



Central Falls District-Charter Collaboration Compact¹

Date Signed: August 2011

Number of Students: 4,503 (2011-2012)

Percent of Charter School Students to All Public School Students: 17.7%

Charter Authorizer: Rhode Island Department of Education

School District Governing Body: State-appointed school board

Overview

With 2,700 students and six schools, and spanning just over a square mile, Central Falls School District is the smallest school district to sign a compact. Five charter schools also serve Central Falls students, with a combined enrollment of over 1,700 students. The city itself faces serious financial challenges, recently filing and emerging from bankruptcy, and the schools serve a high-poverty population. (Ninety percent of public school students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.) Under the leadership of Frances Gallo, Central Falls has embarked on bold reforms. In 2007, Gallo learned from parents about a promising charter school, the Learning Community Charter School, and she investigated. She was so impressed that the district formed a partnership with the school to help the district develop quality teaching practices. This close and protracted relationship gave the compact a jump-start, and collaboration between the sectors has been strong. Soon after the compact was signed, weekly meetings were scheduled with the superintendent and charter school leaders. One local dual-language charter school known for effective professional development, International Charter School, is developing a dual-language certification program that will help both district and charter schools recruit and train educators with the necessary skills to work with English language learners. Although not spelled out in the compact, the district has launched Teach CFI, a combined marketing and communications campaign to attract high-quality teacher applicants to all Central Falls schools. The district and charter schools also have made it a practice to jointly fundraise. A recent event featuring Central Falls alumnae and actress Viola Davis was co-hosted by a district school and a charter school, and proceeds were shared.

Key Compact Agreements

Big Wins

Charter schools agree to ensure transparency regarding student demographic data, student mobility, achievement, and instances where special needs designations shift.	
Actively exchange best practices and participate in communities of practice across sectors.	Learning Community Charter School and International Charter School help provide professional development to district teachers.
Support the Learning Community Charter School goal of reaching 500 teachers and 10,000 students through Lab School.	District relationship with Learning Community remains strong.
District will make available, where possible, economies of scale for charter schools.	
District will advocate for equitable distribution of resources for charter and district schools.	
Ensure that all on-site teacher and leader preparation courses are open to all district and charter school employees as space is available.	
District will provide charter schools access to facilities by studying potential excess space and helping to secure financing for renovations.	

Challenges and Next Steps

District-charter collaboration in Central Falls is strong and healthy, thanks in large part to Superintendent Frances Gallo's leadership. District and charter schools share a number of challenges, including implementing a new statewide teacher evaluation, educating a high number of students living in poverty, filling in gaps where funding is inadequate, recruiting and retaining strong teachers, providing services in all schools for special education students, ensuring strong instruction for English language learners, and sustaining multiple pathways to graduation. The sectors continue to be committed to work together and build on prior successes. Strong partnerships, such as the professional development program in reading that a charter school provides to a district school, have resulted in teacher-to-teacher relationships across sectors. This should help the compact survive a change in leadership if Superintendent Gallo steps down. Student achievement in district schools has showed gains, but students at Central Falls High School—a federal School Improvement Grant recipient school that made national headlines when the school board fired all the teachers—still struggle. In the 2010-2011 school year, just 7 percent of its 11th graders were proficient in math, and 7 percent were proficient in reading. Special education students in the district appear to be the focus of Central Falls compact work moving forward. There are plans to develop a shared risk pool for special education services (based on a Denver model) and to share specialists across schools. To tackle human resource challenges, there are plans to create a Central Falls Teaching Fellowship, which would invite potential teachers to spend a year working in a district or charter school, meet as a group, and carry a modified teaching load.

1. See this compact on CRPE's website.