



## Austin District-Charter Collaboration Compact<sup>1</sup>

**Date Signed: December 2011**

**Number of Students: 91,426 (2010-2011)**

**Percent of Charter School Students to All Public School Students: 5.4%**

**Charter Authorizer: Texas Education Agency**

**School District Governing Body: Elected board**

### Overview

In December 2011, Austin Independent School District leaders launched their first partnership with charter schools by creating “in-district” charters, which (unlike past charters) are invited in by the district. IDEA Public Schools took over a low-performing district elementary and middle school vulnerable to state sanctions in the fall of 2012, and planned to take over a high school within the next few years. Community members had voiced opposition to the new in-district charter schools, and stakes were high for their success. In a dramatic twist of events, in December 2012, the school board—whose makeup had shifted in an election—revoked its contract with IDEA for the new merged elementary and middle charter school. IDEA still wants to find a district solution or continue operating the school as a state-authorized charter in a new building. Should the school operate outside the district and succeed, the district will lose out on sharing in the benefits it had initially sought: improved test scores, facilities revenue, and the turnaround of failing schools. Compact leaders are trying to focus on the positive—the new board approved a different in-district charter (one that was sponsored by district teachers and leaders and the teachers’ union) and district-charter collaboration working groups are up and running, focusing on school-to-school collaborations.

### Key Compact Agreements

### Big Wins

Development of in-district charters focused on college-preparation and/or alternate education.	In-district charter school (IDEA Public Schools) opened in fall 2012 as district turnarounds for Allan Elementary and Martin Middle School (revoked a year later); Travis Heights in-district charter school approved in December 2012; Responsive Education Solutions opened two dropout-recovery charter programs in existing district high schools.
Joint recruitment and retention of teachers and school leaders to include the sharing of effective practices used by compact partners, such as strategic compensation programs, use of value-added data, and innovative teacher-appraisal systems.	
Enhance efficiencies through joint facilities access, shared services contracts, and collaborative pursuit of state/federal and private grant funding.	Caruth Foundation gave \$100,000 in support of future compact work; Educate Texas serves as fiduciary agent.
Charter schools commit to serve all types of students, including students requiring special education services, and ensure transparency regarding student mobility and achievement, particularly college readiness.	
Actively share best practices to scale up successful programs and build capacity to serve all students.	

### Challenges and Next Steps

The Austin school board and district leaders have approached compact work cautiously after the community’s strong and negative reaction to IDEA Public Schools. After the latest setback by the board, it is even clearer that district and charter leaders will have to find better ways to communicate the benefits of district-charter partnerships to the public. Beyond developing new charters, district leaders and board members will also have to decide what value existing high-performing charter schools provide to the system and offer tangible incentives to work together. In fall 2012, compact leaders started working with Educate Texas and consultants Safal Partners to keep the compact intact. Led more by school leaders than the superintendent, working teams have formed that focus on sharing professional development and substitute teachers, joint communications, and expanding public school options including blended learning models. Moving forward, Austin compact leaders hope to show how bottom-up support can create collaboration momentum.

1. See this compact on CRPE’s website.