



Fostering Collaboration Between District and Charter Schools

A Toolkit for State and Local Leaders



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Introduction

A growing body of research has found that, when done well, collaboration between traditional public schools and charter schools has the potential to improve school quality in both sectors and to support families in accessing the school options that are right for their children.¹ But collaboration across sectors is complex. Research has identified barriers and pitfalls that participants may face in their collaborative attempts.

This toolkit is intended to help state and local policymakers learn from documented successes, anticipate and address potential barriers, and facilitate cross-sector initiatives to improve education quality in both traditional public schools and charter schools and to increase access for all students. For instance, district and charter leaders might collaborate to provide professional development in common areas of need such as teaching students with a specific learning disability, or they might work together to develop common tools and strategies for educating parents about school choice options. The toolkit can be used by state or local education agency staff in planning collaborative initiatives or in facilitating collaborative planning between traditional public schools and charter schools. It can also be used by technical assistance providers, community-based organizations, or facilitators who are working with state or district organizations in planning and implementing collaborative initiatives.

At a meeting convened and hosted by the Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center in February 2018, state education leaders identified district-charter collaboration as both an area of opportunity and a critical strategy for achieving greater education quality and more equitable access to education options for students. This toolkit was developed in response to that interest and is intended to provide a user-friendly, evidence-based set of resources to support leaders in their current or future collaborative endeavors. It draws from a review of research on collaboration in general, as well as collaboration between the traditional public

¹ See, for example, Lake, R., Yatsko, S., Gill, S., & Opalka, A. (2017). *Bridging the district-charter divide to help more students succeed*. Seattle, WA: Center for Reinventing Public Education (CRPE). Retrieved from <https://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/crpe-bridging-district-charter-divide.pdf>; Maas, T., & Lake, R. (2018). *Passing notes: Learning from efforts to share instructional practices across district-charter lines*. Seattle, WA: CRPE. Retrieved from <https://www.crpe.org/publications/passing-notes-share-instructional-practices-across-district-charter-lines>

school and charter school sectors more specifically. The toolkit is also informed by field experiences, including interviews with education leaders in the District of Columbia and Massachusetts who have engaged in successful cross-sector collaborations.

The toolkit provides guidance for each stage of the collaborative process, practical tools and templates, and links to additional resources. Although it is primarily intended to support collaboration between districts and charter schools,² it may also be helpful for collaboration across other sectors, such as collaborations between the education and health sectors. The toolkit includes two profiles of promising cross-sector initiatives, in the District of Columbia and in Massachusetts. These locations were chosen to be profiled because district-charter collaboration has been underway there longer than in most states and districts and has yielded successes from which others can learn. The intent is that other states and districts will learn not just from the substance of these collaborative initiatives but also from the processes that the District of Columbia and Massachusetts undertook to design and implement them.

The toolkit is organized into the following sections:

- **Benefits of District-Charter Collaboration.** Outlines collaborations' benefits for students and families.
- **Framework for Cross-Sector Collaboration: Four Dimensions.** Describes the four dimensions of a successful collaboration and the five stages of the collaborative process.
- **Framework for Cross-Sector Collaboration: Guidance and Tools for Taking Action.** Provides information, guidance, and tools for planning and implementing a collaborative initiative.
- **Putting Students First: Profiles of District-Charter Collaboration.** Presents profiles of cross-sector initiatives in the District of Columbia and Massachusetts.
- **Outside Resources.** Includes descriptions of resources that were reviewed to inform the development of the toolkit, as well as a list of other resources that may be helpful to states and districts in planning collaborative efforts.

² Throughout the toolkit we will use the terms *district-charter*, *cross-sector*, and *collaboration between traditional public schools and charter schools* interchangeably.

Benefits of District-Charter Collaboration

Collaboration across sectors requires significant investment of time and resources, so why should educators bother? In communities where students and families have various types of schools from which to choose, the underlying driver for collaboration is a desire for equity — ensuring that all students and their families have equitable access to high-quality education options. Research and practical experience with cross-sector collaborations point to three ways in which cross-sector collaboration can serve as an important strategy for improving education quality in both the traditional public-school and charter-school sectors and, also, for ensuring more equitable access to choice options.³

Leveraging Strengths to Solve Sector-Specific Challenges. Each of these two sectors has unique challenges, and each has something to offer the other to help address those challenges. For example, many charter schools struggle to find suitable facilities. Some traditional public schools struggle to create a culture of high expectations, which many charter schools are able to create by virtue of their singular missions and visions. In collaborative relationships, traditional school districts could, for example, offer charter schools space in district buildings, and charter schools could provide non-charter schools professional learning on school culture.

Addressing Common Challenges. Traditional public schools and charter schools also share some challenges that can be resolved more effectively with cross-sector solutions. For example, both sectors strive to serve highly mobile students, address issues of chronic absence, and provide students with access to mental health services. By working together, schools across both sectors can better leverage resources, ideas, and innovations from one sector or the other to serve their common purposes.

³ Lake, R., Yatsko, S., Gill, S., & Opalka, A. (2017). *Bridging the district-charter divide to help more students succeed*. Seattle, WA: Center for Reinventing Public Education (CRPE). Retrieved from <https://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/crpe-bridging-district-charter-divide.pdf>; Maas, T., & Lake, R. (2018). *Passing notes: Learning from efforts to share instructional practices across district-charter lines*. Seattle, WA: CRPE. Retrieved from <https://www.crpe.org/publications/passing-notes-share-instructional-practices-across-district-charter-lines>

- *Real-world example:* The Boston Compact was a citywide, cross-sector initiative launched to **address the gaps in achievement** for English learners and students with special needs across the city's public-charter, public-traditional, and private Catholic schools.

Coordinating to Support Families. In cities or districts that serve significant numbers of students in schools of choice, coordination and collaboration are necessary to ensure that families have the information and resources that they need in order to make good decisions about the best schools for their children.⁴ Having many options for which school to attend can create logistical issues for families, which must be addressed districtwide if those families are to benefit from school choice.⁵ For example, common lotteries and school reporting systems ensure that families have information in one place about all school options.

- *Real-world example:* In 2012, the executive director of the DC Public Charter School Board believed that **navigating all of the application and enrollment systems in the city was unmanageable for families** and posed **concerns about equity of access to school choice**. The superintendent of DC Public Schools shared these concerns and agreed to participate in creating a citywide application and enrollment system, My School DC.

When the public sees traditional public and charter schools working together, it helps everyone to understand that both types of public schools are part of one system working for the benefit of all students. This coordination helps to increase support for public education as a whole.

⁴ Lake et al. (2017).

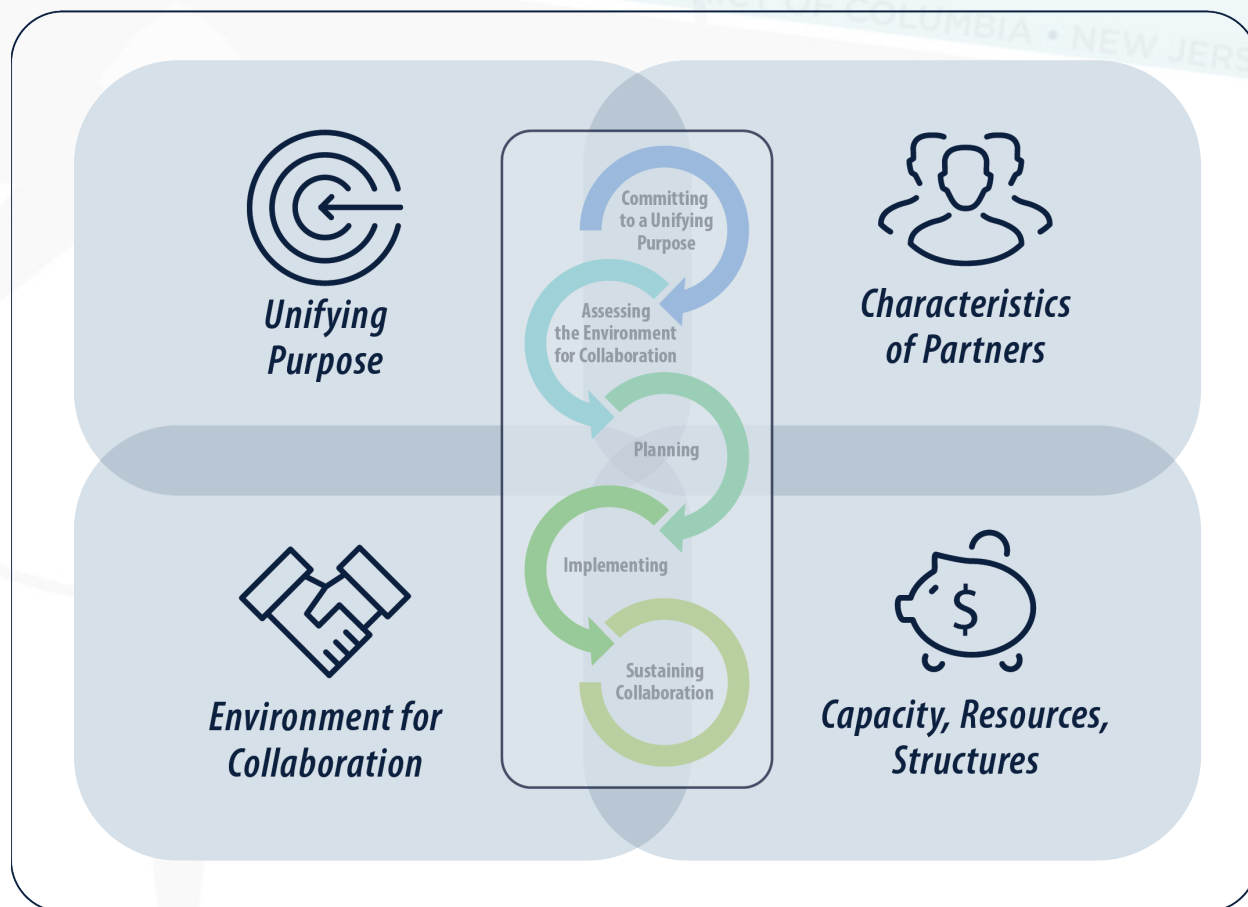
⁵ Ibid., p. 10.

Framework for Cross-Sector Collaboration: Four Dimensions

At the heart of this toolkit is a *Framework for Cross-Sector Collaboration* (figure 1), which can be used to guide planning and implementation of collaborative activities. In addition to listing five sequential stages that successful collaborators undertake when planning and implementing an activity together (described later in the Taking Action section), the framework identifies four evidence-based dimensions that are part of any collaborative process.

Much of the emerging literature on collaboration between district and charter schools focuses on cities and schools that received funding through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to engage in district-charter collaboration. Drawing from a targeted review of this literature, a review of literature on effective collaboration in general, field-based experiences, and interviews with practitioners who have engaged in successful cross-sector collaboration, the toolkit developers created a framework for guiding effective cross-sector collaboration. The framework comprises four overlapping dimensions of collaboration: unifying purpose; environment for collaboration; characteristics of partners; and capacity, resources, and structures.

Figure 1. Framework for Cross-Sector Collaboration



Unifying Purpose

District-charter collaborations that focus on one unifying purpose are better poised to succeed than those that set overly broad goals.⁶ That purpose may stem from a mutual concern, such as addressing persistent achievement gaps, or it may come about when potential partners see an opportunity that is best addressed through collaboration, such as developing a cross-sector enrollment system. Whatever its specifics, the unifying purpose should be compelling enough that partners are willing to reach beyond traditional boundaries in order to achieve it. Ideally, partners work together to ensure clarity about the problem

⁶ Pandit, M., Walne, M., & Kumar, M. (2015). *District-charter collaboration: A user's guide*. Houston, TX: National Charter School Resource Center at Safal Partners. Retrieved from https://charterschoolcenter.ed.gov/sites/default/files/files/field_publication_attachment/District_Charter_Collaboration_A_Users_Guide.pdf

to be solved or the nature of the opportunity, and how the collaboration will benefit each party.

Environment for Collaboration

The environment for collaboration is shaped by a number of factors in a district, as well as in the city and the state in which the district exists. Acknowledging the history of the relationship between traditional public schools and charter schools within that locale, understanding the current relationships and dynamics, and working to recognize and understand the motivations of the potential partners can aid the partners involved in the collaborative effort.

In many cities, traditional public schools and their charter counterparts have a history of contentious relationships or have had ongoing conflicts about specific issues. Making meaningful progress may prove difficult without acknowledging these relationships and the role that various stakeholders have played in the past.

In many cities, traditional public schools and their charter counterparts have a history of contentious relationships or have had ongoing conflicts about specific issues. Making meaningful progress may prove difficult without acknowledging these relationships and the role that various stakeholders have played in the past.⁷ Even in localities where the relationship between the two sectors has been friendly, there may be state-level barriers to collaboration, such as inflexible funding streams, that should be explored and understood.⁸ Identifying these issues and relationships early on helps partners address concerns directly and in a

⁷ Pandit et al. (2015).

⁸ Pandit et al. (2015); Medler, A. (2016). *What states can do to promote district-charter collaboration* (p. 4). Seattle, WA: CRPE. Retrieved from <https://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/crpe-medler-what-states-can-do-dist-charter.pdf>

timely fashion. Potential champions of collaboration could also be engaged to support the collaboration or to remind enthusiastic proponents about how barriers have been overcome in the past.

Characteristics of Partners

The characteristics of collaborative partners, be they state education agency staff, school leaders, or anyone else, play an important role in shaping a collaboration. An understanding of the experiences, skills, and perspectives of the individuals who will be involved in the collaboration allows the group to identify strengths as well as gaps in knowledge or experience that they need to fill through additional staff, partners, or professional development.

One key to a successful partnership is strong, reform-minded leadership.⁹ Effective leadership can shift combative attitudes in order to help foster a more collaborative atmosphere. Another critical asset is a “boundary spanner,” that is, someone with a foot in both the district and the charter worlds.¹⁰ This individual's understanding of the motivations and personalities in both sectors, as well as of the dynamics of relationships, can be a significant resource for creating a collaborative atmosphere.

Capacity, Resources, and Structures

The capacities of the traditional public school and charter sectors, their respective resources, and the structures in place for executing the collaboration are critical factors in the success of a district-charter collaboration. A successful collaboration requires significant investment of time from participants in order to develop relationships and undertake the actual work of the collaboration.¹¹ Partnering organizations must allow for staff time to be dedicated to the collaboration. Financial resources are also critical.¹² Partners will need to consider whether they can support the collaborative activities in whole or part from their own funds and if they will need to find other funding sources.

⁹ Pandit et al. (2015).

¹⁰ Yatsko, S., & Bruns, A. (2015). *The best of both worlds: Boundary spanners*. Seattle, WA: CRPE. Retrieved from https://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/crpe_boundary_spanners_final.pdf

¹¹ Lake et al. (2017).

¹² Pandit et al. (2015).

Strong governance structures and processes are an important facet of successful collaborations.¹³ Partners will need to establish specific governance structures and processes for implementing the initiative, but it is helpful if there are existing structures upon which to build, such as a cross-sector task force. In some cases, supportive legislation may be needed.¹⁴ Along with governance structures, processes for making decisions and communicating among partners are also necessary.

¹³ Pandit et al. (2015).

¹⁴ Medler (2016).

Framework for Cross-Sector Collaboration: Guidance and Tools for Taking Action

As with any innovation, systematic development and execution of a collaborative initiative moves through stages. Drawing specifically from the literature on cross-sector collaboration, the framework outlines five stages of carrying out collaborative efforts: committing to a unifying purpose, assessing the environment for collaboration, planning, implementing, and sustaining collaboration. These stages are both sequential and, as needed, iterative. For example, sometimes partners will want to reassess conditions for collaboration or undertake a new round of planning after initial pilot implementation.

This section provides information and guidance on each of these five stages of carrying out collaborative efforts, along with related tools to help teams take action.

Figure 2. Five Sequential Stages of Carrying Out a Collaborative Initiative



A. Committing to a Unifying Purpose

As noted earlier, district-charter collaborations that focus on a specific, unifying purpose are more likely to succeed than those that are overly broad. Such purposes might include improving student outcomes, improving the quality of programs or services, increasing access to school choice options for students and families, or maximizing the use of resources.

A unifying purpose may emerge when an “initiator” creates a spark that ignites interest, passion, and commitment in the partners to come together for a

common good. The initiator could be a community leader in a prominent position of authority, such as the mayor of Boston. The mayor created a spark by chastising leaders from Boston's charter, traditional, and Catholic school sectors for not adequately addressing the needs of English learners and students with special needs. In DC, the executive director and other leaders from the Public Charter School Board were initiators of the common lottery when they recognized the logistical challenge for families who, at the time, had to navigate multiple enrollment systems.

Initiators of collaborative efforts see a need that can be best — or only — solved by working across organizational boundaries. In some cases, the need is prompted by a crisis, such as data that reveal very low achievement for a particular group of students. In other cases, the need may start as a mandate or a policy requirement, such as a requirement to transfer data across sectors in a timely manner. Or the need may represent an opportunity made available through a policy change and/or a new funding source, such as a dissemination grant.

For an initial spark to ignite a collaborative effort, it must communicate a unifying purpose that is compelling enough to elicit the commitment of people's interests, passions, and talents. Once partners have sufficient interest and commitment to come together across boundaries to pursue a unifying purpose, the work of collaboration to achieve collective results can begin.

Once partners identify a unifying purpose, they should set a goal or goals. Goals operationalize the purpose and ensure that its measurable. Goals should be SMART — *specific, measurable, achievable, results-oriented, and timebound*.

B. Assessing the Environment for Collaboration

Prior to planning a pilot or formal collaboration, each partnering organization should take stock of the assets it can bring to the effort and should also consider the potential pitfalls and barriers to the effort. The partnering organizations should then share and discuss the findings from their self-assessments. Sharing these self-assessment findings will help partners assess whether they are poised to be good collaborative partners; reflect on the benefits of collaborating; clarify the capacities that each group will commit to the collaboration; and take note of any gaps in capacity that will need to be addressed.

In some cases, the costs of a collaboration may outweigh the benefits.¹⁵ Collaboration requires significant investment of time and resources, particularly where there is political opposition. Therefore, if the benefits to students and families are insufficient, the group may decide to tackle a different problem or opportunity. The self-assessment process is a good time to make that determination.

The self-assessment process also lays a foundation for formal planning and can create a baseline for measuring the progress of the partnership. The Related Tools section below includes the *Self-Assessment Tool: Assessing Environment for Collaboration* (page 13), which is based on the four dimensions of collaboration; factors highlighted in the tool are based on research about collaboration.¹⁶

Related Tools for Assessing the Environment for Collaboration

SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL: ASSESSING ENVIRONMENT FOR COLLABORATION

The *Self-Assessment Tool* provides an opportunity to take stock of partners' readiness for collaboration and will help the partners determine next steps to address gaps in readiness. Each section of the self-assessment includes factors that are known to be important in collaboration; each factor is accompanied by descriptive examples and a suggested rating scale (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree, not applicable). At the end of each section is an opportunity to reflect on the team members' ratings, to determine the steps that might be taken to strengthen readiness for collaboration.¹⁷

¹⁵ Lake et al. (2017), p. 18.

¹⁶ Winer, M. B. (1994). *Collaboration handbook: Creating, sustaining, and enjoying the journey*. Saint Paul, MN: Amherst Wilder Foundation.

¹⁷ Based in part on collaboration research tools in Winer (1994).

Instructions. First, each partner should *independently* complete the self-assessment. Next, all partners should come together to discuss their ratings and suggested steps, if any, to strengthen readiness and assess the feasibility of the collaboration.

UNIFYING PURPOSE

Factors	Explanatory Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Applicable
1. We have identified a mutual problem or concern that could be addressed by working together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is an authentic problem/concern/opportunity that we've identified, which is at the heart of the collaboration (e.g., a known curricular weakness, professional development, or grant opportunity) There's mutual understanding of the problem 					
2. We have a vision of what collaboration might look like	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have a sense of who the optimal partners would be, how decisions would be made, what the goals could be, and approximately what it might take to succeed 					
3. We can see clear benefits that might accrue from working together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We can define benefits for students and families from working together on the problem/ opportunity (e.g., improved achievement results, additional course options) 					
4. We can state a specific purpose and objectives for collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a unique purpose for working together 					

SUMMARY OF RATINGS FOR UNIFYING PURPOSE

Current Status: We're ready for next steps/in good shape here	Current Status: We need to do some work here before launching an effort	Next Steps

ENVIRONMENT FOR COLLABORATION

Factors	Explanatory Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Applicable
1. We have a history of collaboration or cooperation among the potential partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools of different types in our community have a history of working together Cross-sector collaborations have been commonly used to work on solving problems in our district 					
2. We have experienced events that might negatively impact success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The community has experienced one or more events that have placed charter and district schools on opposing sides of an issue (e.g., disagreements over use of a facility) Schools are dealing with issues that are overwhelming their current abilities to take on collaboration (e.g., severe budget cuts, major staff transitions) 					
3. We have key champions in the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People in positions of influence in the community (e.g., mayor, school superintendent) explicitly encourage collaboration People in positions of influence in the community have deep connections to both the district and charters 					
4. Public opinion in our community generally favors options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When provided with the opportunity, the community has expressed openness (e.g., voting preferences, opinion polling) to providing a range of education options 					

SUMMARY OF RATINGS FOR ENVIRONMENT FOR COLLABORATION

Current Status: We're ready for next steps/in good shape here	Current Status: We need to do some work here before launching an effort	Next Steps

CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTNERS

Factors	Explanatory Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Applicable
1. Our team represents a cross-section of individuals who will be needed to make the collaboration work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members of the team represent the roles that are necessary to operationalize the collaboration (e.g., administrative decision-makers, lead teachers) 					
2. Our relationships with potential collaborators are open and honest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members of our team see that collaboration is in our self-interest Members of our team have respect for and trust in our proposed collaborating partners The leadership of our team is flexible/willing to compromise to achieve benefits 					
3. We have an understanding of the skills/competencies needed for the desired goal of the collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have a good idea of the skills and content expertise needed to accomplish the unique purpose (e.g., expertise in middle-grades math curricula, familiarity with scheduling software, instructional coaching) We have experience participating in effective collaborations 					
4. We know our own strengths and weaknesses related to the desired goal for collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We know what we can contribute to the collaboration and what the potential partner(s) can contribute We know our areas of need related to the project 					

SUMMARY OF RATINGS FOR CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTNERS

Current Status: We're ready for next steps/in good shape here	Current Status: We need to do some work here before launching an effort	Next Steps

CAPACITY, RESOURCES, AND STRUCTURES

Factors	Explanatory Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Applicable
1. We are prepared to offer human resources to staff the collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have staff who will carry out the project and have defined clear roles and responsibilities for them We have staff who can manage and monitor the collaboration itself 					
2. We can offer/obtain financial resources to support collaborative activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are able to share the financial burden among partners 					
3. We are ready to participate in a governance/decision-making structure to guide the collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We recognize that we will need to create a governance/decision-making structure for making the key decisions that guide collaborative activity; this may require a multistage decision-making process Members of our team understand and buy into participating in a decision-making process 					
4. As needed, we are able to identify a neutral convener to facilitate the collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We know of potential partners who can serve as external facilitators 					
5. We have well-established and regular communication with potential partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have formal and informal communication channels with potential partners We have tools/resources to communicate our results externally 					

SUMMARY OF RATINGS FOR CAPACITY, RESOURCES, AND STRUCTURES

Current Status: We're ready for next steps/in good shape here	Current Status: We need to do some work here before launching an effort	Next Steps

C. Planning

Joint planning is key to the success of district-charter collaboration. It is particularly important because of the complexities of working across multiple organizations and the need to plan both for development of the capacity to collaborate and for the work to be accomplished through collaboration. This section outlines steps that are found in effective planning processes, along with tools that can be used in carrying them out.

Understanding the Problem. An important, and sometimes overlooked, step in embarking on a planning process is diagnosing the problems or opportunities that, if appropriately taken advantage of, will lead to desired changes. Getting the problem right is a first and critical step in determining the focus of collaborative work. Once a unifying purpose or need has been identified as the catalyst for collaborative action, partners come together to understand what is at the root of the issue or problem they will work to solve.

Root-cause analysis is a collection of principles, techniques, and methodologies that can be leveraged to identify the root causes of an event or trend. Looking beyond superficial cause and effect, root-cause analysis can reveal where processes or systems failed or caused an issue in the first place.

A commonly used method of root-cause analysis is identifying the “5 Whys” of the problem or issue at hand. In its simplest form, planners ask themselves “why?” five times when they’re confronted with a problem. Asking “why” repeatedly directs one’s focus toward root causes, enabling problems to be solved and solutions to be found in a long-term, sustainable way.¹⁸ To identify the 5 Whys for your local context, see *Getting the Problem Right: Template for the 5 Whys Root-Cause Analysis* on page 21 in the Related Tools section below.

Another root-cause analysis process uses a fishbone diagram, which is a more structured visual tool for brainstorming causes of a problem. Regardless of which process is used, partners should identify observable causes that a collaborative effort could address.

¹⁸ Vajda, P. (2016, October). Root cause problem-solving. *Management Issues*. Retrieved from <https://www.management-issues.com/opinion/6767/root-cause-problem-solving/>

Developing a Logic Model. Logic models are detailed schematics of intentions that enable teams to map out the big picture — the what (i.e., the overarching problem or issue being addressed) and the how (i.e., the key steps that will lead to desired outcomes). Logic models help to conceptualize and communicate change efforts. In their logic models, teams/partners should articulate their understanding of the current situation, changes they hope to bring about through their program efforts, activities that are planned to contribute toward these changes, resources needed for the effort, assumptions they are making, and any external factors that could influence results. Having a logic model also lays a foundation for assessing results over time. The Related Tools section includes a *Sample Logic Model Template* (page 23). In addition, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation Logic Model Development Guide is a comprehensive guide that provides logic models that can be used for various purposes.¹⁹

Creating a Plan of Action. If you have developed a logic model, you have already identified your goals and outcomes, so you are halfway toward creating a Plan of Action. An *Action Planning Template* (page 24) that can be amended to suit the purpose of a planning team is included in the Related Tools section. The template includes the following elements:

- **Action Steps:** *What specific steps will be taken?*
- **Responsibilities:** *Who will do what?*
- **Timeline:** *When will the tasks be completed?*
- **Resources:** *What resources are needed? What do you have? What do you need?*
- **Potential Barriers:** *What barriers do you anticipate? Think about actions needed to address them.*
- **Communications Plan:** *An oft-forgotten and very important question to ask consistently is: With whom do we need to communicate about this — how and when?*
- **Evidence of Success:** *How will you know that you are making progress? What are your benchmarks?*
- **Evaluation Process:** *How will you determine that your goal has been reached? What are your measures?*

¹⁹ W.K. Kellogg Foundation. (2004). *W.K. Kellogg Foundation logic model development guide*. Battle Creek, MI: W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Retrieved at <https://www.wkcf.org/resource-directory/resource/2006/02/wk-kellogg-foundation-logic-model-development-guide>

For district-charter collaborations, there are two important additional planning considerations: developing the capacity to collaborate and determining the appropriate scope of work. **Developing the capacity to collaborate** effectively requires fostering appropriate mindsets, dispositions, and skills. When bringing individuals from various organizations together to collaborate for a mutual purpose, it is important to assess individuals' and groups' capacity to collaborate, then plan how to further develop that capacity through professional development, protocols, or other strategies.

During the planning phase, district-charter collaborations should also **determine a scope of work** that is discrete and manageable in light of available capacities. Defining a "right-sized" scope of work is critical to successful collaboration. A scope of work that is too ambitious may collapse under the weight of its potential. Conversely, a scope of work that is not ambitious enough may never take flight.²⁰ That said, in instances where collaboration is new or potentially fraught with tension, organizations are encouraged to initially identify "easy wins" from which they can build momentum for future collaborations.

Related Tools for Planning

These three tools are designed to help entities plan and implement effective collaborations. The first tool, *Getting the Problem Right: Template for the 5 Whys Root-Cause Analysis* is for identifying what is at the root of the problem. The second is a *Sample Logic Model Template* that can be used to develop a logic model that articulates and conceptualizes the theory of action. The third is an *Action Planning Template* that can be used or adapted to develop an action plan for the collaborative activity.






²⁰ Hansen, M. (2009). *Collaboration: How leaders avoid the traps, create unity, and reap big results*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.

GETTING THE PROBLEM RIGHT: TEMPLATE FOR THE 5 WHYS ROOT-CAUSE ANALYSIS

Instructions.²¹ Instructions for going through the 5 Whys are provided below, followed by a template that can be used or adapted to record your team's work. (You may prefer to use Post-it Notes to map out your responses rather than using the template. Using Post-its allows groups more flexibility in refining and updating their answers as they reflect, discuss, and make connections across contributing factors.)

1. Before you begin asking "Why," state the problem your collaboration is seeking to address. Try to be as specific as you can, given what you know and have data to support.
2. Ask the first why. Why is this problem occurring? Search for answers that are grounded in facts and record the sources of information leading you to identify the reason.
3. Building on your answer from step 2, ask the next why. Why is the answer that you identified in step 2 a factor contributing to the problem? Again, indicate sources of information.
4. Building on each successive answer that you've identified, ask whys 3–5. Continue to probe for each factor identified as contributing to the one before. Note your sources of information.
5. When you have exhausted contributing factors, identify those factors that (a) collaborative effort is best suited to address and (b) would solve the problem if addressed successfully.

Problem Statement (one-sentence description of the problem):

5 Whys	Reason why problem is occurring	How do we know? Observable, data-based evidence
1. Why 		
2. Why 		
3. Why 		
4. Why 		
5. Why 		

²¹ More detailed instructions for implementing the 5 Whys process can be found at https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_5W.htm

Root Cause(s)

Once you feel you have gotten to root causes (i.e., why the problem is occurring), record those that you believe are best suited for district-charter collaborative action. Restate the data that tell you these are root causes for the problem. To validate root causes, ask the following: If you removed this root cause, would the problem be prevented?

Root Cause(s)	How do we know? Observable, data-based evidence

SAMPLE LOGIC MODEL TEMPLATE

The Problem

This is a statement of the problem we propose to address through cross-sector collaboration. Include data to the extent possible.

INPUTS/RESOURCES <i>In order to accomplish our set of activities, we will need the following:</i>	ACTIVITIES <i>In order to address our problem, we will need to carry out the following activities:</i>	OUTPUTS <i>Once we carry out our activities, we will have the following evidence of service delivery (e.g., policies, guidance, tools):</i>	OUTCOMES <i>We expect that, if accomplished, we will achieve these short-term (1-year) and long-term (3-year) changes:</i>	IMPACT <i>We expect that if we accomplish our short- and long-term outcomes, we will see the following results:</i>

Enabling Factors/Conditions (Factors that advance the work)

Constraining Factors/Conditions (Potential obstacles and challenges)

ACTION PLANNING TEMPLATE

Once partners have identified root causes of the problem they are committing to address, they can begin to develop action plans to accomplish their goals. Each goal should have its own action plan.

Goal: It is always best to identify a goal that is Strategic, Measurable, Attainable, Results-Oriented, and Timebound (SMART).

Outcomes: Statements that describe the observable, measurable changes that will be achieved as the result of this work.

Action Steps <i>What will be done to achieve the goal?</i>	Responsibilities <i>Who will do it?</i>	Timeline <i>By when? (Day/month)</i>	Resources Available	Resources Needed <i>Financial, human, political & other</i>	Potential Barriers <i>What individuals or organizations might resist?</i>	Potential Barriers <i>How might there be resistance?</i>	Communications Plan <i>Who is involved? What methods to communicate? How often?</i>
Step 1:							
Step 2:							
Step 3:							
Step 4:							
Step 5:							

Evidence of Success: (How will you know that you are making progress toward your goal? What are your benchmarks?)

Evaluation Process: (How will you determine that your goal has been reached? What are your measures?)

D. Implementing

This section draws from the central tenets of implementation science and improvement science, as well as current research on effective collaboration, to describe stages of effective implementation.²² Implementation is a journey and not a singular event — it is a dynamic process that responds to context and ongoing feedback. The following stages take place after the self-assessment and planning stages.

Piloting. The piloting phase of a new initiative is necessary to ensure that full implementation is feasible. Piloting entails implementing the project with a smaller population or on a smaller scale than is ultimately intended. In some instances, the pilot may only consist of a few classrooms or schools, prior to scaling up to a systemwide initiative. Partners are encouraged to “think small” before they “go big.” The initial piloting phase can be a period of challenging emotions as the status quo is confronted and organizational inertia is disrupted. Documenting and reflecting on lessons learned from the piloting stage will help guide the full implementation stage.

Full Implementation. Full implementation occurs when the initiative is scaled up and becomes fully integrated into organizational practice. The characteristics of full implementation should be clarified during the pilot phase, to ensure that all parties know what the appropriate expectations for full implementation are (e.g., systemwide vs. targeted implementation).

Reflection. Partners can benefit by taking time to reflect periodically on implementation and making the changes or adaptations that are necessary to ensure that desired outcomes are still achievable. It is entirely likely that piloting or full implementation will result in detours or roadblocks that require adaptations. If an approach is not working, partners are encouraged to make adaptations to the initiative as necessary. Each attempt at full implementation lends itself to an opportunity for reflection in order to refine the initiative or to identify where implementation has not been faithful to the original intent.

²² These stages have been adapted from Fixsen et al.'s 2005 review of implementation science literature. Fixsen, D. L., Naoom, S. F., Blase, K. A., Friedman, R. M., & Wallace, F. (2005). *Implementation research: A synthesis of the literature*. Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, The National Implementation Research Network (FMHI Publication #231).

The Related Tools section below includes an *Assessing Implementation Progress* tool for reviewing the progress of implementation and taking action if challenges arise or efforts stall.

Related Tools for Implementing

ASSESSING IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS

Time for action! Assuming the plan has been carefully crafted, the schedule and roles specified, and responsibilities distributed, implementation of collaborative work can begin. In the daily goings-on of school systems, it is easy to lose track of plans as other issues assume greater priority. To keep the collaborative initiative moving forward, use this checklist to periodically review implementation progress and take action if challenges arise or efforts stall.

The *Assessing Implementation Progress* tool is organized by the three stages of implementation: piloting, full implementation, and reflection. Each phase in the tool includes descriptions of features and activities that are relevant for moving the phase forward in a successful manner.

Partners should work together to complete the tracking during the relevant stages, honestly discuss issues that have arisen, then identify how best to tackle the issues. Maintaining a record of the discussion in each stage is helpful background for reviewing what has worked and what might need to be addressed in future collaborations.

Desired Qualities of Plan Implementation	Successes/Challenges	Next Steps
PILOTING (if applicable)		
<i>1. Partners have defined the pilot effort, including scope of activity, timeline, and leadership for the pilot.</i>		
<i>2. Partners have provided information to their staffs and stakeholders about the scope of the pilot.</i>		
<i>3. Partners have secured the resources necessary for the pilot (or adjusted scope as necessary).</i>		
<i>4. Partners have determined success measures or benchmarks for the pilot effort.</i>		
<i>5. Leaders from the traditional and charter schools are forging working relationships.</i>		
<i>6. Partners have taken stock of pilot results, reflecting on the process and outcomes, and have identified adaptations needed to achieve longer-term goals.</i>		
<i>7. Partners have communicated the results of the pilot to their staffs and stakeholders and shared lessons learned.</i>		
<i>8. In light of adaptations and lessons from the pilot, partners have reviewed capacities and resources as needed.</i>		
FULL IMPLEMENTATION		
<i>1. The collaboration initiative is led by representatives from all partner organizations.</i>		

Fostering Collaboration Between District and Charter Schools:
A Toolkit for State and Local Leaders

Desired Qualities of Plan Implementation	Successes/Challenges	Next Steps
2. Leaders from the traditional public schools and charter schools have communicated collaboration objectives and action plans to all staff and stakeholders.		
3. Stakeholders and staff are clear about how and why to participate in the collaboration.		
4. Partners have developed and are employing collaboration norms and protocols.		
5. Partners are able to have authentic and honest dialogue about challenges that arise.		
6. Resources are adequate for initiative activities.		
7. Partners have allotted enough staff time for collaboration.		
8. Leaders from the traditional public schools and charter schools periodically review progress, attainments, changes in the environment that affect implementation, and progress on the timeline.		
9. Leaders provide updates to their staff and stakeholders about progress of the collaborative work.		
10. The majority of intended participants are actively engaged in the collaborative work.		
11. Leaders are monitoring the development of collaborative capacities among staff members.		
12. Most staff have bought into the value of the collaboration.		
13. Staff from partners are developing working relationships.		

Fostering Collaboration Between District and Charter Schools:
A Toolkit for State and Local Leaders

Desired Qualities of Plan Implementation	Successes/Challenges	Next Steps
<i>14. Partners have implemented data collection about outcomes according to the evaluation plan.</i>		
REFLECTION		
<i>1. Partners have taken stock of the results of implementation, reviewed outcomes, and documented lessons learned.</i>		
<i>2. Leaders from partner sites have taken stock of the status of collaborative skills and competencies in their staff.</i>		
<i>3. Leaders have shared the results of the collaborative initiative beyond their organizations.</i>		
<i>4. New champions for collaboration have emerged.</i>		
<i>5. Partners have identified other potential collaborative objectives and purposes based on problems or opportunities.</i>		

E. Sustaining Collaboration

If a collaborative initiative or activity has been successful, stakeholders will likely be motivated to continue working together, and perhaps even to scale up their work in partnership with other traditional public schools in the district and/or other charters. To maximize investment of time and resources, it is wise to treat any collaborative initiative — even if it is conceived as a small pilot effort — as the initial activity in what may evolve into a longer-term collaborative relationship.

Laying the groundwork for sustainability and scaling up should begin early in the collaborative process. The way an initiative is designed and executed helps to sustain the improvements that have been made and to foster future work together.

Preparing for Scale Up and Sustainability

1. Identify the collaboration; give it a name (e.g., the Boston Compact, Partners for Success, Service to Students).
2. Place the collaborative initiative in a visible position that helps establish its importance (e.g., as a special project of the mayor) and gives it an organizational home.
3. Ensure that leaders of partner organizations (e.g., governing board members) are involved and are informed about the purpose of the collaboration and its progress.
4. Ensure that those implementing the collaboration have adequate compensated time to attend to the health of the collaboration (e.g., by learning about one another's schools, by building relationships) as well as to conduct the collaborative project (e.g., through joint professional development).
5. Build a logic model for each initiative, describing the intended outcomes, implementation activities, and inputs required for implementation (see the *Sample Logic Model Template* on page 23 for a logic model template).
6. Establish information-sharing channels, both internal (among collaborators) and external, to collect feedback from stakeholders and to communicate the work to the public; prioritize accurate and frequent communication.

7. As the project unfolds, build capacity by distributing responsibilities for aspects of the collaboration among stakeholders so that more individuals have the opportunity to work together and build relationships.
8. Incorporate formal evaluation of desired outcomes. Take time periodically to reflect on the progress of the collaboration and the benefits of the collaborative project. Use the reflections to make improvements as needed to better serve students and families.
9. Widely publicize what the collaboration is trying to accomplish, the benefits for students and families, and what is being learned from the efforts. Document key features for potential scale up.
10. Develop a governance structure that makes the initiative permanent, solidifies the responsibilities of cross-sector actors, and establishes a vehicle for collecting feedback from key stakeholders.
11. Take stock at the conclusion of an initiative; build consensus about what worked well in the collaboration and what could be improved in future collaborations. As part of the initiative debrief, identify challenges that might be addressed by collaborative activities. Discuss optimal timing, who should be involved, and necessary resources for addressing these challenges. Consider conducting a self-assessment again to determine a new starting place.

Putting Students First: Profiles of District-Charter Collaboration in the District of Columbia and Massachusetts

These brief profiles provide an overview of several cross-sector initiatives in the District of Columbia and in Massachusetts. In both places, the traditional public school sector and the charter school sector have come together in multiple initiatives to improve students' education experiences and outcomes. The particular efforts profiled herein, chosen because they have experienced successes, range in focus from joint professional development to sharing data to providing families with information about school choice options. These profiles were developed so that other states and districts can learn from the substance of these initiatives, as well as from the processes that the District of Columbia and Massachusetts undertook to design and implement them.

Both profiles are based on a materials review and on interviews with leaders and others in both sectors.

REFLECTION SHEET: LEARNING FROM OTHERS — PROFILES OF CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

As you read the profiles of cross-sector collaboration in the District of Columbia and Massachusetts, you may want to use this reflection sheet to keep track of your reflections and takeaways.

Case #1: District of Columbia

Case #2: Massachusetts

Name:

Position:

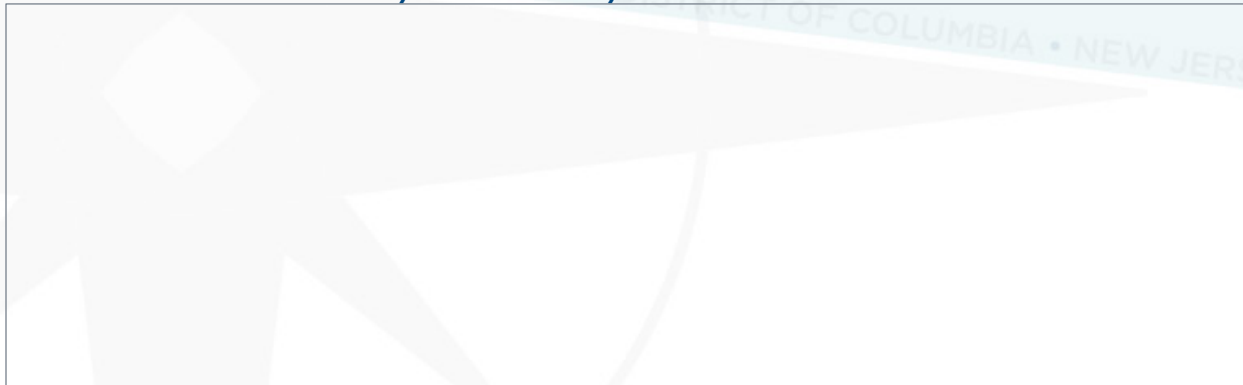
Organization:

INDIVIDUALLY, take a few moments to jot down what stood out to you in the profile you read.

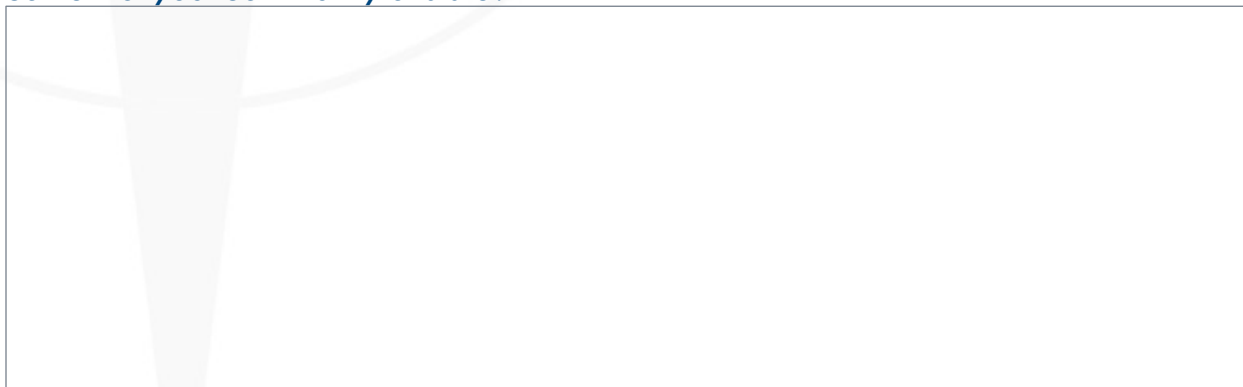
As you do that, consider how it may be important to you and others you work with.

① ***What stood out to you as important to take note of, and why?***

② How does this connect to your work and your context?



③ What purposes and needs which led to collaboration resonate with you in the context of your community or state?



IN STATE GROUPS, take note of individual reflections shared in the answer to question 3.

Discuss and identify what is most important from this profile to consider in working to address needs in your community/state. Consider needs or problems related to students and families having equitable access to choices, and to ensuring high-quality options.

① What needs were leaders working to address in this profile?

Equitable Access to Education Options	Improving the Quality of Education Options

② Considering these and others, what are the problems that students and families face in your communities/state that are or should be addressed through cross-sector collaboration?

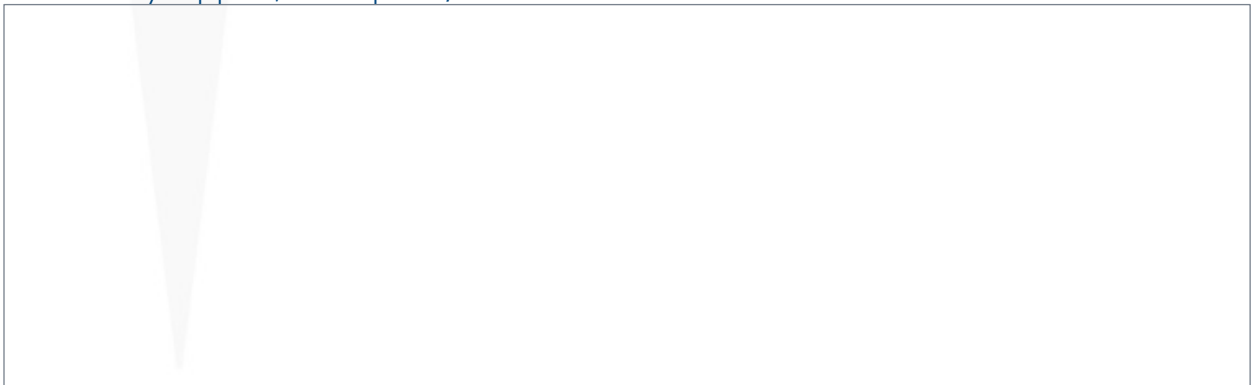
Currently Working to Address	Not Being Addressed and Should Be

IN STATE GROUPS, discuss and draw out lessons from the profiles that may be useful to you regarding:

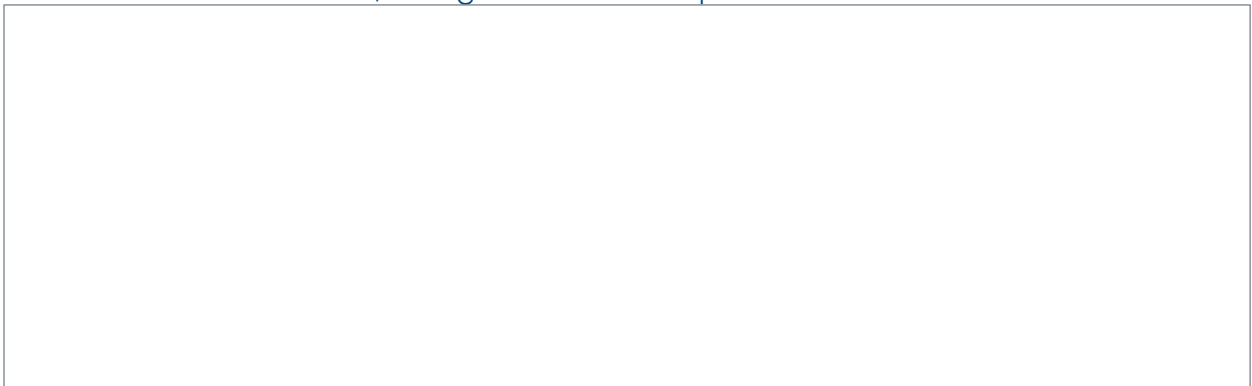
PURPOSES: Clear understanding of the problem, agreement within and across the organization; data and root causes; intended outcomes; reasons to collaborate; potential traps



THE ENVIRONMENT FOR COLLABORATION: History of collaboration; policy; politics; community support; champions/adversaries



CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTNERS: Who is needed and why; competencies needed; levels of influence needed; strengths of relationships



CAPACITIES/RESOURCES/STRUCTURES: Human resources; mindsets; skill sets;
governance structures; funding



District of Columbia

This profile of cross-sector collaboration in the District of Columbia (DC, or “the District”) touches on several initiatives that were developed with one or more of the following purposes: facilitating students’ knowledge about and equitable access to all school options; sharing data in order to better meet students’ needs; and improving the quality of academic programs. The profile draws, in part, from interviews with current and former leaders from the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE); DC’s Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB); the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME), [Raise DC](#) (a nonprofit District-based organization that facilitates cross-sector alignment among local stakeholders to improve education from cradle to career); and individual charter schools. The profile does not describe all cross-sector education efforts in DC, of which there are many, but focuses on six collaborations: four Districtwide and two school-level. The first following section provides a description of DC’s complex education governance system. The second and third include brief descriptions of the six collaborations. Following a summary of cross-sector efforts in the District, the final section provides insights and lessons on which others can reflect and act.

The DC Landscape

DC’s public education landscape is unique in many ways. Public education is controlled by the District’s mayor, who oversees both the traditional public school system, which operates through DCPS, and the charter school system, which includes individual charter schools and management organizations that operate a range of charter schools. Although DC is not a state, OSSE functions as a state education agency, managing federal funds and ensuring compliance with federal education laws for all of DC’s public schools — both traditional schools overseen by DCPS and charter schools. The chancellor of DCPS and the state superintendent (i.e., the leader of OSSE) both report to the DME. The mayor appoints the members of DC PCSB, which is independent of DCPS and which authorizes charter schools in DC. Friends of Choice in Urban Schools (FOCUS) is another key player in the education landscape with respect to charter schools; it advocates for and provides support services to DC’s charter schools.

The District's first charter school opened its doors in 1996,²³ after Congress passed the District of Columbia School Reform Act; since then, DC's charter sector has grown rapidly. As of early 2019, there are 66 local education agencies (LEAs) operating 123 charter schools, which serve 47.4 percent of District students, and DCPS operates 115 traditional public schools, which serve 52.6 percent of District students.²⁴

Student enrollment in both sectors has increased over the last decade, an indication of local families' growing confidence in their public schools. After an enrollment low of 70,922 students in 2008/09, total public school enrollment (including both sectors) rose, to 91,537 in 2017/18. In 2017/18, about half (24,072) of DCPS students attended a school other than their assigned "in boundary" school, which is based on where they live.²⁵ Students may attend their in-boundary school or apply to another DCPS school that is out-of-boundary or to any public charter school in the District.

Over the past decade, DC's public school students have made steady gains in academic achievement. Perhaps the best measure of this is evidence from student scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Results from the latest NAEP administration, in 2017, demonstrate that the District's traditional and charter public schools have improved faster than those in any state over the past decade. Traditional and charter schools in the District have improved at about the same rate.²⁶

More recently, both traditional and charter public schools in the District have also seen steady improvement on the Districtwide Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments. Between 2015 and 2018, scores for students in the District's public schools rose 8.5 percentage points

²³ District of Columbia Public Charter School Board. (2019). *About us*. Retrieved from <https://www.dcpscb.org/about-us>

²⁴ Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). (2018). *Audit and verification of student enrollment for the 2017–18 school year*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/2017-18_School_Year_Audit_and_Verification_of_Student_Enrollment_Report_-_Feb_2018.pdf

²⁵ Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education. (2018). *Cross-sector collaboration task force report*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <https://dme.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dme/publication/attachments/CSCTF%20Report2018.pdf>, 2.12

²⁶ Osborne, D., & Langhorne, E. (2018, April 16). *Analysis: NAEP scores show D.C. is a leader in educational improvement — with powerful lessons for other cities*. The74. Retrieved from <https://www.the74million.org/article/analysis-naep-scores-show-d-c-is-a-leader-in-educational-improvement-with-powerful-lessons-for-other-cities/>

in English language arts (ELA) and 7.3 percentage points in mathematics, although only about a third of students have been achieving at the college- and career-ready level.²⁷ While DCPS students overall have performed at a higher level over the last two school years, compared to the District's charter school students,²⁸ African American students attending charter schools have outperformed African American students in DCPS.²⁹ Hispanic students have been performing about the same in both sectors. At-risk students attending charter schools also perform at higher levels than at-risk students attending DCPS schools.³⁰

Cross-Sector Collaboration in the District

Some of the earliest cross-sector work in the District began when OSSE, DCPS, individual charter schools, and charter management organizations, which serve as LEAs for their charter school(s), came together in 2010 to apply for — and won — a federal Race to the Top grant. In the grant proposal, they agreed to implement a common set of initiatives, such as a common student growth measure and common guidelines for teacher evaluations. The grant proposal also required that OSSE staff convene several cross-sector task forces (e.g., a human capital task force and a student growth task force) to engage DCPS, DC PCSB, and charter school leaders to work together. The purposes of the human capital task force were to develop guidelines for teacher and leader evaluation systems and to share best practices in implementing human capital strategies. The purpose of the student growth task force was to plan implementation of the common student growth metric for schools participating in the grant activities. The student growth task force was one of the District's first collaborative data initiatives. It is likely that the work that educators began as part of the Race to the Top program laid a foundation for subsequent collaborative work, by

²⁷Office of the State Superintendent of Education. (2018). *DC's 2018 PARCC results*. Retrieved from [https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/2018 PARCC Results Release %28Aug. 16, 2018%29.pdf](https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/2018%20PARCC%20Results%20Release%20Aug.%2016,%202018%29.pdf)

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33; For example, in grades 3–8 ELA, 32.1 percent of DCPS students met or exceeded standards, while 29.5 percent of charter students met or exceeded standards, in 2017; for 2018, the percentages were 35.5 and 32.1, respectively.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38; For example, overall sector results in ELA indicate that 24.4 percent of African American students in public charter schools met or exceeded standards, compared to 19.9 percent of African American students in DCPS schools, in 2017; in 2018, the percentages were 26.6 and 22.9, respectively.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 39; For example, overall sector results in ELA indicate that 20.3 percent of at-risk students in public charter schools met or exceeded standards, compared to 17 percent of at-risk students in DCPS schools, in 2018.

building relationships across the two sectors, showing what was possible in terms of cross-sector work, and seeding a habit of collaboration.

My School DC

The proliferation of school choice options for DC students created logistical challenges for families who wanted to take advantage of their new options. In the 1998/99 school year, charter schools only served 5 percent of District students; by 2008/09, that proportion had jumped to 36 percent, and as of 2017/18 it was 47.4 percent.³¹ Students in DC are also able to apply for spots at DCPS schools other than their assigned school. It is likely that families from high-poverty communities felt the challenges of choice more acutely, especially those with parents working multiple jobs to make ends meet and having little extra time. To exercise school choice, families first had to figure out how to get information about their school options, and then had to navigate the application and enrollment process(es) of the particular school or schools that they wanted for their children. To address this challenge, DC created My School DC, a common online application and lottery system for its public schools. The system was launched in 2013. As of the 2018/19 school year, 99 percent of LEAs offering traditional prekindergarten (PK3)–to-high-school programs are represented in it, although LEAs' participation is voluntary.

Today, families are using the system to access:

- almost all charter schools (PK3–12);
- DCPS schools outside a student's boundary or feeder pattern for any grade (PK3–12);
- DCPS citywide schools — that is, those that do not have boundaries and are open to all students in the city;
- PK3 or PK4 programs at any DCPS school; and
- DCPS selective high schools and programs (9–12).

Students wishing to attend their in-boundary DCPS school do not need to apply to a school through My School DC. They can directly enroll in their in-boundary school. The one exception is for grades PK3 and PK4, because those grades are not compulsory.

³¹ OSSE (2018).

My School DC simplifies the entire school choice process so that families only have to navigate one system — first to find out about what public schools are available to their children, and then to apply to their choices. The [My School DC](#) website includes a profile for each school that is available through the lottery. In the My School DC system, all schools share the same application deadline and, with one general exception, the same application form. The exception is DCPS's selective high schools. These schools are represented in the My School DC system, and any student may apply to them, but selection for these schools involves a more elaborate application process and an interview. Systemwide, once applications are submitted, they enter the lottery, which randomly assigns students to schools. Through the lottery process, each student is only assigned to one school and can accept that assignment, enroll in their in-boundary DCPS school, or stay enrolled in their current school.

The charter school sector, specifically the DC PCSB, took the lead in developing My School DC. Leaders in both the traditional and charter school sectors had acknowledged that navigating multiple application and enrollment systems across District schools was challenging for families. Before My School DC, it had been difficult for families to know what all of the school options were. Because, in a practical sense, any option that a family is unaware of is not really an option, families with greater resources (e.g., more knowledge about the education system, more time available for researching schools, greater familiarity with conducting web searches) tended to have more options than other families. Also, prior to My School DC, some schools had earlier deadlines than others. This, too, created equity issues, because families with greater resources tended to be more informed about schools than other families were, and thus were better able to meet the earlier deadlines.

Prior to the common application process, many schools had their own application forms, which meant that families might have to complete multiple forms with the same information. Moreover, some schools required applications to be dropped off in person, while others required that they be mailed, and families had to keep track of multiple school addresses.

DC PCSB wanted the new system to have a common application for all schools, a common application date that was as late in the year as possible, and an electronic application with a “one-click” submission. Although the long-term intent was to have one system that would include *all* public school options, the first stage of implementation was initially envisioned as including only charter schools, with establishment of a common application deadline and an

advertising campaign for all participating charter schools, but the DCPS superintendent at the time was enthusiastic about the project and wanted DCPS schools to be included right away in that first year.

To help develop the system, DC PCSB hired an outside consultant, an education leader who had worked in both sectors and was well respected, and who later became DC's DME. The development project was initially supported by a combination of foundation funding and staff support from DC PCSB and DCPS. The board later hired and supported a project management team from its own budget. That team included a DCPS employee.

As required in its authorizing legislation, My School DC is governed by the Common Lottery Board, whose members include the DME; three charter LEA leaders, elected by their peers; three representatives from DCPS, appointed by the chancellor; and non-voting representatives from the DC PCSB and OSSE. The board reviews the lottery budget, makes decisions about major policy changes, develops the strategic plan, and helps to identify partnerships with organizations that will help to increase the system's effectiveness. In addition, a My School DC parent advisory council, includes representatives of every ward in the District, and meets quarterly to provide feedback on the system and on potential policy changes.

The application and lottery system was originally run by DC PCSB. When it was part of the DME's office, the lottery was funded by that office's budget. Currently, it is funded by OSSE's budget and managed by a team consisting of an executive director and staff.

Those managing the system do a great deal of outreach to ensure that all families are aware of the choice system, the process, the deadlines, and how to apply. The system now has a full-time director of partnerships and engagement, who plans all outreach activities and cultivates relationships with organizations that work with families. Outreach activities include traditional advertising, social media, grassroots canvassing, and partnerships with community-based organizations. The outreach group targets low-income and language-minority families in particular. It also operates a hotline to provide parents information about schools, run by four full-time staff members who are bilingual in English and Spanish and who have access to a language line for live interpretation in other languages.

My School DC is probably the most successful cross-sector initiative in the District. It is now based in OSSE, a government agency, and therefore is a central and permanent mechanism of school choice in the District.

Equity Reports

Between the 2012/13 and 2016/17 school years, DC produced cross-sector Equity Reports to share common data on a set of metrics across all District schools, including both traditional public schools and charter schools. The metrics included enrollment, attendance, graduation rates, suspensions, expulsions, and midyear student mobility. Data for individual schools were disaggregated by demographics, including by racial and ethnic subgroups, and compared to citywide averages for the same populations. This provided families with a way to make apples-to-apples comparisons among DCPS schools and public charter schools. The Equity Reports represented one of the first instances of citywide reporting on discipline and mobility data.

This initiative grew organically out of conversations between DCPS's chief of data and accountability and, on the charter school side, the deputy director of DC PCSB. They realized that they were collecting and reporting on similar data for their respective websites — DCPS through its school report cards, posted on its website, and DC PCSB on its school quality reports for each charter school. They concluded that it would be useful to create a single report that could be usable across schools. At the time, there was no common set of data that parents or community members could use to evaluate schools across sectors. Charter leaders were interested in publicizing their data because they thought the data would challenge perceptions about charter schools — for instance, the perception that charter schools had very high expulsion rates or had higher student mobility, compared to traditional public schools — while DCPS leaders thought their own schools were enrolling the hardest-to-serve students. Given the finger pointing from both sectors, leaders of the two sectors saw a common interest in shedding light on what was really happening in the District, by providing data about the students served by their schools.

Charter leaders and representatives from DCPS and DC PCSB worked together to identify the measures and business rules (i.e., guidelines for using or modifying a particular data element) for the Equity Reports. DCPS and DC PCSB created a working group, which OSSE and DME staff joined as well, to jointly develop the business rules and design and produce the Equity Reports. They hired a third-party consultant to produce the data visualizations that would appear in the

report. After the first year of implementation, OSSE assumed responsibility for production of the reports. With the addition of OSSE to the effort, the group engaged a third-party facilitator, New Schools Venture Fund, to help it come to agreement on the business rules.

The Equity Reports initiative continued to build on the Race to the Top program's efforts toward cross-sector data collection and reporting. The initiative was managed by one of the first cross-sector data governance structures in the District, which included representation from DC PCSB, charter schools, DCPS, OSSE, and the DME's office, with all of these entities providing input for decision-making.

The Equity Reports drew attention to issues of high suspensions and expulsions in some schools, as well as high student mobility citywide. The Council of the District of Columbia, DC's legislative body, subsequently attempted to address these challenges through passage of the Student Fair Access to School Amendment Act of 2018, which limits out-of-school suspension of students in kindergarten through eighth grade to serious safety incidents and bans its utilization for minor offenses in high school.

The 2016–17 Equity Report was the last one and moving forward the equity data will no longer be published in a stand-alone report. Instead, they are being subsumed by DC's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Report Cards, which are required by the U.S. Department of Education for individual states and for the District. The District's ESSA report card will include many, but not all, of the original data elements. The report cards are hosted on an interactive website with full school profiles, which are separate from the profiles included on the My School DC website. The District's ESSA report card will be the first time that every school in the District will be assessed using the same accountability system, and will include a comprehensive report with the same information on every school in the District.

Bridge to High School Data Exchange and Kid Talk

The Bridge to High School Data Exchange is a cross-sector initiative that focuses on sharing student-level data between middle schools and high schools, including both traditional and charter schools, to support students' transition from eighth grade into ninth grade. As part of the data exchange, participating middle schools agree to provide student-level data on their graduating ninth graders who will be enrolling in a participating high school. OSSE also provides participating high schools with data that it maintains, including demographic,

attendance, and standardized-test data. The data exchange grew out of research, commissioned by cross-sector leaders in 2014, that analyzed DC students' pathways to high school graduation, their outcomes, and when and why students fall off the graduation track. The final graduation pathways report³² included a number of critical findings, including that half of the District's ninth grade students were already off track. The authors identified seven factors that were predictive of not graduating on time and that were observable by a student's eighth grade year: special education status in grade 8, limited English proficiency in grade 8, overage at high school entry, basic or below basic performance on grade 8 DC Comprehensive Assessment System, suspensions before high school, absences, and course failures before high school. The graduation pathways report articulated a clear need to identify off-track students early and to provide them with academic and social support in their ninth grade year.

Raise DC, a nonprofit District-based organization, took those findings to heart. In response, it began convening its 9th Grade Counts Network (9GCN), bringing together LEAs that had already started addressing the issue of transition, to find out what these LEAs were learning and what they needed. As a group, 9GCN participants noted their need to receive more timely quantitative and qualitative information that would allow them to serve incoming ninth graders well. They wanted a systemic, citywide way of sharing data between middle and high schools, regardless of each school's LEA, and Raise DC was uniquely positioned to pilot a collaborative data-sharing effort of this sort because of its work facilitating cross-sector initiatives.

Raise DC's deputy director at the time began working with OSSE staff who were interested in figuring out what the state's role might be in supporting the middle-to-high-school transition. 9GCN and OSSE partnered to design and pilot a data-sharing initiative, which eventually led to the broader Bridge to High School Data Exchange. The partners focused first on the factors that the *graduation pathways report* had identified as predictive of students not graduating on time. Because participating schools would be sharing student-level data, Raise DC and OSSE staff also worked through student privacy issues. Lawyers from OSSE and from the U.S. Department of Education helped to develop data-sharing

³² Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education. (2014). *District of Columbia Graduation Pathways Project summary*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from https://dme.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dme/publication/attachments/DME_GradPathways_FinalReport_20140924_vF.pdf

procedures that were compliant with Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act protections.

Middle schools participating in the Bridge to High School Data Exchange are required to submit students' final grades (with course names for eighth grade mathematics and English); final interim assessment data (e.g., MAP, ANet, or i-Ready); and, optionally, anecdotal information about students' strengths. OSSE then provides the receiving high schools with additional standardized data (e.g. demographic information, special-education status, English learner status, attendance, and PARCC scores) for each incoming student. In addition to facilitating the exchange of quantitative data about individual students, Raise DC and OSSE facilitate another kind of data exchange through an annual Kid Talk event before school starts. In the Kid Talk, staff from participating middle and high schools come together to share and discuss information about their transitioning students and to determine strategies for supporting these students through their ninth-grade year. The Kid Talk conversations follow a structured protocol.

After three years of running the Bridge to High School Data Exchange and seeing the initiative grow to 98 percent participation among DC middle and high schools, Raise DC is transitioning management of this work to a full-time OSSE staff member. The movement to OSSE management will allow the program to receive government funding, making it more sustainable.

Cross-Sector Task Force

In the 2013/14 school year, the DME's office and the DME-appointed DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment led a comprehensive review of the city's student assignment process, which resulted in revised boundaries for DCPS students. One recommendation resulting from the review was that the city convene a cross-sector body, representing the traditional public school and charter school sectors, to identify areas in which public education in the District could benefit from cross-sector collaboration. In addition, when the new mayor of the District took office in 2015, one of her personal initiatives was to increase cross-sector collaboration. The mayor appointed a cross-sector task force, which was housed in the DME's office and began working in 2016, with its final recommendations released in November 2018.

The task force spent most of its time in two working groups, one focused on improving outcomes for at-risk students and the other focused on the opening, closing, and siting of schools. The groups met for about two years, examined

research, heard expert testimony, and developed action-oriented recommendations for addressing these issues. In addition, the task force initiated two communities of practice — one focused on attendance and the other on trauma-informed practice — and two pilot projects that grew out of the task force meetings.

The first pilot project, which was managed by My School DC staff, was aimed at centralizing all midyear transfers and enrollment through My School DC. There had not previously been a centralized process for transferring, so students who wanted to change schools would usually transfer to their neighborhood school, without necessarily considering other options. A centralized process would allow the District to collect information on why students were transferring and to provide these students with information about school options throughout the city. During the pilot, My School DC collected useful information about the underlying causes of midyear transfers: the four reasons identified as driving midyear transfers for students who were not moving away were safety, current school culture, current school academics, and transportation-related challenges. Because the pilot project proved challenging for both school sectors, the task force opted to not continue it. One challenge was that, because school funding is based on an October 5 enrollment audit, charter schools are not financially incentivized to enroll students after that date, although DCPS schools must accept in-boundary students at any time. Another challenge was that the most popular schools in both sectors had long wait lists and, therefore, did not have room for midyear transfers.

The second pilot project, managed by the DME's office, also involved student transfers, specifically transfers for reasons of safety. The vision of the project was to provide students in crisis with better access to timely and appropriate options for midyear placement, in either a DCPS school or a charter school. In the past, midyear placements had typically been in DCPS schools, and the task force hoped to expand midyear transfer students' access to charters, with the hope of assisting students in finding the school that best matched their needs, thereby providing a more stable environment for the student. The DME's office convened a working group consisting of My School DC, DCPS, and four charter LEAs to advise on the pilot.

Two of the implementation challenges for the student safety project were identifying how LEAs could best transfer information about students in need and then facilitating the transfer. The group ultimately decided that the DCPS Student Placement Office (SPO) was best positioned to manage the process, given that

it was already administering midyear transfers for students who were crime victims. In that role, the SPO already worked closely with the police department and received information about gangs and other neighborhood conflicts and dynamics. The plan in the new initiative was that the SPO would work with a student's current school to verify that the criteria for a transfer were satisfied and that the student and the student's family were interested in transferring. Then, the SPO would contact participating charter LEAs and DCPS schools to determine whether a placement was possible. In that process, the SPO would also collect information about the dynamics on the ground at the potential transfer school, to ensure that it would be a good fit for the student.

The second pilot project was not successful for a couple of reasons. First, few charter schools in general — and particularly few high schools, the grade levels where most transfers were needed — participated. Second, the SPO and charter LEAs had difficulty communicating and trusting each other with sensitive information about students. In addition to issues related to sharing student information, the time constraints inherent in potential safety transfers further complicated the internal review process for many LEAs.

Although both pilot projects ended after one year, they both yielded helpful information about how such programs might work better in the future.

The two communities of practice established through the task force have been very valuable to participants and continue to meet. The DME's office manages a community of practice focused on attendance. Representatives from traditional and charter schools meet monthly to share knowledge and to learn from experts about best practices for improving student attendance and addressing chronic absenteeism. The community of practice is part of a broader cross-sector effort, led by DME, called Every Day Counts, which includes a citywide task force, a public campaign, and support for a variety of attendance programs. The other community of practice focuses on trauma-informed practice and is a collaboration among the DME's office, Education Forward DC, Relay Graduate School of Education, Georgetown MedStar, and Turnaround for Children. From September 2018 to June 2019, more than 25 assistant principals are meeting to learn about trauma-informed practices. The assistant principals are also developing and implementing action-research projects centered around these practices. This collaborative is preparing future leaders in both sectors who are knowledgeable about trauma-informed practice.

School-Level Initiatives

The citywide cross-sector initiatives have focused primarily on sharing data, providing information to families, and other systemic coordination activities to better serve students. There have been several school-level cross-sector initiatives as well, focused on improving teaching and learning. The two school-level initiatives described in the following sections were incentivized by federal dollars — the first with Race to the Top funding and the second with Charter Schools Program Dissemination Grant funding — and probably would not have occurred without external funding. As educators involved with the initiatives realized, collaboration takes time and resources, and is difficult to manage in addition to the regular business of running programs and initiatives within a school.

CROSS-SECTOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Using Race to the Top funding, OSSE awarded E. L. Haynes Public Charter School (E.L. Haynes) a grant to support a cross-sector lesson study collaborative — the DC Common Core Collaborative (Collaborative). Functioning as a professional learning community, participating teachers from across the District, in both the traditional and charter sectors, engaged in a lesson-study process to help them improve their instructional strategies and, in the process, to develop effective lessons that all DC teachers could then use to differentiate instruction and help students meet the Common Core State Standards. The Collaborative addressed a particular need to provide educators at small schools — many of which had only one or two teachers in a particular grade level or content area — with a professional learning experience with peers. The Collaborative brought together about 200 participants from 22 traditional and public charter school campuses between 2011 and 2014. The group used LearnZillion as its technology platform for sharing videos.

An E. L. Haynes project director led the effort, organizing teams of teachers in the same content areas and grade levels to work together. Each team had a facilitator and engaged in a six-month cycle of professional learning using a lesson-study protocol. At the end of the cycle, each team produced a short video summarizing the key instructional strategies that they developed for their content area. LearnZillion hosted the videos and also provided content experts to work with the teacher teams. As it turned out, many of the videos were not of sufficient quality for posting publicly; thus, instead of relying on their videos, many teams shared their learning in person at an annual conference, hosted by E. L. Haynes, that included teachers who had not participated in the

collaborative and who wanted to learn more about effective instructional strategies.

Unfortunately, the collaborative ended when the funding ended. However, another charter school, Two Rivers Public Charter Schools (Two Rivers), has been hosting an annual “Evening of Learning,” with presenters from schools throughout the District. Although the Two Rivers initiative is not a direct outgrowth of the Collaborative, it continues the effort to engage DC traditional and charter schools in learning together. In this initiative, the LEA invites teachers to submit proposals to offer seminars on topics related to inquiry-based learning, and then selects the highest-quality sessions. For example, last year’s sessions included “Problem-Based Tasks in Math: Turning Thinking Over to the Students” and “Synthesizing the Grapple: Orchestrating Effective Discussion Post-Problem Solving.” Staff from several DCPS schools have presented, but most presenters have been from charter schools. However, District- and school-level educators from both sectors are invited to come and learn. The event is free and is typically attended by about 50 educators. The annual event includes 12 or 13, ninety-minute seminars, from which participants choose one to attend. Two Rivers also hosts a networking reception afterward and pays for the whole event.

SUPPORTING ENGLISH LEARNERS

Beginning in 2012, the English as a Second Language (ESL) department of Center City Public Charter Schools (Center City) implemented an after-school language development program called ESL After the Bell. The program develops students’ language skills, using a cross-curricular, Common Core-aligned curriculum. Additionally, ESL After the Bell promotes family engagement and participation, through parent meetings, celebrations, and projects that support learning at home. Each year, the program focuses on a different theme. In the 2018/19 school year, for example, students have been investigating how their community can become more responsible for the environment, water, and food sources to sustain a growing global population. Since the program started, English learners at Center City schools have consistently approached or met expectations on the Districtwide PARCC assessments in both ELA and mathematics at a higher rate than their English learner peers across the District.

In 2017, OSSE awarded Center City a two-year, federally funded Charter Schools Program Dissemination Grant to expand its ESL After the Bell programming to one of the District’s traditional public schools, H. D. Cooke Elementary School. The ESL program manager at Center City leads a team that develops the curriculum each year and shares it with H. D. Cooke. The ESL program manager trained the

program lead at H. D. Cooke and provides monthly technical support. Center City also provides all of the resources that H. D. Cooke needs to run its program, such as templates for attendance trackers, guidelines for incentive programs, and instructional materials. The dissemination grant also paid for joint professional learning in effective strategies for teaching English learner students as well as training in project-based learning (through the Buck Institute). The program has worked equally well at H. D. Cooke as it has at Center City. After the first year of implementation at H. D. Cooke (2017–18), the percent of its English learner students who were approaching or meeting expectations on PARCC's English language arts assessment grew to 54 percent in 2018, up from 44 percent in the prior year. While this growth cannot be attributed solely to ESL After the Bell, staff at H. D. Cooke believe that the program contributed to that growth.

This collaboration, and the resulting positive working relationship between the two schools, would likely not have happened without the dissemination grant. The two schools likely would not have initiated the collaboration on their own, because providing resources from a charter school to a DCPS school is time-consuming, costly, and logistically challenging. Center City's ESL program manager attributes the success of the collaboration to the positive working relationships between staff at both schools and to the fact that H. D. Cooke's principal and staff value the program and its purpose of supporting English learners and, therefore, have been committed to implementing the program with fidelity.

Summary of District of Columbia's Cross-Sector Efforts

The District of Columbia's cross-sector efforts are intended to achieve two equity purposes: to promote equitable access to schools for all students, and to improve school quality for all students across sectors. The table below shows how each of the various efforts has worked in support of each of these purposes.

Table 1. Addressing Issues of Equity through Cross-Sector Work in the District of Columbia: Summary of Initiatives

Initiative	Equitable Access to Schools	Improving Educational Quality for All
My School DC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a common online application and lottery system for traditional public and charter schools • Provides families information about all of their school options in one location • Includes profiles of all participating schools 	
Equity Reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided common data on a set of metrics across all District schools to provide families with a way to make apples-to-apples comparisons among DCPS and charter schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided common data on a set of metrics that District schools could use to inform strategies for improving the quality of academic and school cultural programs
Bridge to High School Data Exchange and Kid Talk		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides quantitative and qualitative data about students transitioning from middle to high school, so the receiving schools can better serve their new students • Facilitates conversations about individual students transitioning from middle to high schools, to determine strategies for supporting students
Cross-Sector Task Force	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launched two pilot projects to improve the process for students making midyear transitions to new schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created a community of practice focused on attendance in which representatives from traditional and charter schools meet monthly to share best practices • Created a community of practice to teach assistant principals in both sectors about trauma-informed practice

Initiative	Equitable Access to Schools	Improving Educational Quality for All
Cross-Sector Professional Learning		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created a professional learning community for teachers from traditional public schools and charter schools to develop effective lessons that help students meet the Common Core State Standards • E.L. Haynes hosted an annual conference for members of the professional learning community to present what they learned to teachers from across the District • Two Rivers hosts an annual “Evening of Learning” for teachers from traditional public schools and charter schools to take seminars on inquiry-based learning
Supporting English Learners		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Center City Public Charter School partners with a traditional DCPS school to share its successful, after school language development program for English learners • H.D. Cooke is in its second year of implementing the program successfully (in 2018–19)

Insights and Lessons Learned

The District’s range of cross-sector initiatives offers substantive ideas that other practitioners can draw from, as well as lessons to inform the design of future collaborative efforts, whether in DC or elsewhere. These initiatives also suggest ideas for state strategies to foster collaboration between traditional public schools and charter schools.

A Clear, Shared Purpose Focused on Students and Families Facilitates Collaboration

All of the cross-sector collaborative efforts previously described in this profile were motivated by a shared purpose that was clear and tangible and focused on improving education for students and their families. The collaborators came together because they had a shared goal that would not be attainable on their own and because they recognized that the only way to progress beyond the status quo was to collaborate. All partner staff interviewed for this profile cited the importance of being clear about the collaboration’s purpose and how participation would benefit not only the partners, but students and families. This shared purpose is critical, in part, because, when obstacles or conflicts arise, the

best motivation for pushing forward is participants' commitment to that purpose. If all participants are on board with a priority, it is easier for the parties to compromise and make concessions.

Trust and Relationship Building Are Critical to Success

All of the people interviewed for this profile spoke about the importance of trust and relationship building in sustaining a successful cross-sector initiative. One of the pilot projects initiated by the cross-sector task force failed, in part, because of lack of trust between the parties involved. The necessary trust may not come naturally. Because traditional public schools and charter schools compete for students, cross-sector relationships may sometimes start from a place of inherent mistrust. Several interviewees referenced myths believed by each sector about the other, and all interviewees said that doing this work and maintaining the cross-sector nature of the relationships were challenging. Only by starting to actually work together, having regular conversations, and taking small steps to build individual relationships and to bridge barriers can cross-sector partners see beyond the myths and the lack of trust that these myths engender. In several initiatives, individual relationships were critical to launching the initiative. The trust and positive working relationships among two or three individuals can go a long way to help an initiative get off the ground, while subsequent organizational support can ensure sustainability. In some cases, top-down initiatives do not support building relationships or trust. Interviewees recommended starting with small collaborative projects and building trust and relationships among participants before tackling larger, more challenging initiatives. For example, the Race to the Top task forces were a way to start building trust and relationships through smaller cross-sector projects, before tackling larger projects such as the Equity Reports.

Committed Leaders Facilitate Collaboration

Many of the cross-sector initiatives were launched or expanded when leaders identified a problem that would be best solved using a cross-sector approach, and made a commitment to take on the challenge of solving that problem in a collaborative way. For example, leaders at DC PCSB led development of the common lottery when they realized that the existence of multiple enrollment systems was not working for families, and DCPS leaders proved to be equally committed to this cause. In a different example, two city leaders — the mayor and the DME — created the cross-sector task force because they thought it was important that the traditional public school and charter school sectors begin

working together to solve common challenges. In both examples, leadership helped to elevate the issue at hand, provide resources to support it, and spur educators in both sectors to come together to address a common challenge.

Governance Structures Ensure Sustainability

Individual entities or schools initiated several of the initiatives and other efforts described in this profile, beginning at the ground level. But no matter how an initiative begins, if it is to become a permanent feature of the education ecosystem, governance structures and permanent funding are needed. Well-conceived governance structures ensure that cross-sector voices have input into decision-making and that participants in the initiative feel safe and able to trust the process. Several interviewees noted that high staff turnover in urban schools and in government entities can present barriers to sustainable collaboration. A good governance structure can mitigate the effects of this turnover, helping to ensure that collaborations are sustained after the individuals who initiated them move on to other positions, retire, or leave a district.

My School DC, for example, is thriving, in part because it has a permanent governance structure, has government funding, and is based in a government agency. The Equity Reports were launched with a governance structure that included representation from both the traditional and charter sectors, and after OSSE took responsibility for their production, it continued to receive input from stakeholders from both sectors. The Bridge to High School Data Exchange and Kid Talk Initiative is now moving from Raise DC to OSSE, where it will have permanent staffing and funding. Although Raise DC was able to launch and develop the project, staff recognized that moving the program to a government agency would ensure sustainability. The cross-sector task force was housed in the DME's office and involved high-level representation from both sectors as well as from the community. Having key staff from both sectors represented on the task force facilitated the development of actionable recommendations. The DME can now move the recommendations forward, with the knowledge that both sectors are invested in them.

Massachusetts

Massachusetts offers a story of state- and local-level leadership of cross-sector work between the traditional public school and charter school sectors, to create more equitable opportunities and outcomes for the state's students and families. This profile is based, in part, on interviews with charter school leaders and others

from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Massachusetts Charter Public School Association (MCPSA), as well as local leaders involved in cross-sector collaboration in Boston. It is by no means an exhaustive look at cross-sector collaboration in Massachusetts, but it points to important lessons from which others can learn and benefit.

The first section of this profile provides an overview of the Massachusetts landscape in relation to cross-sector collaboration. That section is followed by descriptions of roles that state leaders from DESE and MCPSA have played in supporting such collaborations. The third section provides descriptions of cross-sector initiatives in Boston. Following a summary of cross-sector efforts in Massachusetts, the final section provides insights and lessons on which others can reflect and act.

The Massachusetts Landscape

Massachusetts is well known for its success in public education, particularly since the passage of the state's Education Reform Act in 1993. Since 2005, the state's students have annually scored first, or statistically tied for first place, on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests in grades 4 and 8 reading and mathematics.³³ Charter schools have been part of this success story.

The Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) has been granting charters since the authorization of charter schools in the Education Reform Act. BESE ranks as one of the top charter school authorizers in the country, based on an 11-point evaluation of school portfolio and authorizer performance outcomes.³⁴ Some see its rigorous authorization process as the foundation for the overall quality of Massachusetts's charter schools, as evidenced, for example, by urban charter schools — especially those in Boston — generally outperforming non-charter district schools in the state. Notable differences between charter schools in Boston and those in other urban districts

³³ Education Week. (2018, September 5). State grades on K–12 achievement: Map and rankings. *Education Week*. Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/ew/collections/quality-counts-2018-state-achievement-success/state-grades-on-k-12-achievement-map-and.html>

³⁴ National Association of Charter School Authorizers. (2018). *Leadership, commitment, judgment: Elements of successful charter school authorizing: Findings from the Quality Practices Project*. Chicago, IL: Author. Retrieved from https://www.qualitycharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/LJC_Elements_of_Successful_Charter_School_Authorizing_FINAL_02.27.2018.pdf

across the country are also believed to be linked to the rigor with which the state approaches authorization of its charter schools.³⁵

According to DESE's Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign, as of October 2018, there were 82 charter schools serving an estimated 48,000 students — almost 5 percent of total public school enrollment — across the state. The high demand for charter schools in the state is reflected in the approximately 32,000 students that remain on charter school wait lists.

Despite the general success of the charter school movement, the deep skepticism about it that has been evident since its inception is alive and well in Massachusetts. In a hotly contested 2016 ballot initiative known as Question 2, a proposed expansion of charter schools in the state was voted down. The measure would have allowed up to 12 new charter schools each year.

Statewide Efforts to Support Cross-Sector Dissemination of Best Practices

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Charter schools operate, in part, to stimulate the development of innovative programs within public education and to provide models that can be replicated in other public schools. To that end, under Massachusetts's charter school statute, a charter school must document to the state's commissioner of elementary and secondary education that it has provided and is disseminating models for replication and best practices for other public schools in the district where the charter school is located.

To support charter schools in their sharing of successful practices, DESE, through its Massachusetts Dissemination Program, offers two-year competitive grants to fuel dissemination of practices and programs that have been developed, tested, and proven successful in Massachusetts's charter schools. DESE bases priorities for the grant competition on statewide needs. Most recently, in its 2017 competition, DESE asked schools to apply for dissemination grants focusing on early-grade literacy and on practices supporting social-emotional development. Seven of 17 applications were funded in that competition. Program grants are supported by funding to the state from the U.S. Department of Education (USED)'s Charter School Program. “We work to fulfill our promise to USED that best practices in

³⁵ Moss, E. (2018, February 26). Massachusetts charter schools: Why do they outrank their counterparts across the nation? *Harvard Political Review*. Retrieved from <http://harvardpolitics.com/united-states/massachusetts-charter-schools-why-do-they-outrank-their-counterparts-across-the-nation/>

charter schools take hold in partner schools," said the director of DESE's Office of Charter Schools, which operates the grant program and conducts other activities to support dissemination of best practices from charter schools.

It is a statutory requirement that Massachusetts charter schools share best practices, but DESE has taken specific actions to bolster this practice. In 2014, charters were required to create dissemination goals as part of their statutorily mandated accountability plans. In 2017, DESE added a performance criterion for assessing charter school performance to its charter renewal determinations. In addition to evaluating a charter school's faithfulness to its charter, academic program success, and organizational viability, DESE now assesses whether and how the charter school has provided innovative models for replication and best practices to other public schools in the district where the charter school is located.

The Office of Charter Schools has focused its efforts on addressing equity through improving the quality of charter schools' education programs and other offerings. DESE has created resources to support dissemination and collaboration, and makes these resources available on a [Massachusetts Charter Schools website](#). The website provides guidance and resources on the following webpages: *Creating Conditions for Successful Dissemination*, *Sharing Resources and Information*, *Sustaining Partnerships*, *Profiles of Dissemination*, *Resources*, and *Best Practices Archives*. The best practices in the archives cover a range of topics, including governance, leadership, professional development, culture and climate, and various instructional programs and practices.

For a long time, the Office's work to support dissemination of best practice was focused exclusively on charter school models and practices. This tight focus was most likely due to the fact that charter schools are statutorily mandated to share their best practices. In recent years, the Office has come to recognize the importance of sharing effective practices from *all* public schools.

In 2016, the Office partnered with other offices across DESE to host a statewide dissemination fair. More than 240 educators participated in the fair, sharing best practices across traditional schools, charter schools, innovation schools, and schools that feature expanded learning time. The fair, created with help from nearly 50 schools and districts, was designed to help educators working in some aspect of school redesign to share promising practices with their peers at other schools. Presenters from across the state addressed topics such as problem-based learning, recruiting and retaining teachers, evaluating curriculum,

reducing chronic absenteeism, designing teacher and student schedules, fostering social-emotional learning in elementary schools, serving English learners, and serving students with disabilities.

Amid the aftereffects of a difficult political battle between charter school proponents and opponents, related to the 2016 ballot measure that sought additional charter schools, the Office continues its work to support charter schools in meeting their performance expectations. The Office continues to communicate and engage with other DESE staff to promote coherence and collaboration in DESE's work with districts and schools. Office leaders are also working to overcome the unintended negative consequences of DESE's history of one-way promotion of charter school best practices, including the resulting implication that traditional public schools had nothing to share. As an interviewed DESE leader said, "Best practice is about what you do, not who you are." DESE is engaged in ongoing work to change perceptions and narratives about learning from best practices in the state.

Massachusetts Charter Public School Association

Also prominent in Massachusetts's education landscape is MCPSA, which plays a critical role in advocating for, and creating community among, the network of charter schools in the state. The association is active in sharing innovative education models developed by charter schools, and has received three National Leadership Grants from USED, focused on capacity building to support students with disabilities. MCPSA provides the online [MCPSA Knowledge Center](#) to facilitate the real-time exchange of charter school innovations and best practices, as well as practical resources for leaders and staff from its member schools.

While these efforts support dissemination of best practices among charter schools, MCPSA also values cross-sector collaboration so that educators from traditional public schools and from charter schools can learn with and from one another. To that end, in 2015, the association commissioned a case study³⁶ of the Boston Compact, a community consisting of educators, administrators, and other school staff, from traditional public schools, charter schools, and Catholic schools, who view multi-sector collaboration as a way of improving education

³⁶ School & Main Institute. (2015). *City-wide collaboration between district, charter, and Catholic schools: The Boston Compact start-up years 2010–2014*. Boston, MA: Author. Retrieved from https://www.masscharterschools.org/sites/default/files/docs/resources/mcpsa.case_study.boston_compact.june_2016_web.pdf

overall for Boston students and who have been working together to do so since 2011. (The following sections describe the compact in more detail.) MCPSA commissioned the case study to highlight the compact's transferable principles that other communities can use to guide their own efforts to form strong, purposeful collaborative relationships among different school systems in their cities or areas.

Cross-Sector Collaboration in Boston

The nonprofit Boston Plan for Excellence (BPE) was founded in the mid-1980s to foster improvement in Boston schools through research and development. In 2009, the BPE formed the Boston Schoolchildren's Consortium, including leaders from the Boston Public Schools (BPS), charter schools, private independent schools, and the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston. As described by the MCPSA leader interviewed for this profile, that cross-sector group of education leaders was "put on a bus and went on school visits across the city. Over the course of a series of school tours and discussions, relationships began to form and strengthen." The mayor at the time then subsequently summoned leaders to a meeting, where, according to the interviewee, he told them, "None of you is doing a good job educating kids with special needs and English learners. Knock the [expletive] off and do right by kids." With this call to action — indeed, this *demand* for action — the seeds for the Boston Compact were planted.

In the same general time frame, a public-private partnership, the [Boston Opportunity Agenda](#), was launched, with a commitment to ensure that all of Boston's children and youths are prepared to succeed in college, careers, and life. The partnership strives to improve Boston's cradle-to-career education pipeline by combining public and private resources, expertise, and influence around a single agenda. At the partnership's inception, the agenda was focused only on BPS, but it later evolved to include charter and Catholic schools. Through the partnership, education leaders in Boston have been working to address issues of equity and quality through cross-sector collaboration over the past decade, supported by federal and state grants and private philanthropy. Interviews with leaders involved in some of these initiatives provide a window into this work.

The Boston Compact

In 2010, the year after the creation of the multi-sector Boston Schoolchildren's Consortium, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation hosted city leaders from across the country, including leaders from Boston, to discuss how sectors could come

together on behalf of students and families. In September 2011, Boston leaders signed their first compact, agreeing to work together and outlining their intentions. With a \$100,000 planning grant, leaders from the mayor's office, BPS, and charter schools worked to develop and implement governance and operational structures, build trust, and develop buy-in from those they represented. In the spring of 2012, the Catholic Archdiocese brought its schools into the compact as partners, and later that year, the Boston Compact received a three-year, \$3.25 million grant from the Gates Foundation to support its work.

Of the 23 entities whose compacts were funded by the Gates Foundation, Boston was one of two cities whose compacts were subsequently rated as "advanced" because they addressed systemic issues of equity on a regular basis and because they were creating partnerships between the district and charter schools, which had become a defining feature of the city's education system.³⁷ While the initiatives and strategies developed by the Boston Compact have evolved over time, the compact's systems, structures, commitments, and relationships have endured.

Fueled by a hunger, among its founders, for cross-sector collaboration, the compact's initial work focused on "building trust, busting myths, and identifying needs," according to a Boston Compact leader who directs one of its participating schools, Boston Collegiate Charter School. The superintendent of BPS at the time and the executive director of the Neighborhood House Charter School in Dorchester were early champions whose drive and shared commitment set the table for honest conversation and partnership to address critical issues.

The compact supports initiatives working to address the needs of student groups who have historically been underserved across sectors. Addressing gaps in student achievement among Boston's students became an early focus for the compact, leading to several initiatives. For example, a leadership initiative helped principals and aspiring principals from all three participating sectors (district, charter, and Catholic schools) to focus on issues of equity and to take equity-informed stances in their leadership roles. In another example, the compact offered a three-year professional development program for teachers from the three sectors to build capacity for addressing gaps in the performance of English learners.

³⁷ Lake et al. (2017).

Made up of teachers and school leaders from all three sectors, the compact's Teaching and Learning Committee advises the compact on content-specific initiatives, such as the Boston Educators Collaborative, through which teachers take credit-bearing professional development courses designed and taught by teachers. In another cross-sector initiative, small networks of schools focused on particular subgroups, such as African American and Latino boys or students with disabilities, as well as on opportunities for educators to see firsthand the practices of colleagues in schools where specific subpopulations are thriving academically and socially.

In 2015, compact leaders began to promote the idea of a unified enrollment system for all Boston schools, as a means of providing equitable access for students and families. The idea was backed by the mayor and was discussed in many community meetings throughout the city. However, charter school opponents organized fierce opposition to the idea, and the concept of having a unified enrollment system became a highly polarized and contentious issue. This effort was ultimately unsuccessful, but it may be taken up at a future date.

The compact has also undertaken work to address issues of equitable access across schools in the three sectors. For example, it produces a citywide open-enrollment month, and it launched the web-based site to help families more easily identify school options. All charter schools in Boston now have a common application and application timeline. In 2017, the compact led the development and adoption of a set of citywide school-climate questions, creating a common means to collect feedback from Boston parents and to have common data for guiding improvement.

The Archdiocese and BPS have leased buildings to charter schools that needed space, thereby assisting in providing greater access to charter school programs across sectors. To provide for consistency in transportation for students and families, charter schools voluntarily adjusted their school drop-off and pick-up times to align with those of BPS, saving the city \$1 million per year in transportation costs.

The compact's governance structure includes a steering committee whose 15 members are representative of all three sectors. Steering committee members, as a group, have key leadership roles in their respective organizations and have access to those with the highest level of authority within their organizations. A four-person executive committee, including representatives of the mayor's office, BPS, a Boston charter school, and the Archdiocese, works

with the compact's chief collaboration officer to plan the work of the steering committee. The chief collaboration officer serves as project manager, facilitator, and plan developer.

Compact leaders describe the governance structure as being the connective tissue that holds the compact together, enabling it to sustain the collaborative work through changes in leadership. Although, thus far, the compact has seen four transitions each of BPS and Catholic school superintendents, its work has continued without interruption. The leadership structures that have been developed are lasting and are well positioned to drive ongoing changes to improve Boston schools for all students.

SCHOOL-TO-SCHOOL COLLABORATION

In addition to the cross-sector work supported directly by the Boston Compact, some Boston schools, including schools participating in the compact, have initiated their own cross-sector collaborations, as recipients of DESE dissemination grants and other funding.

Boston Collegiate Charter School. Boston Collegiate Charter School has been a key player in the Boston Compact since 2011. Boston Collegiate, which serves students in fifth through twelfth grades, has a successful track record in achieving its aims of college acceptance and completion for all its graduates. With a mission to deliver on the promise of charter schools, the school has been involved in the compact and in other collaborative activities for some time.

The school's cross-sector work first focused on partnering with schools within a one-mile radius of its neighborhood of Dorchester to support school turnaround. Boston Collegiate partnered with Jeremiah Burke High School, designated by DESE as a Level 4 (i.e., low performing) school. Teacher leaders from both schools collaborated, with a focus on standards and data-driven practices. Boston Collegiate then applied for and received a national grant supporting exemplary charter collaboration. Although these efforts were successful and Burke exited Level 4 status, changes in lead teacher positions at Burke prevented the work from being sustained.

Boston Collegiate has also received DESE dissemination grants to support its cross-sector work. The school was recently awarded a grant to partner with four BPS schools on a blended-learning middle school math project. In this project, Boston Collegiate is leading a team of 15 educators, from across the five schools, through an inquiry cycle for applying blended learning to a learner-centered challenge. In addition to this academically focused work, a local foundation

approached a group of schools, including Boston Collegiate, and asked what these schools wanted to do together. When the schools identified achievement for young men of color as an area of need, the foundation provided a \$70,000 grant to implement a mentorship program, which has now grown and been sustained over five years.

Boston Collegiate's executive director now serves as co-chair of the Boston Compact and as its sector leader for participating charter schools. Following a report that raised concerns about off-track youth (i.e., students with risk factors that might impede graduation) in Boston, the compact is now dedicating time and resources to tackling that citywide issue. While achievement and excellence at Boston Collegiate itself remains a priority for the school, its executive director is committed to improving education outcomes for all Boston students.

Neighborhood House Charter School. With one of the first charters awarded in Massachusetts, Neighborhood House Charter School (NHCS) opened in 1995, with 51 students and with a vision to become a beacon of excellence in a city with what its founders saw as too many failing schools. Today, NHCS serves 656 students in grades K-10, 80 percent of whom are students of color and nearly 30 percent of whom speak a language other than English at home. The school is undergoing an expansion that will serve students through grade 12 by the 2020 school year.

NHCS has a long history of cross-sector collaboration in Boston. NHCS's director, who also chairs the Boston Compact's teaching and learning committee, described NHCS's cross-sector involvement this way: "We cultivate relationships in Boston and engage with other schools to help others benefit [from] our approach and success. We have been working with schools to become the best versions of themselves." The school was also part of a compact-supported triad in which NHCS partnered with a BPS school and a Catholic school so that all three schools could learn with and from one another. In this particular case, NHCS's director noted, factors such as varying priorities and conflicting schedules for professional development undermined the partnership. However, she reported that other triads supported by the compact were more successful, due to partners having the necessary capacity to effectively engage.

In 2013, NHCS received a large federal dissemination grant to support four BPS schools in implementing NHCS's Rich Structured Learning Experiences model program of standards-based arts integration. In 2015, it began its School Consulting Initiative, whereby NHCS staff partnered with BPS schools to develop

and implement customized plans to address a school's instructional priorities and develop effective instructional leadership teams around those priorities. Today, NHCS provides direct professional development and coaching sessions to leaders of other schools to establish foundations of effective practice. A recipient of DESE dissemination grants and of support from a variety of philanthropic organizations, NHCS is one of four schools featured in DESE's Dissemination Profiles, which highlight the important work that charter schools and district partners are doing to share innovative practices in Massachusetts.

Boston Day and Evening Academy. Serving students who, for various reasons, have not been successful in traditional high school, Boston Day and Evening Academy (BDEA) is a Horace Mann Charter, which, in Massachusetts charter school law, means that its charter is sponsored by the local public school district — in this case, BPS. BDEA offers day and evening classes in a competency-based program to students aged 16 or over. Designed to help students with chronic absenteeism, mental health issues, and/or other risk factors, BDEA supports students in mastering competencies, using a trauma-sensitive, hybrid program of in-class and asynchronous online work.

BDEA is innovative in that it has developed and implemented a model that balances in-class learning, a support system, trauma-informed practices, and online learning. The school has received national grants, as well as grants from local philanthropies and businesses, to sustain its efforts. “We have been hard at work at this competency-based model and have a lot for others to learn from,” said the head of BDEA's math department.

Supported by a DESE dissemination grant, BDEA collaborated with BPS's Brighton High School to assist in a pilot program for 20 to 30 special education students, using BDEA's trauma-informed, competency-based model. The curriculum from this initiative will be transferred to an online platform, to enable other schools to access it as a free resource. In addition, the school runs the annual Responsive Education Alternative Labs (REAL) Institute, a summer professional development program for others to learn from its model. The school also offers residencies during the school year for visiting teams from other schools to receive topic-specific support designed to meet their needs. Teams spend two to four days at the school, working with an instructional lead, observing classes, meeting staff and students, and working on problems of practice.

Summary of Massachusetts's Cross-Sector Efforts

Massachusetts's cross-sector efforts at the state and local levels are intended to achieve two equity purposes: to promote equitable access to schools for all students, and to improve school quality for all students across sectors. The table below shows how each of the various efforts has worked in support of each of these purposes.

Table 2. Addressing Issues of Equity through Cross-Sector Work in Massachusetts: State and Local Examples

Organization	Equitable Access to Schools	Improving Educational Quality for All
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides information about traditional and charter school performance on website • Partners with economic development agency to support acquisition of facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funds dissemination of best practices between charter and non-charter public schools • Provides resources on website to support dissemination • Requires charter school accountability goals for the dissemination of best practices
Massachusetts Charter Public School Association		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improves education practices across charter schools • Researches and shares innovative models developed by charter schools
Boston Compact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitates building leases • Provides web-based site for families • Produces tri-sector open enrollment month • Supports transportation savings through changes in bus schedules • Developed citywide school climate survey for families • Attempted adoption of unified cross-sector enrollment system • Developed common application among charter schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers Quality Teaching for English Learners, a cross-sector professional learning series • Supports tri-sector equity leadership initiative • Initiated district-, charter-, and Catholic-school triads working together to improve instructional quality for specific subpopulations • Supports teachers in leading and taking courses across sectors, through the Boston Educators Collaborative • Undertakes initiatives addressing needs of subpopulations • Developed networked improvement communities to better serve students with disabilities • Focuses on “off track” youth

Organization	Equitable Access to Schools	Improving Educational Quality for All
Boston Collegiate Charter School		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborating on standards-driven instruction in turnaround settings through a Dorchester cross-sector triad • Led five-school blended learning in middle school mathematics initiative • Joined a multi-school coalition to create a mentorship program for young men of color
Neighborhood House Charter School		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnered across sectors with schools on standards-based arts integration • Works across sectors to help schools design and implement customized plans to improve instructional practice and leadership capacity
Boston Day and Evening Academy		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners with a traditional BPS high school on implementing a trauma-sensitive, competency-based blended-learning model • Provides a four-day professional development institute on student-centered, competency-based learning • Created and hosts an online, open platform providing access to competency-based blended-learning curriculum

Insights and Lessons Learned

As in the previous profile, the wide-ranging cross-sector initiatives described in this profile offer substantive ideas from which other practitioners can draw, as well as lessons to inform the design of future collaborative efforts, whether in Massachusetts or elsewhere. They also suggest ideas for state strategies to foster collaboration between traditional public schools and charter schools.

Having Both Authority and Influence Are Critical to Success

Two key factors appear to have been critical to the success of cross-sector collaboration in Massachusetts: leaders had the *authority to compel and support* cross-sector work and the *ability to influence* others. Those factors worked in tandem to support educators in collaborating across governance boundaries to improve education opportunities and outcomes.

One clear champion of the early cross-sector work in Boston was the mayor of Boston — a no-nonsense, to-the-point person who set forth a call to action

among education leaders across sectors in the city. It is impossible to know what would have occurred in Boston schools in the absence of that mayoral challenge to leaders over a decade ago. It is evident, however, that his actions, from a position of authority, served as the disruption that led to cross-sector work in Boston. At the state level, leaders from the DESE Office of Charter Schools have leveraged their legislative authority over resources to provide incentives for charter schools to disseminate best practices. Similarly, MCPSA has used its authority to advocate for and support charter schools through implementation of charter school models in district schools. At the local level, school boards, both charter and non-charter, are positioned to use their authority to compel leaders to engage in collaborative work. For example, the executive director of Boston Collegiate reported that her board of directors had set a goal of collaboration, and, given that goal, she went on to play a lead role in making such collaboration happen. Similarly, the BPS board has supported its superintendents in working for the betterment of education in Boston.

Authority alone is not always sufficient to build the kind of will, commitment, and political capital necessary to sustain cross-sector work, and sometimes people without authority have to take the first steps. Some Boston educators and other education stakeholders, who saw the value of cross-sector work, built on their respective networks and their impassioned beliefs to enlist leaders to join in and, in many cases, to fund collaborative work. The chief collaboration officer for the Boston Compact also noted that “it is important to have people across sectors who are practitioners in their roles and who have access to authority in their organizations.”

The qualities of leaders interviewed for this profile reflect those highlighted in the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation’s research on successful collaboration.³⁸ In this review of research, Mattesich (2001) refers to “monster influencers,” as leaders of successful collaborative efforts whose love for their work shows. The passion, conviction, and steadfastness with which leaders interviewed for this profile spoke about their cross-sector work reflect their commitment to and love for this work. Working persistently across traditional boundaries for a common good, leaders involved with the Boston Compact, either directly or tangentially, have created strong, trusting relationships. One of those leaders, the executive director of Boston Collegiate and a prominent leader in the Boston Compact,

³⁸ Mattesich, P. (2001). *Collaboration: What makes it work: A review of research literature on factors influencing successful collaboration* (2nd ed.). St. Paul, MN: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation.

describes a key outcome of the work this way: “We now have strong connective tissue that allows us to respond to issues and needs that arise.”

While leaders interviewed for this profile pointed to a high level of trust that was established over time among Boston educators across sectors, they also reflected on the failure to move forward with a unified enrollment system in Boston, with one citing “historic and deep barriers and the lack of successful community engagement” as contributing factors. Another reflected, “We did not involve the right people in the early conversations.” Research on successful collaboration suggests that developing relationships and trust in the face of organizational, political, or ideological differences takes considerable time and attention. Leaders in Boston appear to have come to that realization and are committed to attempting the enrollment system innovation again at a later time.

Keeping Focused on the Larger Purpose While Advancing Initiatives Keeps Efforts Moving

In thinking about the purposes for which collaboration and dissemination activities were undertaken in Massachusetts, and in Boston in particular, the concept of deep focus cannot be ignored. In *deep focus*, the foreground, middle ground, and background are all in focus, with near and distant objects equally clear. The various unique purposes pursued by the interviewed leaders were all carried out with a larger unifying goal in mind. The chief of policy and practice at the MCPSA described that unifying goal this way: “We need to come together to better serve students and their families. We all must put our heads together to create a better system of education.” She added that the commitment to collaborate requires “the ability to see why it is important and to address barriers with the overarching purpose in mind.” The pull of this greater good of better serving students compels these leaders to support, and, in some cases, to undertake cross-sector collaboration.

As these leaders designed and implemented strategies to address specific unique needs, they always had the larger unifying goal in mind. From this mission, they then worked to prioritize needs and develop solutions. Most of the cross-sector work focused on improving the quality of teaching, learning, and leadership. Many initiatives were explicitly designed to support historically underserved students (e.g., English learners, students with special needs, African American and Latino boys, students off track for graduation), and thereby to address important issues of equity. Keeping the larger picture in clear focus,

leaders continuously work to prioritize needs that cross-sector collaboration can best address.

Building Enduring Systems and Structures Helps Ensure Sustainability

The various efforts to support cross-sector collaboration represented in this profile can be seen as a loosely coupled system.³⁹ Although state and local efforts are not intended to function as a statewide system, these efforts can be seen as functioning with a common unifying purpose, but without coordination between the state and local levels. One benefit of a loosely coupled system is that it allows local adaptations and creative solutions to emerge. The actors working to promote cross-sector collaboration in Massachusetts operated within their own structures, using their own processes, and leveraged resources that were needed to carry out the work. The DESE and the MCPSA worked within their governance structures to lead, fund, and support cross-sector work. Leaders in Boston worked from scratch to design and refine a structure and processes and to build relationships with philanthropies that would support the work and enable it to be sustained.

In the early 2010s, the mayor's convening of local education leaders, with his fiery call to action, was clearly an impetus for the subsequent cross-sector work in Boston. But translating leaders' shared commitment into a reality took a new organization and governance structure — a new metaphorical table around which leaders could come together to pursue the common goal of improving education for the children and families of Boston.

The Boston Compact, launched with Gates Foundation funding, has served as that metaphorical table, and the compact's governance structure has provided the necessary stability to support the work on top of it. Relationships, structures, and processes — including a dedicated chief collaboration officer, an executive committee with whom she consults on a regular basis to plan and support the work, and a larger steering committee representing three education sectors — have been key to the endurance of the compact, especially because, while each compact partner has its own accountability structure, the compact has become a means of building mutual accountability. As the chief collaboration officer noted, “the greatest accomplishment is the table itself,” but having the right people at the table and the resources needed to build relationships,

³⁹ Weick, K. E. (1976). Educational organizations as loosely coupled systems. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 21(1), 1–9 (part).

identify needs, and design and implement solutions has been key to making the compact's structure work. The relationships and "connective tissue" established over time have endured beyond the compact's Gates Foundation funding, even amid numerous changes in sector leadership.

Cross-sector leaders described how strategies and initiatives to generate more, and more effective, cross-sector collaboration have evolved over time. They noted that sustainability and scale can be difficult to accomplish, due to changes in priorities of agencies and funders. Referring to a DESE shift in English learner policy, one leader cautioned, "When you take on a programmatic initiative, you run the risk of it not being sustainable due to conflicting policy efforts and/or philanthropic priorities." Another interviewee touched on that issue when she said, "We have had many successful and not-so-successful initiatives. My interest now is in systemic issues."

Both Human and Fiscal Capacities Are Necessary Ingredients to Successful and Lasting Cross-Sector Efforts

The need to engage the right people in cross-sector collaboration, those who are best suited for the work, cannot be overstated. It is not work for the faint of heart, and it is not work that everyone is prepared to effectively conduct. Morten Hansen's research on collaboration in the private sector has revealed characteristics of effective collaborative leaders,⁴⁰ and these characteristics are evident in the leaders interviewed for this profile. Most importantly, the leaders' individual agendas are eclipsed by a greater unifying goal; they have committed to taking on the challenge of working and learning together for the benefit of students and families. Leaders who were connected to the Boston Compact, either directly or tangentially, demonstrated openness — to ideas, to alternatives, and to debate, and rather than conveying a sense of having all of the answers, they recognized the power of the diverse perspectives, experiences, and ideas that are necessary to solve problems that they all wanted to see solved.

The ways in which leaders spoke of how they sought to address the complex tasks involved in cross-sector efforts attest to the importance of boundary spanning as a core capacity in cross-sector collaboration. Leadership actions associated with boundary spanning include reaching across borders to build relationships, interconnections and interdependencies. These leaders worked to

⁴⁰ Hansen, M. T. (2009). *Collaboration: How leaders avoid the traps, build common ground, and reap big results*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Press.

develop sustainable relationships built on trust and managed through influence and negotiation. Spanning the boundaries among the Boston Compact and their individual schools, organizations, and/or sectors, these leaders were able to leverage influence from many directions.

Bringing the right talent together for cross-sector efforts without having fiscal resources to support the work undermines the efforts. In Massachusetts, DESE has long provided opportunities for charter schools to apply for grants specifically to engage in the dissemination of best practices. In recent years, recognizing the need to cultivate learning across all public schools, the Office of Charter Schools reached out to other DESE offices to find ways of supporting that broader effort. The MCPSA also played a key role in contributing resources to support collaboration, both within the charter school sector and across sectors, to improve educator practice. Since the infusion of the Gates Foundation funding that helped establish the Boston Compact on firm fiscal ground, the compact's leaders have worked to cultivate relationships with philanthropies and businesses, which have resulted in the necessary support to sustain cross-sector efforts beyond the Gates Foundation funding. Unlike many of the other compacts funded by the Gates Foundation, the Boston Compact has been able to sustain the work partially through efforts to cultivate interest and commitment from an array of partners and funders.

Although it is limited in scope, this overview of cross-sector collaboration among education leaders in the District of Columbia and Massachusetts provides opportunities to learn from their successes, challenges, and disappointments. Without exception, all of the leaders interviewed for these profiles indicated their belief that their cross-sector work is important — indeed, necessary — for addressing issues of equity and quality in the education of *all* students. The work is ever-changing and always challenging, and it continues to build on successes and lessons learned from experience.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to all of the interviewees, from the District of Columbia and from Massachusetts, who took the time to provide information, reflect openly on their experiences, and share lessons learned for others undertaking collaborative

initiatives. Thanks, as well, to those who also reviewed drafts of the profiles. These individuals are listed below.

District of Columbia Interviewees

- Jennifer Comey, Director of Planning, Data, and Analysis, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education
- Naomi Rubin DeVeaux, Deputy Director, District of Columbia Public Charter School Board
- Celine Ferejan, Deputy Director, Raise DC
- Khizer Husain, Director of External Relations, Two Rivers Public Charter Schools
- Jeffrey Noel, Chief of Educational Research, Accountability, and Evaluation, Department of Defense Education Activity (Former Assistant Superintendent of Data, Accountability, and Research, Office of the State Superintendent of Education)
- Alicia Passante, ESL Manager, Center City Public Charter Schools
- Catherine Peretti, Executive Director, My School DC
- Richard Pohlman, Executive Director, Thurgood Marshall Academy Public Charter School
- Cate Swinburn, President, YouthForce NOLA (Former Chief of Data and Accountability, District of Columbia Public Schools)
- Ramin Taheri, Director of Cross-Sector Collaboration, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education
- Shana Young, Chief of Staff, Office of the State Superintendent of Education

Massachusetts Interviewees

- Michelle Allman, Mathematics Department Chair and Math Teacher, Boston Day and Evening Academy
- Allison Bagg, Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Erica Brown, Chief of Policy and Practice, Massachusetts Charter Public School Association
- Joanna Laghetto, Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign
- Kate Scott, Executive Director, Neighborhood House Charter School
- Shannah Varón, Executive Director, Boston Collegiate Charter School
- Rachel Weinstein, Chief Collaboration Officer, The Boston Compact

Appendix. Outside Resources

Annotated Resources

The Best of Both Worlds: School District-Charter Sector Boundary Spanners

<https://www.crpe.org/publications/best-both-worlds-school-district-charter-sector-boundary-spanners>

This publication from the Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) focuses on the role that boundary spanners can play in facilitating collaboration. A boundary spanner has a foot in both the traditional public school and charter worlds and is able to bridge the divide to become a critical asset in coordinating opportunities for collaboration. The publication discusses who these people may be, what makes them successful or unsuccessful, and the circumstances under which they may be the most productive. This resource may best be used by district or charter leaders who are seeking someone to fill this role in their organizations, or by a third-party partner looking to fill this role to the best of its ability.

District-Charter Collaboration: A User's Guide

<https://charterschoolcenter.ed.gov/publication/district-charter-collaboration-users-guide>

This paper from the National Charter School Resource Center, a U.S. Department of Education–funded center run by Safal Partners, provides a methodology for district-charter collaborations, an overview of how they may function, and a framework for functioning, based on lessons learned from leaders in districts and charter sectors. The framework focuses on six factors that the center considers critical for successful collaboration. Each section is followed by a set of reflection questions for district and charter leadership. This resource is intended to be used by district and charter representatives who are interested in effective collaborations and may best be utilized by those representatives together in a series of working sessions.

Herding Cats: Managing Diverse Charter School Interests in Collaboration Efforts

<https://www.crpe.org/publications/herding-cats-managing-diverse-charter-school-interests-collaboration-efforts>

This publication from the CRPE groups collaboration efforts into several major themes: “shared resources, shared responsibility, shared effort to build trust and

collegiality, and shared work to ensure equal access to high-quality schools.” It offers an analysis of 23 cities, in both rural and urban areas, that signed Gates Foundation–funded district-charter collaboration compacts, looking at what worked, what failed, and where the points of collaboration were. It also provides an analysis of charter school attitudes toward collaboration and offers a number of points of collaboration to pursue, based on the attitudes of the charter schools in question. This resource may help charter leaders think about their own attitudes toward collaboration and may help district leaders pinpoint particular collaboration activities that may be fruitful in their contexts. Both groups may learn from the analysis of what cities have tried before.

Bridging the District-Charter Divide to Help More Students Succeed

<https://www.crpe.org/publications/bridging-district-charter-divide>

This CRPE publication speaks to district and charter leaders, state education leaders, and funders. It provides recommendations for each group on how to facilitate, support, and fully realize opportunities for cooperation and collaboration between districts and charter schools. Beyond recommendations of opportunities to collaborate and tips on building the infrastructure to do so at the school and district levels, it lays out concrete steps for policymakers and funders to robustly support district-charter collaboration in city and state contexts.

Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory

<https://wilderresearch.org/tools/cfi-2018/start>

The Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, a nonprofit community organization in Minnesota, provides a free inventory of collaboration factors for private and educational use. The inventory is based on research and evidence from academic literature, only takes around 15 minutes to complete, and is simple to use. The current version of the inventory identifies 22 factors that contribute to the success of collaborations and allows users to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their approach to collaboration, based on the particulars of their current context, which can be learned through a simple survey. The tool divides the factors into categories of environment, membership characteristics, process and structure, and communication.

Norms of Collaboration Toolkit

<http://www.thinkingcollaborative.com/norms-collaboration-toolkit/>

Strengthening a group's capacity for collaboration requires a combination of long-term investments — in building relationships and trust, and in developing a culture in which senior leaders are role models of cooperation — and smart near-term decisions about the ways in which teams are formed, roles are defined, and individuals interact. Practices and structures that may have worked well with simple teams of people who are all in one location and know one another are likely to lead to failure when teams grow more complex.⁴¹

The online Norms of Collaboration Toolkit is useful in helping members of collaborative groups to learn, use, and improve their individual and collective abilities to effectively collaborate. This online toolkit offers resources specifically for groups and teams to learn about and apply these seven norms of collaboration:

- **Pausing** before responding to or asking questions, to allow for time to think and to enhance discussion and decision-making.
- **Paraphrasing** what others are saying, to convey understanding and establish common meaning.
- **Posing Questions**, to explore ideas and clarify thinking.
- **Putting Ideas on the Table**, to further advance meaningful discussion and decision-making.
- **Providing Data**, to help construct shared understanding by collaboratively exploring, analyzing, and interpreting data.
- **Paying Attention to Self and Others**, to ensure that individuals are aware of what is being said and how others are responding, as well as paying attention to others' needs for planning and participation purposes.
- **Presuming Positive Intentions**, to promote supportive and meaningful dialogue that ideally minimizes misunderstandings and hurt feelings.

⁴¹ Gratton, L., & Erickson, T. J. (2007, November). Eight ways to build collaborative teams. *Harvard Business Review*, 85(11), 100–9, 153.

Tip Sheet

BARRIERS TO AND SOLUTIONS FOR EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION

In his extensive research on intra- and inter-organizational collaboration, Morten Hansen identified four critical barriers to collaboration, which can limit the effectiveness of a collaboration, as well as three approaches to solutions to mitigate those barriers.⁴² These barriers include individual motivational barriers (that is, an *unwillingness* to collaborate) as well as organizational capacity barriers (that is, an *inability* to collaborate). Similarly, the solutions include individual and organizational approaches.

Barriers	What the Detractors Say
Not-Invented-Here Barrier: Potential collaborators are unwilling to reach past their departments or organizations to seek input and work together. The Not-Invented-Here Barrier can be aggravated by insular cultures; status gaps (e.g., power imbalances); excessive self-reliance; and/or a fear of revealing shortcomings.	"This is not our problem."
Hoarding Barrier: Potential collaborators are unwilling to or deliberately do not share information, time, or effort to support a collaboration. The Hoarding Barrier can be aggravated by a culture of competition; narrow incentives that do not support collaboration; and/or fear of losing power among collaborators.	"Why should we share our resources?"
Search Barrier: Potential collaborations may be impeded by the inability to find the necessary information or people to participate in an effective collaboration. The Search Barrier can be aggravated by an organization's size; physical distance; information overload; and/or limited networks among collaborators.	"We don't know who can help."
Transfer Problems: Potential collaborations may be impeded by an inability to share complex information. Transfer Problems are aggravated by conditions that include too much technical knowledge; no common understanding of work habits and styles; and/or weak or nonexistent relationships among collaborators.	"We don't understand each other."

⁴² Hansen (2009).

Solutions
<p>Unify People by crafting a common goal or purposes for the collaboration; stating a core value for teamwork and collaboration across and within organizations; and utilizing leadership to further prioritize collaboration. <i>The collaboration goal or purpose should be simple and concrete, and it should create a common fate.</i> Additionally, a common language will help enforce expectations for collaboration (see Norms of Collaboration Toolkit, above).</p>
<p>Cultivate “T-shaped” Management that is supported by staff who can simultaneously deliver results within their own job or department (vertically) and across their organization or collaborative unit (horizontally). <i>The goal is to identify staff who can balance the needs of individual unit, department, or organizational performance while also supporting collaborative efforts.</i></p>
<p>Build Nimble Networks that support the formation of intra- and inter-organizational relationships to help reduce “search-and-transfer-problems.” <i>Networks should expand outwardly, building a diversity of connections — not just more connections.</i></p>

Not all solutions address all barriers, and all collaborators will need to carefully consider their own circumstances to ensure that barriers and solutions fit with their organizational contexts. The following chart provides a snapshot of how the barriers and solutions relate to each other and of the varying degrees to which solutions address barriers.⁴³

Barriers/Solutions	Unify People	T-shaped Management	Nimble Networks
<i>Not-Invented-Here</i>	***	***	*
<i>Hoarding</i>	***	***	*
<i>Search</i>		*	***
<i>Transfer</i>		*	***

***Recommended Approach

*Limited Impact

⁴³ Hansen (2009).

Findings from Previous District-Charter Collaboration Efforts

District-Charter Collaboration Grant Implementation: Final Findings from Interviews and Site Visits (Gates Foundation Outcomes Report)

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED568719.pdf>

This report from Mathematica is the final evaluation report for the Gates Foundation's District-Charter Collaboration Grant series, in which cities were given funding to develop partnerships and collaboration opportunities between traditional public and charter schools. The report categorizes grant activities into five broad categories and is organized around those categories and the cities in which they took place. It provides findings and lessons learned across the scope of the grant, as well as an analysis of each city's efforts. The report found stakeholders viewed the cross-sector leadership programs, such as principal residencies and aspiring leader programs, as the most successful grant activities in terms of their perceived effectiveness in generating meaningful cross-sector collaboration. Participants agreed that collaboration alone is not a viable method for school improvement. Readers may particularly benefit from findings and lessons from a range of local contexts.

Passing Notes: Learning from Efforts to Share Instructional Practices across District-Charter Lines

<https://www.crpe.org/publications/passing-notes-share-instructional-practices-across-district-charter-lines>

This resource from CRPE provides three case studies of largely successful district-charter collaboration efforts, organized into three case studies, in New York, Boston, and Chicago. It identifies challenges and benefits and provides recommendations targeted for three core areas for cross-sector collaboration: co-locating schools; creating residencies and fellowships to train teachers or leaders; and sharing resources and providing facilitated professional development trainings and workshops, the latter of which is the most common approach. This resource may be helpful for district or charter leaders interested in pursuing one of the highlighted forms of collaboration.

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