



Boston District-Charter Collaboration Compact¹

Date Signed: September 2011

Number of Students: 61,200 (2011-2012)

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

Charter Authorizer: Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

School District Governing Body: Mayor-appointed school board

Overview

Mayor Thomas Menino, who appoints the members of the Boston School Committee, or school board, expressed strong reservations about charter schools for most of his political career. Yet he understood the potential of the compact and helped bring the district and charter sectors together to sign. Interestingly, just three months after the board voted, by a narrow margin, to approve the district’s signing of the compact, the mayor made a surprising and controversial choice to fill a vacancy on the board with a charter school founder and director. Some say he made this choice because of the momentum created by the compact signing. Signs of a shift in the relationship are noteworthy given the nearly 20-year history of tension between the sectors. Recently, charter detractors have opposed the high reimbursement rate the district pays charter schools and expressed a belief that charter schools discourage harder-to-serve children from enrolling. The local teachers’ union opposed the compact, citing concerns over the agreement that allows charter schools to lease district buildings and another that permits charter schools to send special-needs students to the district’s specialized services program. Despite these political struggles, the compact has been a strong success and is considered a model in its governance structure and its inclusion of the Archdiocese of Boston.² Among the big wins for Boston via the compact, the district leased three buildings in a high-poverty neighborhood to high-performing charter schools, the district and charter enrollment calendars were aligned, and some charter schools have helped reduce district transportation costs.

Key Compact Agreements

Big Wins

Mutually support the location of new charter schools in the neighborhoods with greatest need; district will explore leasing vacant or underutilized district buildings to charter schools.	The district leased three empty school buildings in a high-poverty neighborhood to charter management organizations. ³
Charter schools will help minimize district transportation costs. (Massachusetts law mandates the district provide transportation to charter school students.)	Charter schools have emphasized recruiting students from surrounding neighborhoods in order to lower transportation costs for the district and build community. Some charter schools have also altered start and end times to align with local district schools to reduce transportation costs.
Facilitate learning communities and shared professional development for district and charter teachers, instructional leaders, and school heads.	Teacher leaders and administrators from charter and district schools participated in the Harvard Graduate School of Education’s instructional rounds network. The network brought school delegations into colleagues’ classrooms to observe and debrief, and participants discussed instructional challenges in their schools.
Identify a tool and establish a process for evaluating the efficacy of individual schools, making recommendations for expanding successful programs or school turnaround plans, and closing schools as needed.	
Increase the number of high-performing teachers and leaders joining district and charter public schools by working with a local degree-granting and/or residency program.	

1. See this compact on CRPE’s website.

2. Learn more about Boston’s Compact Steering Committee.

3. See the “BPS and Uncommon Schools Lease Agreement.”

Challenges and Next Steps

Boston was one of seven cities that shared \$25 million from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for continued compact work. This \$3 million dollar boost will ensure that the compact steering committee is staffed with a full-time coordinator and will allow the city to push forward on several original as well as some newly added compact agreements.⁴ They include focused attention on the academic achievement of the city's African American male students and the approximately one-in-three English language learner students, and an increase in the number of effective school leaders through the establishment of a school leadership pipeline.⁵ Given the progress to date, it is easy to understand why Boston received additional funding from the foundation, yet there is no shortage of challenges in the city. Some charter school leaders believe that while they are building good relationships, they are giving more than they are getting. Given their autonomy and freedom from regulations, charter schools can move faster than the district, which can lead to an imbalance of progress. There has been much talk of a shared accountability system, but progress has been slow. School leaders have opted to begin this work by forming relationships and trust across sectors, hoping a shared commitment to a common accountability tool will ease the implementation and help quell controversy. These early conversations have led to eight "School Performance Partnerships" that connect a district and charter and in some cases a Catholic school to work together on tasks such as aligning curricula to the Common Core. In the spirit of the compact, but not listed as an agreement, Boston has aligned school enrollment calendars. This was the first step toward Denver-like universal enrollment, but most agree there is a very long way to go.

4. See CRPE's webinar, "Pushing Compact Results from the Outside."

5. See CRPE's webinar, "How District and Charter Schools Coordinate Supports for English Language Learners: Lessons from Boston."