



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

**Date Signed: December 2010**

**Number of Students: 78,651 (2010-2011)**

**Percent of Charter School Students to All Public School Students: 10.9%**

**Charter Authorizer: Denver Public Schools**

**School District Governing Body: Elected board**

### Overview

Signing the district-charter collaboration compact reaffirmed Denver Public School’s longstanding commitment to using charter schools as a way to improve student performance across all schools. District and charter leaders have worked together to complete a unified school enrollment system that was initiated in 2009, increase the number of students with severe special needs in charter schools, and launch school-level partnerships to share instructional practices. Though Denver serves as a leader in compact implementation, large barriers remain. The charter sector does not fully buy in to the current compact work, which critics argue only reflects the district’s agenda. When they signed the compact, charter leaders expressed great concern over transparency and autonomy over special education funding and services, an area that has seen limited progress since. Implementation pressure will stay high as external reform organizations continue to push district and charter leaders to work together.

### Key Compact Agreements

### Big Wins

Help the most effective schools reach substantially greater levels of scale; commit to locating new schools in the highest-need areas.	Simpler charter school renewal process for high-performing charter schools.
Implement a common and coordinated choice enrollment system; charters commit to ensure that midyear-entry students are provided equitable access to schools across the district.	Launch of SchoolChoice, a unified school enrollment system in which families choose schools through the same application. <sup>2</sup>
Ensure equity regarding special education.	Several charter schools host centers for the highest-need special education students. <sup>3</sup>
All students have access to adequate facilities and equitable resources, including per-pupil revenue and all other district resources.	High percentage of charters continue to be located in district space (approximately 50%); charter schools’ facilities agreements with the district moved from an annual to a contractual process (with five-year renewals); improved charter school funding mechanism for pre-K.
Commit to a market-driven system that allows charters to solicit bids for services.	
Share timely access to longitudinal data systems and data warehouses; charter schools commit to keeping data accurate and current.	
Refine and improve the School Performance Framework. <sup>4</sup>	
Close or restructure the lowest-performing schools.	Continue to close low-performing schools.
Publish progress reports specifying core actions and specific impact of compact efforts over first 12-15 months of the effort.	
Implement a parent engagement strategy that effectively communicates the strengths of approved district-run and charter schools.	

### Challenges and Next Steps

Many new collaboration projects are underway, and compact leaders have a lot to decide and learn during implementation. Will district leaders fulfill their commitment to support charter leaders with full flexibility as they take on programs for students with severe special needs? Can district and charter schools successfully share instructional practices under different environments, and what, if any, are the right pairs of schools to do so? Both of these collaborations, however, affect only a small number of charter schools. A larger challenge will be implementing policies that level the playing field and create sustainability for the charter sector beyond the current administration. Right now, the success of major reforms hinges on whether supportive board members are reelected in the next election. Charter school expansion, facilities sharing, and full charter financial equity continue to be contentious school board issues.

1. [See this compact on CRPE’s website.](#)

2. See CRPE’s webinar, “[How District and Charter Schools Coordinate Enrollment: Practical Experiences from New Orleans and Denver.](#)”

3. See CRPE’s webinar, “[How District and Charter Schools Coordinate Supports for Students with Special Needs: Lessons from Denver and Los Angeles.](#)”

4. See the “[Denver High School Performance Framework Rubric.](#)”