



Hartford District-Charter Collaboration Compact¹

Date Signed: December 2010

Number of Students: 22,228 (2010-2011)

Percent of Charter School Students to All Public School Students: 5.7%

Charter Authorizer: Connecticut Department of Education

School District Governing Body: Mayor appoints most school board members, the rest are elected

Overview

Years of frequent superintendent turnover, poor performance, and alarmingly large gaps in achievement between white and minority students spurred an otherwise status quo school board into hiring the pro-reform Steven Adamowski in late 2006. Adamowski swiftly instituted a series of reforms and was a vocal supporter of high-performing charter schools. He paved the way for a cabinet member, Christina Kishimoto, to succeed him and to continue to implement the reforms, which had been followed by several years of steady growth in student performance. Although the Hartford School District is home to just a handful of charter schools, enrolling under 6 percent of the district's public school students, Kishimoto welcomed the opportunity to build on her school district's history of collaboration. She continued a practice established by Adamowski to supplement state charter school funding and was a key voice supporting state legislation to increase state dollars for charters. She also advocated for a local high-performing charter school to take over a chronically failing district high school. Through the compact the district has invited Achievement First, a charter network that operates two schools in the city, to provide residencies in both sectors, intense individual coaching, and weekly professional development seminars aimed at training district teachers to assume leadership roles.²

Key Compact Agreements

Big Wins

Charter schools to actively share best practices to build capacity of district schools.	Achievement First has opened up their effective leadership training program to district teachers.
Ensure transparency and accountability regarding student demographics, mobility, and achievement.	
Leverage district benefits of economies of scale with charter school sector.	
Collaboratively work to remove barriers to charter school success and expansion, such as charter caps and funding limitations.	District superintendent wrote open letter to legislators publicly advocating for legislation to increase charter school funding, and the measure passed.
Jointly pursue accountability across all schools, including working to close or reconstitute persistently low-performing schools.	District successfully advocated with the state for a local charter management organization to take over chronically failing district high school.

Challenges and Next Steps

In terms of a climate for bold change, the wind appears to be at Hartford's back. The new state education commissioner is the founder of Hartford's Achievement First charter management organization and a strong supporter of the reform work exemplified in the city. In December 2012, Hartford learned that it was awarded nearly \$5 million in continued Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation compact funding, the highest amount of all seven winners. Their proposal outlined a plan to build on the compact's wins to date as well as to embark on new collaborative efforts. The highly successful Achievement First leadership training program has helped the district prepare strong new principals, and the RFP funding will allow Hartford to further expand the program. The district also plans to partner with Achievement First to provide instructional support for teachers, and to work jointly to develop a curriculum and assessment tool aligned to the Common Core. There is a strong need in Hartford, as in many other cities, to find turnaround principals, but Connecticut's restrictive certification laws limit the city's ability to recruit effective, experienced principals from outside the state. Working in partnership with the Commissioner's Network (the state's school turnaround initiative), the district hopes to capitalize on the growing expertise of its high-performing charter schools to develop and train principals to turn around chronically low-performing schools.

1. See this compact on CRPE's website.

2. See CRPE's webinar, "Residencies for Leaders and Teachers: Lessons from Connecticut and Minneapolis." See also "Achievement First Residency Program for School Leadership Seminar: Framework."