

# DENVER DISTRICT-CHARTER COLLABORATION COMPACT

Date Signed: December 2010

Number of All Public School Students: 83,377 (2012-2013) NAPCS

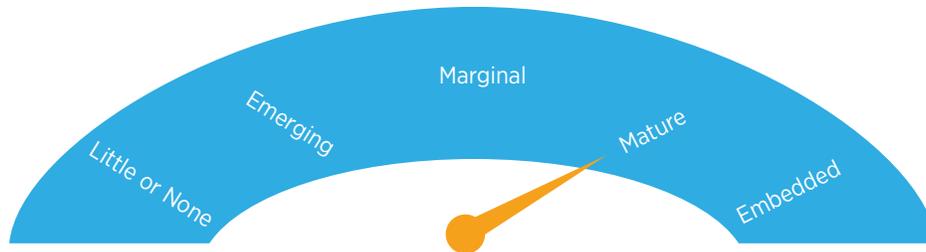
Percent of Charter School Students to All Public School Students: 14.1%

Charter Authorizer(s): Denver Public Schools

School District Governing Body: Elected board

Compact Grant Amount: \$4,000,000

## CURRENT STATUS OF COLLABORATION:



## OVERVIEW

Even before signing its Compact agreement in 2010, Denver was invested in district-charter collaboration. Denver Public Schools (DPS), under Superintendent Tom Boasberg, has maintained a commitment to working with the charter sector; recent school board elections have further solidified this stance. In 2012, thanks in part to a well-established track record on collaboration and political winds at its back, Denver was awarded a \$4 million Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation grant to build on its cross-sector work.

Five years since the Compact launched and three years in to the grant, Denver has several impressive wins, including successfully implementing common enrollment and creating a robust unified accountability system. A Compact initiative that corrected an inequitable distribution of levy dollars across district and charter schools benefited the charter sector. District leaders have praised the Compact's Learning Labs for cross-sector professional development to better serve English language learners and special education students. A Compact push to replicate district-run special education center programs within the charter sector has nearly eliminated a special education student enrollment percentage imbalance between the district and charter sector. District and charter leaders agreed that more improvements could be made, so they traveled around the country together to research special education service delivery models, resulting in the creation of two district and two charter schools with high percentages of students with a disability and high rates of classroom-level inclusion.

Denver's Collaboration Council vets initiatives and moves the work. It has equal district and charter representation,

five topical subcommittees, and meets monthly. One issue the Compact faces is the perception that DPS, the sole charter authorizer, has worked more closely with two large and highly regarded charter organizations, STRIVE Prep and DSST Public Schools. These networks have seen sharp enrollment growth since signing the Compact and DPS has provided them with facilities to accommodate the new students. The smaller charter players feel shut out of the biggest collaboration advantages, including access to district facilities. However, in May of 2015 DPS passed a facilities allocation policy with a set list of criteria, including academic performance and enrollment, making the process of facilities assignment more straightforward and transparent.

In December of 2015 Superintendent Boasberg announced a six-month leave of absence. Susana Cordova, former Chief of Schools, was asked to act as interim superintendent. Complicating the leadership transition, Alyssa Whitehead-Bust, a key administration leader who oversaw the Innovation and charter schools sector and who shepherded the compact work for years, stepped down in January 2016. With most of the early goals realized, a major leadership transition, and the large Compact grant soon to expire, Denver must be wary of losing momentum on collaboration. Although Denver's collaboration is exemplary, this was also true in other Compact cities when political winds shifted and progress unraveled. Denver must continue to prioritize the work to both add to and sustain its collaboration wins.

COMMON AREAS OF COLLABORATION	COMPACT PROGRESS
<b>High-Performing Schools</b>	Denver's Compact has aggressively supported the expansion of high-performing charter networks to increase quality options, especially for low-income and minority families.
<b>Special Education &amp; English Language Learners (ELL)</b>	The Compact has placed a high priority on special populations of students since its signing. Roughly 20 center programs serving high-needs special education students have opened in charter schools with over a half dozen opening this year alone. The Compact created Learning Labs, open to all district and charter schools and their teachers, to facilitate shared professional development on how best to serve these students.
<b>Facilities &amp; Resources</b>	Via collaboration between the district and a handful of high-performing charter organizations, several district facilities were made available to these charter schools to accommodate strong demand. This was seen as unfair for smaller charter schools that also hoped to scale or locate in a district building. After several years of negotiation, Compact pushed for and got a new and much more transparent facilities allocation policy.
<b>School Performance Framework</b>	Via the Compact, the charter sector pushed to revamp the School Performance Framework that measures academic achievements uniformly in both district and charter schools. The new formula reduces the weight on growth, so that generally poor performing schools with modest growth are not able to avoid attention and potential non-renewal of their charter.
<b>Enrollment Systems</b>	A major compact win is Denver's exemplary district-charter common enrollment system. A recent audit suggested increasing the uniformity of how enrollment works across the city, as currently there is variation from neighborhood to neighborhood.
<b>Human Capital &amp; Professional Development</b>	Learning Labs are viewed by both district and charter schools as having a positive impact on teaching practice.
<b>Common Core</b>	Some district and charter schools in Denver collaborated to get ready for Common Core's implementation. The School Performance Framework has been put on hold for one year during the switch to Common Core so it is too soon to tell how well the sectors were prepared for the new standards and testing.