



Baltimore District-Charter Collaboration Compact¹

Date Signed: December 2010

Number of Students: 83,625 (2010-2011)

Percent of Charter School Students to All Public School Students: 12.8%

Charter Authorizer: Baltimore City Schools

School District Governing Body: Board appointed by mayor and governor

Overview

Of Maryland’s 52 charter schools, 33 are located in Baltimore City. Under Maryland state law, charter school teachers must belong to the union in their school district and are subject to local bargaining agreements and contract rules. In addition, Baltimore City Schools is the charter school authorizer, and the district CEO hires and fires charter school principals. This unusual set of conditions formed the backdrop for the signing of the compact agreement and clearly played a role in its progress and sticking points. Although the CEO of five years, Andrés Alonso, is highly supportive of charter schools, the inherent power imbalance made compact negotiations feel to some charter leaders as though the scales weighed in favor of the district. The compact was signed by Alonso, the city’s charter schools, a charter school advocacy organization, and a school board member. Agreements called for the district and charter sectors to work together on improving accountability systems, including developing a charter school renewal process. Impressively, after years of failing to act on charter school renewals, a working committee made up of district and charter representatives developed a renewal process, which gives schools different terms for their renewal based on their proven results. In January 2013, Alonso announced that charters would not be renewed for 3 of the 18 charter schools reviewed.

Key Compact Agreements

Big Wins

Refine the outside (non-district) operator schools renewal process; develop mutually agreed-upon strategy to close low-performing schools of any type; policy workgroup to determine criteria.	Working group of district and charter leaders convened and developed multiple-measure renewal tool. Tool was used to consider renewal of 18 charter schools; in January 2013 the CEO announced that 3 would not have their charter renewed.
Develop shared legislative agenda for Maryland General Assembly session.	During 2011 session of Maryland General Assembly, advocacy efforts were closely aligned on school funding, charter facilities, and other issues.
Develop a purchase-of-services model for services provided by the district, which can be optional for charter schools.	
Leverage partnerships to address facilities needs of all city students, including minimizing the cost of a public charter school in a traditional public school facility.	
District will create an Office of New Initiatives to interact with and serve charter schools.	In July 2011, district CEO completed a district reorganization and appointed an executive director to lead the new Office of New Initiatives.

Challenges and Next Steps

As compared with other compact documents, the scope of Baltimore’s compact was highly focused. While this helped concentrate efforts, especially around the development of a charter school renewal process, it also hamstrung the city’s movement toward broader goals, including addressing concerns about the limits to autonomy that have long troubled the city’s charter sector. Compact signers have rightly celebrated the big win of the creation of the operator-run renewal process. Most concede it was a hard-fought win and a good start, but a work in progress. Some charter leaders have expressed reservations about the lack of an appeals process, the failure of the tool to fully consider the unique instructional model or theme of the school, and the fact that a corresponding tool for district schools is not yet in place. Moving forward, the charter sector will continue to consider how to push the district on autonomy. For both sectors, questions around the renewal process remain: Are the five-year renewal winners candidates for expansion and replication? How should the weaker three-year and one-year renewal winners be supported? Lastly, the district has come a long way (with significant foundation support) toward investigating how district and charter schools are funded, whether or not inequities exist, and, if so, to what extent and how can they be remedied. But the answers, as well as any policy or funding changes they may call for, are still forthcoming.

1. See this compact on CRPE’s website.