



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

**Date Signed: December 2011**

**Number of Students: 206,779 (2010-2011)**

**Percent of Charter School Students to All Public School Students: 19.5%**

**Charter Authorizers: Pennsylvania Department of Education, Philadelphia School Reform Commission**

**School District Governing Body: School board appointed by mayor and governor**

### Overview

The School District of Philadelphia (SDP) has seen its share of reforms over the years, and some wonder if (and even hope that) the compact will be added to the list of efforts that have come and gone. Numerous charter operators have been taken to court on charges of fraud or worse, further fueling the distrust and antagonism some feel toward the city’s autonomous schools. However, compact committee members, who include representatives from high-quality charter schools and the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, claim that the momentum around the compact agreements is unprecedented. There is even a sense that its message—that quality matters and governance does not—has begun to percolate in schools and neighborhoods. The city’s mayor, Michael Nutter, ran and was reelected on a platform of improving the school system and early on indicated an intention to include the charter sector in the conversation. The compact likely played a role in the school board recruiting candidates for the superintendency who had a track record of and strong belief in collaborating across sectors. The School Reform Commission (i.e. school board) has taken a lead role in the compact work. The Philadelphia School Partnership (PSP), a strong consortium of local philanthropic organizations, has guided the compact work and will continue to serve as the fiscal agent for the recent \$2.5 million Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation award.<sup>2</sup> The PSP has helped raise tens of millions of dollars of private money to support the reform efforts. This broad support was built on some early compact momentum, including a big win around shared professional development. Mastery Charter Schools, a homegrown and highly successful charter management organization, has partnered with the district to provide professional development to teachers at district schools.

### Key Compact Agreements

### Big Wins

Collaboratively develop, consistently implement, and make accessible to all stakeholders a transparent performance framework.	
Create consistent and transparent processes that will enable access to funding and facilities for all schools.	
Provide resources and supports to high-quality schools to encourage their expansion.	District expanded enrollment at over a dozen high-performing schools by more than 2,000 students.
Provide feedback and support to chronically low-performing schools; failure to improve after a probationary period can result in closure.	Board recently voted to close four low-performing charter schools and eight schools that were under-enrolled.
Share best practices across sectors on how to provide high-quality options for special education students and English language learners.	Mastery Charter Schools developed and piloted the Teacher Effectiveness Institute, a professional development program for teachers.
Pursue a system on universal enrollment.	
School Reform Commission will establish a new Office of Charter Schools.	

### Challenges and Next Steps

The dire financial status of the SDP is difficult to overstate. During the past summer, the district floated \$300 million of debt just to maintain school operations. In recent months the new superintendent has made a slew of public appearances to announce the closure of 37 school buildings. Although finances played a role in the decisions to close the schools, under-enrollment and, in some cases, weak performance was also a factor. The School Reform Commission and district continue to rely on the compact as a guide and a frame for decision-making. As laid out in the compact and in the RFP, the work moving forward will focus on expanding high-performing district and charter schools and closing and reconstituting schools that have not performed well over time. One of the first schools up for closure is the 100-year-old chronically struggling Germantown High School, and parents and students have begun to position themselves for a fight. Decisions like this, driven by the overarching goal of replacing 50,000 low-performing seats by 2017, will test the compact and its signers. Equally controversial is the planned overhaul of the district’s Office of Charter Schools. Pressures from charter schools to make it more welcoming conflict with pressures from many in the community who see front page headlines of fraud and believe it needs to move in the other direction.

1. See this compact on CRPE’s website.

2. See CRPE’s webinar, “Pushing Compact Results from the Outside.”