, and you see a way that you could think about how the states could support them?

JORDAN Yeah. And actually, we already heard from Mark that the charter association in Arizona is a
POSAMENTIER: third party that's doing cross-sector collaboration improvement work. Yeah, so CRPE studies harbormasters across the country, and one in particular out of Missouri.

A harbormaster is essentially a third party that has pooled philanthropic resources but a more close interface with the community in a particular city to help move the needle on public education there. And we see harbormasters all over the place. I believe there's federal money that you can set aside for a third party, funding to actually get those third parties more involved.

You have places like Denver. Kansas City just got one. San Antonio has one now. There are, I think, over almost two dozen. And it's too soon to say how instrumental they can be in leveraging the work, but we know that in a number of places, they've really helped out both sides.

Like in-- oh, gosh, where is it? Indianapolis, for example, the Mind Trust has been a third party there for a number of years, and they've worked really hard to get high-quality talent into both sectors. They've addressed some of the more difficult issues. They realized at one point that they had some challenges interfacing with the community, so in response to that, they've got-- there's a new entity dedicated toward community engagement and improving those feedback loops.

And these are things that on a local level, with your leadership are already strapped to capacity, it really helps to have a third party involved. And because, you know, nobody's exactly flush with cash in our field, getting the best-situated entity to be concentrating on these issues and locale is something to just be really intentional about.

So let me shift gears and talk about the third bucket. First bucket was mindset. Second bucket was leveraging funding grants. And this is the third issue that I heard on the call quite a bit, and it actually harkens back to some of the ideas Alex mentioned when he was going over some opportunities for the states to collaborate, or to foster collaboration.

And that is that the state can actually step in and resolve some of the tougher local conflict. This is sort of like the parent taking away the toys or implementing forced sharing in order for the kids to play nice. There some conflicts on a local level we're all aware about. They're highly contentious. They seem quite likely intractable for the locals to resolve on their own. And when the state steps in, it can actually clear a path to better cross-sector exchanges.

So, you know, you see access on the left hand side, and any number of issues can be really difficult to sort through on a local level, like enrollment, transportation, buildings, and safety services. Tennessee offered a good example of taking some of that off the table. For example, oh, that's-- well, I'm going to give her the right column really quick.

There's some fighting about what level authorizer fees should occur between the charter school and its authorizer. And so one outcome was for the state to simply stipulate what the fee would be. And that took that fight off the table. We see similar issues play out with facilities and transportation where the legislature passes a law saying, districts have to provide transportation, or the dollar equivalent to the charters in the area, because we all know districts have more of this infrastructure, and charters want that infrastructure.

Tennessee's worked to remedy the facilities as well. Georgia just passed a law clarifying when charters get access to district buildings. So that issue, again, facilities, is always front and center. As a fun side note there, CRPE's done a-- well, we're doing a 50 state analysis on charter access to district facilities to see what trends we can spot. And what are the challenges? What are the promising practices? And hopefully we'll have that published in the next couple of months for you guys to review. We'd love to get feedback on that.

But just as sort of an opposing example of how the state has taken something off the table, not that-- I gather that this is probably not a welcome solution in a lot of circles, but Nevada ended up when they passed their charter law, they prevented charters from accessing district facilities, save for after hours.

Now, in reality, most of the charters in Nevada take place in their two large cities. Those cities

are already at over capacity, so they don't really have a lot of space to begin with, and they don't have bond money to build new buildings. So it's really a moot issue. But the point is, they don't fight over that, because it's been taken off the table. And Nevada's gone the other way with a few other things, like pooling safety services. That needs to be shared between the sectors. And that led me to a--

ALEX MEDLER: Can you--

JORDAN Yeah.

POSAMENTIER:

ALEX MEDLER: I was going to say, that raises a question for me. I think it would be good for both you and Sarah to touch on briefly. At some level, people are reluctant to engage in the collaboration because they're afraid they're going to lose something to the other side. And the districts are afraid they're going to legitimize that demonic enemy of the charter school, and the charter schools are reasonably afraid that they're going to be re-regulated and this is a strategy to take away their autonomy.

And so reasonable people, based on 25 years of experience, have come to not trust each other. Can you talk a little bit-- you know on some level, you're saying, well, if you take some of this harm, it's no longer a question. This collaboration won't make this worse, because it's set.

But what are some of the things the charter schools are afraid of losing in collaboration that might, you know, make it better? For example, at some level, I think, of the target schools has, like the traditional schools, have uneven performance. The districts are skeptical of the worst charter schools but would like to partner with the good ones.

If somebody can arbitrate and say, hey, the worst of the charter schools shall be closed and the remaining ones will be of a sufficient quality, do you feel good about participating? So I guess the question is, is there a mix between what the sides are actually afraid of losing to collaboration, and are things that make that risk really go away, or is it just sort of making the perception go away? Does that make sense as a question?

JORDAN Yeah.

POSAMENTIER:

SARAH YATSKO: Yeah, it definitely make sense as a question. And so much of what you just said and there is absolutely the case in cities around the country. You know, we see a real difference in cities

like Boston where there's a pretty strong uniformity in terms of a performance among the charter sector, given Massachusetts' very high bar as an authorizer.

And that contrasts the collaboration work in a city like Cleveland where you have much more of a mix in terms of charter school performance. So you had the school district in Boston and the school district in Cleveland having very different challenges around interacting with the sector, because you had in one place a very diverse performing sector, and the other place that's much more uniform.

So, yeah, that brings up different questions for different contexts. And it also necessitates, or, sort of calls out for a different response from the state in terms of how to encourage this work. And so in Cleveland, you know, the state really intervened legislatively with the Cleveland Plan that helped the district weed out some charters that were really low performing in terms of any kind of pressure for the district to collaborate with them. So it took those charters out of the equation a little bit. And that made collaboration that much more appealing.

So I think, Alex, the bottom line is, changing the calculus and, as you say, reasonable people came to and continue to come to reasonable conclusions about whether or not this risk was worth it. And our position is that states can help change that calculus in a number of ways that Jordan's trying to go through.

JORDAN

POSAMENTIER:

Yeah, Let me give you two examples, because it's this is really good point, and there's no shortage of narrative on this. Let's look at the fears directly. Let's just take two. The district schools are afraid they're going to lose enrollment. And they accuse the charters of cheating and skimming and creaming and not back-filling, and only taking the best.

And the state actually has an opportunity to say, OK, unify movement in a way that's fair for the families, essentially. And remove the contention from the local level. We just-- CRPE just published a guideline for locales interested in pursuing unifying enrollment. And you don't have to go full hog. There are some ancillary steps that could lead up to that.

But we know that it's politically contentious, and there are fears on both sides. On the charter side, it's we lose autonomy. We don't get to carefully structure the diversity of our student population if we participate in enrollment. And there are other challenges. Getting students into some of these schools can be more difficult because folks aren't aware, or they aren't aware of the particular services at the school. But the state could step in and organize toward a more

unifying enrollment program to remove some of those fears.

Look on the other column, back to funding issues. I'll give you an example of how state funding can really raise-- everyone's worried-- the traditionals are worried that the charters are chewing away at their bottom line, right? When charters take kids, they take the dollars that go with them. And that means less for the traditional, or at least, so the narrative goes.

In Rhode Island, the charter-- it's so contentious the way this funding works. The charter sends its bill for reimbursement back to the district when it gets a kid within the district boundaries. And it's very public. And it's very irksome and reinforces this idea that charters siphon district dollars.

Contrast that with South Carolina. South Carolina, most of the charters are authorized by the state, not through the local district. And there's no bottom line public siphoning optics associated with that. It seems to reduce the resentment between the sectors when that happens. It doesn't look like the charters are chewing away at the district's bottom line.

Now, there are problems with that, too. You know, in South Carolina, if you're authorized by the state, you don't get access to local coffers. So there are challenges with respect to funding that way. So it's a balance. But it's an example of taking away that fear by stepping in as a state and thinking very intentionally about how you structure those relations.

Let me switch over to just a recap. And I want to hit on a couple other things Alex had mentioned. So if I were to recommend something for states to consider if they're interested in fostering additional shared problem solving between the sectors, own that sector neutrality mindset. Focus on what works rather than who works. Get them together. Prioritize bilateral learning and strong partnerships in grants and turnaround efforts. Use the carrot and stick approach. And then step in like we just talked about to resolve intractable local battles at the state level.

So there are a number of other opportunities. Alex wrote a piece for CRPE. Robin Lake, CRPE's director, wrote a piece for NASBE, the National Association of State Boards of Ed. Some of those ideas allow for shared test scores in the case of turnaround.

So for example, if there are turnaround efforts going on in a city, let that city claim the wins the charter can provide so that it's understood that all kids in the city are moving toward improvement efforts. Encourage localities to adopt shared performance metrics. Coordinate

enrollment systems, like I mentioned. Promote objective standards for local authorizing. And this gets right back to something Alex said.

On the call, there are two really big issues that really get in the way of collaboration. One is weak authorizing. It really gets in the way. And the state can raise authorizing standards not just for locals but for any authorizer. I mean, why should a district collaborate with an under-performing charter? Or with a perception that the sector has such a mixed bag of performance on a whole? Or why should an authorizer with a mixed- or low-performing portfolio be invited to the district table? These are questions that strong authorizing can really help resolve.

And then the other issue, and this is sort of the flip side, the challenges with collaborating with a district. The district, in many cities and a lot of suburbs we're seeing, they have regular churn of district leadership. And that is a real problem for charters to get to the table of collaboration.

Just as a charter has to establish trust in relations with the district, the superintendent leaves. A new one comes in, and you have to learn the politics and the priorities all over again as a newbie. And that means learning the charter sector and the charter leaders. And you get this new vision with the new superintendent, which shifts directions, which messes up collaboration. And states would be smart to consider ways to stabilize district leaderships.

In fact, just yesterday, I saw in *Edweek* there's a financial incentive to actually get district leaders to bow out early. It's the exact opposite of what needs to happen in order for collaboration to be more successful. They have these-- it's essentially the state is authorizing golden parachutes for district leaders to bow out.

They were able to elicit really strong incentives to get out of there when we know that sticking around is actually really helpful, because it takes time to figure out the vision, figure out the politics, figure out the community, the needs. And then to stay the course, to actually implement that vision over more than just two or three year period.

So my bottom line, and then we can open it back up for questions, is sectors working together locally can help states accomplish big goals. Back to the bottom line, school improvement in equity improving outcomes for all the students in your state, that's what you've been working on every day. Collaboration can help you get there.

Local collaboration efforts have gone far in some places, have backslid in some places. But the state can help drive them toward improvement with those intentional efforts that we just

described. And an effective state involvement and local collaboration really does require intention and dedication and political savvy. And I was gratified when I took my call to hear so many of you working towards those ends. So with that, I'll open it up, hand it back to our hosts and others who would like to chime in.

ALEX MEDLER: Yeah, and I will-- I'd encourage everybody to feel free to post questions to the Q&A, and then we can get you involved in the audio. We don't have a lot of time, but we can go as long as there is discussion. And as questions come in, let me raise one for Jordan and Sarah. One of my observations earlier was that some of the collaborations, as you mentioned, can be reversed when the school board gets flipped or a superintendent is switched or the charter community feels burned or something.

So, you know, they do turn around. But in the meantime, some of these efforts have institutional authority. And the SEAs in particular, they're likely to create some things that have sticking power. I was wondering if you might speak to the difference between why you've got collaboration, create some of those things like strong authorizing or a common enrollment practice or other things. What are the things that will survive in the long term that are hard to reverse? Can you talk about that?

JORDAN Yeah.

POSAMENTIER:

SARAH YATSKO: Yeah. I think Jordan and I, from our different perspectives, would maybe say slightly different things, but the sticky things, as, Alex, as you laid out or implied in your question are those changes in policy, practice, and, of course, obviously at the state level, changes in how funding happens or in state laws. And those are the things, I mean, very obviously, that stick around over time.

An interesting example are in places like Sacramento, California, that didn't really go too far in terms of collaboration, but there was an agreement across district and charter sectors around the leasing of charter school facility-- charter schools in district facilities. It was a one-year lease agreement. It changed to a five-year. It happened under the superintendent Raymond [INAUDIBLE] and he was very pro-collaboration.

So they had wind at their back. They changed a policy that no one really cared about. So it was very far under the radar in terms of the politics of the work. And it stuck. And so to this day, charters now have a much longer lease on the leasing of those district facilities. The

charter sector considered it a huge win, and it was. And it stuck because, A, it was under the radar, B, it was done when the political wind was at their back, and C, it with just a policy change that is hard to change back.

JORDAN

Yeah. We've seen a lot of-- there's actually a lot of small ways to make collaboration sticky.

POSAMENTIER:

You mentioned third parties before. Outsourcing to a third party shared issues like enrollment can be really helpful. Contracting between the sectors. Beyond buildings, you have transportation and food and safety services. And these aren't real outwardly-facing issues in all locales, but, boy, when you can get a contract where the district gives your small charter some scale so that the per pupil is lower, that has an effect where both sides win.

Involve the universities. I feel like we don't have this conversation enough, but especially with respect to getting principal and teacher talent into the schools, finding shared programs, again, it's a third party helping driving improvement across sector that can really help. Those are the ideas off the top of my head, but sticky means something that outlasts the leaders involved. I think that's, to me, what I look for when I'm looking for a more sustainable solution.

And then, I always want to make sure that I mention that every time you're carrying out one of these collaborative efforts, it's not just an administrative action. It's a political one. And so one of the basic components of sustainability is to have that positive regular feedback loop with the communities being served, making sure that they kind get what's going on between the sectors, what's going on with the vision for public education. Again, back to the state, mindset matters, and you can speak from the bully pulpit what you expect and what you provide, to make sure s education is a success in all your locales.

ALEX MEDLER:

That's great. I want to raise one other issue that I'd be curious to get your thoughts on. For both the US Department of Education and for most state education agencies, student equity is always a key part of their mission, to make sure there aren't subgroups or protected classes or groups of kids that are sort of being left behind by what happens. Knowing that the SEAs play that role of champions for equity so often, within collaboration, can you give any concrete examples where you saw SEAs doing a good job that's sort of helping collaboration lead to better access for all kids, or better access for students with disabilities and services?

JORDAN

Well, look at DC. They adopted an equity report that applies to all traditionals and charters

POSAMENTIER:

alike. And the equity report is looking at things like discipline, the number of suspensions and expulsions between with charters and traditionals, which is really important for every school.

And then you get this entire city, which really helps families understand what's going on. And more importantly, the leaders, when they start seeing outside their own silos, when the leaders start seeing these challenges, they can start making really concerted efforts to fix.

The DC equity report, I think, is being considered for adoption in a number of other locales. I think Indianapolis might be one place, and the state has an opportunity to push that. And it would be something for all states to look at as some of these issues become more and more contentious, and as we started seeing more promising solutions for resolving them.

ALEX MEDLER: That's great. And I know we're not getting-- as usual, I apologize. The webinar format does make interaction difficult with this many. But I would like to give our hosts from the US Department of Education a chance to weigh in with any observations or reflections or thoughts they have before we move towards closing the webinar. Lourdes, Amy, anybody else from the Department care to weigh in?

OK. Well, they can have a chance to raise their hand and come back into the discussion. But in the spirit of time, I guess I would turn it back to Sarah and Jordan, and see if you have any closing thoughts and things that you want to make sure that we haven't had a chance to get to or that you want to reinforce for everybody.

JORDAN POSAMENTIER: Yeah, first thing I'd like to say is CRPE is a resource for you. You know, we're out here in Seattle. We're just a bunch of university wonks that are trying to help you get it right out in your field. So don't hesitate to shoot us an email or drop us a line. We're responsive and happy to help, any way we can.

SARAH YATSKO: And I say, just in closing, in that vein, if there are things that we've talked about that you want to hear more about, or if there are things that we talked about that you think, wow, that's really different from how things work in our state and you would like to contribute and make sure we have your state's viewpoint as we continue to gather information for this brief, please reach out. We'd love to hear.

There's a lot of folks on this call, many of whom we've talked to, but many of whom we haven't. So we'd love to hear your perspective. Jordan has a whole quick protocol that he can go through to get a sense of how this work looks on your-- you know, in different states. So we'd love to hear from you in that way as well.

ALEX MEDLER: Great. And I would reinforce, from the National Charter Schools Resource Center we are

equally interested in your feedback and your input, as well as trying to make sure you know about the resources that we have available. And I was just going to scroll through the things that are out there, just to give you a sense of the breadth of things that are going on.

We encourage you to check out these materials, give us feedback on what you like, what you'd like to see more of. And we will do everything in our power to try to make that work for you. In the meantime, I just want to give our thanks to Jordan and Sarah and the rest of the crew at CRPE for an excellent presentation.

This webinar is recorded and will be posted on the Resource Center site. And we will continue to try to facilitate discussion on these topics. For the SEA staff in particular, I suggest that we could have some pretty good exchanges on the community practice on our web resource. And I know that we've got some great leaders, and the SEA is working on this area, and that the department is committed to helping you make as much progress as possible on this.

So with that, I think we're going to wrap up and close. And as you log off, you will see a survey that I encourage you to take. And also subscribe to the NCSRC newsletters and other materials. And follow us on Twitter. That's it. Thank you very much. And I think we are closing as we speak. Thanks again, Sarah and Jordan. And thank you all for coming.