MID-ATLANTIC COMPREHENSIVE CENTER

WestEd

Putting Students First

Profiles of District-Charter Collaboration in the District of Columbia and Massachusetts

Robin Chait, WestEd
Carol Keirstead, RMC Research Corporation

D.C. ❋ MARYLAND ❋ NEW JERSEY

DELAWARE ❋ PENNSYLVANIA

The Mid-Atlantic Comprehensive Center (MACC@WestEd) is part of a federal technical assistance network of 15 Regional Comprehensive Centers and seven supporting Content Centers. This network of centers works closely with the Regional Educational Laboratories and other technical assistance providers to ensure effective coordination of services to SEAs and their constituents. The U.S. Department of Education selected WestEd to operate the MACC in October 2012 to provide direct assistance to the states of Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia. MACC@WestEd works in partnership with states in building their capacity to implement state-level initiatives and support district- and school-level efforts intended to improve education outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, and raise the quality of instruction.

WestEd is a nonpartisan, nonprofit research, development, and service agency that partners with education and other communities throughout the United States and abroad to promote excellence, achieve equity, and improve learning for children, youth, and adults. WestEd has more than a dozen offices nationwide, from Massachusetts, Vermont, Georgia, and Washington, DC, to Arizona and California, with headquarters in San Francisco. For more information, visit WestEd.org or call 415.565.3000.

WestEd
WestEd.org

Table of Contents

Conclusion   39

Acknowledgments   39

List of Tables

Introduction

A growing body of research has found that, when done well, collaboration between the traditional public school sector and the charter school sector has the potential to improve school quality in both types of schools, as well as to support families in accessing the school options that are right for their children.[1] Although cross-sector collaboration is complex and requires a major investment of time and resources for all involved, when done well, the payoff for students and families is significant.[2]

Leveraging Strengths to Solve Sector-Specific Challenges. Each of these two sectors has unique challenges, and each has something to offer the other to help address those challenges. For example, many charter schools struggle to find suitable facilities. Some traditional public schools struggle to create a culture of high expectations, which many charter schools are able to create by virtue of their singular missions and visions.[3] In collaborative relationships, traditional school districts can offer charter schools space in district buildings, and charter schools can provide non-charter schools professional learning on school culture.

Addressing Common Challenges. Traditional public schools and charter schools also share some challenges that can be resolved more effectively with cross-sector solutions. For example, both sectors strive to serve highly mobile students, address issues of chronic absence, and provide students with access to mental health services. By working together, schools can better leverage resources, ideas, and innovations from one sector or the other to serve their common purposes.

Coordinating to Support Families. In cities or districts that serve significant numbers of students in schools of choice, coordination and collaboration are necessary to ensure that families have the information and resources that they

---

[1] See, for example, Lake, R., Yatsko, S., Gill, S., & Opalka, A. (2017). *Bridging the district-charter divide to help more students succeed.* Seattle, WA: Center for Reinventing Public Education (CRPE). Retrieved from https://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/crpe-bridging-district-charter-divide.pdf; Maas, T., & Lake, R. (2018). *Passing notes: Learning from efforts to share instructional practices across district-charter Lines.* Seattle, WA: CRPE. Retrieved from https://www.crpe.org/publications/passing-notes-share-instructional-practices-across-district-charter-lines.

[2] Lake et al. (2017).

[3] Whitmire, R. (2014, Fall). Inside successful district-charter compacts. *EducationNext, 14*(4). Retrieved from https://www.educationnext.org/inside-successful-district-charter-compacts/

need in order to make good decisions about the best schools for their children.[4] Charter-rich environments create logistical issues for families, which must be addressed districtwide if those families are to benefit from school choice.[5] For example, common lotteries and school reporting systems ensure that families have information in one place about all school options.

These brief profiles provide an overview of several cross-sector initiatives in the District of Columbia and in Massachusetts. In both places, the traditional public school sector and the charter school sector have come together in multiple initiatives to improve students' education experiences and outcomes. The particular efforts profiled herein, chosen because they have experienced successes, range in focus from joint professional development to sharing data to providing families with information about school choice options. These profiles were developed so that other states and districts can learn from the substance of these initiatives, as well as from the processes that the District of Columbia and Massachusetts undertook to design and implement them.

Both profiles are based on a materials review and on interviews with leaders and others in both sectors.

---

[4] Lake et al. (2017).

[5] Ibid., p. 10.

District of Columbia

This profile of cross-sector collaboration in the District of Columbia (DC, or "the District") touches on several initiatives that were developed with one or more of the following purposes: facilitating students' knowledge about and equitable access to all school options; sharing data in order to better meet students' needs; and improving the quality of academic programs. The profile draws, in part, from interviews with current and former leaders from the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE); DC's Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB); the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS), the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME), Raise DC (a nonprofit District-based organization that facilitates cross-sector alignment among local stakeholders to improve education from cradle to career); and individual charter schools. The profile does not describe all cross-sector education efforts in DC, of which there are many, but focuses on six collaborations: four Districtwide and two school-level.

The first following section provides a description of DC's complex education governance system. The second and third include brief descriptions of the six collaborations. Following a summary of cross-sector efforts in the District, the final section provides insights and lessons on which others can reflect and act.

The DC Landscape

DC's public education landscape is unique in many ways. Public education is controlled by the District's mayor, who oversees both the traditional public school system, which operates through DCPS, and the charter school system, which includes individual charter schools and management organizations that operate a range of charter schools. Although DC is not a state, OSSE functions as a state education agency, managing federal funds and ensuring compliance with federal education laws for all of DC's public schools — both traditional schools overseen by DCPS and charter schools. The chancellor of DCPS and the state superintendent (i.e., the leader of OSSE) both report to the DME. The mayor appoints the members of DC PCSB, which is independent of DCPS and which authorizes charter schools in DC. Friends of Choice in Urban Schools (FOCUS) is another key player in the education landscape with respect to charter schools; it advocates for and provides support services to DC's charter schools.

The District's first charter school opened its doors in 1996,[6] after Congress passed the District of Columbia School Reform Act; since then, DC's charter sector has grown rapidly. As of early 2019, there are 66 local education agencies (LEAs) operating 123 charter schools, which serve 47.4 percent of District students, and DCPS operates 115 traditional public schools, which serve 52.6 percent of District students.[7]

Student enrollment in both sectors has increased over the last decade, an indication of local families' growing confidence in their public schools. After an enrollment low of 70,922 students in 2008/09, total public school enrollment (including both sectors) rose, to 91,537 in 2017/18. In 2017/18, about half (24,072) of DCPS students attended a school other than their assigned "in boundary" school, which is based on where they live.[8] Students may attend their in-boundary school or apply to another DCPS school that is out-of-boundary or to any public charter school in the District.

Over the past decade, DC's public school students have made steady gains in academic achievement. Perhaps the best measure of this is evidence from student scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Results from the latest NAEP administration, in 2017, demonstrate that the District's traditional and charter public schools have improved faster than those in any state over the past decade. Traditional and charter schools in the District have improved at about the same rate. [9]

More recently, both traditional and charter public schools in the District have also seen steady improvement on the Districtwide Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments. Between 2015 and 2018, scores for students in the District's public schools rose 8.5 percentage points

---

[6] District of Columbia Public Charter School Board. (2019). *About us*. Retrieved from https://www.dcpcsb.org/about-us

[7] Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). (2018). *Audit and verification of student enrollment for the 2017–18 school year*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/2017-18 School Year Audit and Verification of Student Enrollment Report - Feb 2018.pdf

[8] Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education. (2018). *Cross-sector collaboration task force report*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from https://dme.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dme/publication/attachments/CSCTF%20Report2018.pdf, 2.12

[9] Osborne, D., & Langhorne, E. (2018, April 16). *Analysis: NAEP scores show D.C. is a leader in educational improvement — with powerful lessons for other cities*. The74. Retrieved from https://www.the74million.org/article/analysis-naep-scores-show-d-c-is-a-leader-in-educational-improvement-with-powerful-lessons-for-other-cities/

in English language arts (ELA) and 7.3 percentage points in mathematics, although only about a third of students have been achieving at the college- and career-ready level.[10] While DCPS students overall have performed at a higher level over the last two school years, compared to the District's charter school students,[11] African American students attending charter schools have outperformed African American students in DCPS.[12] Hispanic students have been performing about the same in both sectors. At-risk students attending charter schools also perform at higher levels than at-risk students attending DCPS schools.[13]

Cross-Sector Collaboration in the District

Some of the earliest cross-sector work in the District began when OSSE, DCPS, individual charter schools, and charter management organizations, which serve as LEAs for their charter school(s), came together in 2010 to apply for — and won — a federal Race to the Top grant. In the grant proposal, they agreed to implement a common set of initiatives, such as a common student growth measure and common guidelines for teacher evaluations. The grant proposal also required that OSSE staff convene several cross-sector task forces (e.g., a human capital task force and a student growth task force) to engage DCPS, DC PCSB, and charter school leaders to work together. The purposes of the human capital task force were to develop guidelines for teacher and leader evaluation systems and to share best practices in implementing human capital strategies. The purpose of the student growth task force was to plan implementation of the common student growth metric for schools participating in the grant activities. The student growth task force was one of the District's first collaborative data initiatives. It is likely that the work that educators began as part of the Race to

---

[10] Office of the State Superintendent of Education. (2018). *DC's 2018 PARCC results*. Retrieved from https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/2018 PARCC Results Release %28Aug. 16, 2018%29.pdf

[11] Ibid., p. 33; For example, in grades 3–8 ELA, 32.1 percent of DCPS students met or exceeded standards, while 29.5 percent of charter students met or exceeded standards, in 2017; for 2018, the percentages were 35.5 and 32.1, respectively.

[12] Ibid., p. 38; For example, overall sector results in ELA indicate that 24.4 percent of African American students in public charter schools met or exceeded standards, compared to 19.9 percent of African American students in DCPS schools, in 2017; in 2018, the percentages were 26.6 and 22.9, respectively.

[13] Ibid., p. 39; For example overall sector results in ELA indicate that 20.3 percent of at-risk students in public charter schools met or exceeded standards, compared to 17 percent of at-risk students in DCPS schools, in 2018.

the Top program laid a foundation for subsequent collaborative work, by building relationships across the two sectors, showing what was possible in terms of cross-sector work, and seeding a habit of collaboration.

My School DC

The proliferation of school choice options for DC students created logistical challenges for families who wanted to take advantage of their new options. In the 1998/99 school year, charter schools only served 5 percent of District students; by 2008/09, that proportion had jumped to 36 percent, and as of 2017/18 it was 47.4 percent.[14] Students in DC are also able to apply for spots at DCPS schools other than their assigned school. It is likely that families from high-poverty communities felt the challenges of choice more acutely, especially those with parents working multiple jobs to make ends meet and having little extra time. To exercise school choice, families first had to figure out how to get information about their school options, and then had to navigate the application and enrollment process(es) of the particular school or schools that they wanted for their children. To address this challenge, DC created My School DC, a common online application and lottery system for its public schools. The system was launched in 2013. As of the 2018/19 school year, 99 percent of LEAs offering traditional prekindergarten (PK3)–to-high-school programs are represented in it, although LEAs' participation is voluntary.

Today, families are using the system to access:

- almost all charter schools (PK3–12);
- DCPS schools outside a student's boundary or feeder pattern for any grade (PK3–12);
- DCPS citywide schools — that is, those that do not have boundaries and are open to all students in the city;
- PK3 or PK4 programs at any DCPS school; and
- DCPS selective high schools and programs (9–12).

Students wishing to attend their in-boundary DCPS school do not need to apply to a school through My School DC. They can directly enroll in their in-boundary school. The one exception is for grades PK3 and PK4, because those grades are not compulsory.

---

[14] OSSE (2018).

My School DC simplifies the entire school choice process so that families only have to navigate one system — first to find out about what public schools are available to their children, and then to apply to their choices. The [My School DC](#) website includes a profile for each school that is available through the lottery. In the My School DC system, all schools share the same application deadline and, with one general exception, the same application form. The exception is DCPS's selective high schools. These schools are represented in the My School DC system, and any student may apply to them, but selection for these schools involves a more elaborate application process and an interview. Systemwide, once applications are submitted, they enter the lottery, which randomly assigns students to schools. Through the lottery process, each student is only assigned to one school and can accept that assignment, enroll in their in-boundary DCPS school, or stay enrolled in their current school.

The charter school sector, specifically the DC PCSB, took the lead in developing My School DC. Leaders in both the traditional and charter school sectors had acknowledged that navigating multiple application and enrollment systems across District schools was challenging for families. Before My School DC, it had been difficult for families to know what all of the school options were. Because, in a practical sense, any option that a family is unaware of is not really an option, families with greater resources (e.g., more knowledge about the education system, more time available for researching schools, greater familiarity with conducting web searches) tended to have more options than other families. Also, prior to My School DC, some schools had earlier deadlines than others. This, too, created equity issues, because families with greater resources tended to be more informed about schools than other families were, and thus were better able to meet the earlier deadlines.

Prior to the common application process, many schools had their own application forms, which meant that families might have to complete multiple forms with the same information. Moreover, some schools required applications to be dropped off in person, while others required that they be mailed, and families had to keep track of multiple school addresses.

DC PCSB wanted the new system to have a common application for all schools, a common application date that was as late in the year as possible, and an electronic application with a "one-click" submission. Although the long-term intent was to have one system that would include *all* public school options, the first stage of implementation was initially envisioned as including only charter schools, with establishment of a common application deadline and an

advertising campaign for all participating charter schools, but the DCPS superintendent at the time was enthusiastic about the project and wanted DCPS schools to be included right away in that first year.

To help develop the system, DC PCSB hired an outside consultant, an education leader who had worked in both sectors and was well respected, and who later became DC's DME. The development project was initially supported by a combination of foundation funding and staff support from DC PCSB and DCPS. The board later hired and supported a project management team from its own budget. That team included a DCPS employee.

As required in its authorizing legislation, My School DC is governed by the Common Lottery Board, whose members include the DME; three charter LEA leaders, elected by their peers; three representatives from DCPS, appointed by the chancellor; and non-voting representatives from the DC PCSB and OSSE. The board reviews the lottery budget, makes decisions about major policy changes, develops the strategic plan, and helps to identify partnerships with organizations that will help to increase the system's effectiveness. In addition, a My School DC parent advisory council, includes representatives of every ward in the District, and meets quarterly to provide feedback on the system and on potential policy changes.

The application and lottery system was originally run by DC PCSB. When it was part of the DME's office, the lottery was funded by that office's budget. Currently, it is funded by OSSE's budget and managed by a team consisting of an executive director and staff.

Those managing the system do a great deal of outreach to ensure that all families are aware of the choice system, the process, the deadlines, and how to apply. The system now has a full-time director of partnerships and engagement, who plans all outreach activities and cultivates relationships with organizations that work with families. Outreach activities include traditional advertising, social media, grassroots canvassing, and partnerships with community-based organizations. The outreach group targets low-income and language-minority families in particular. It also operates a hotline to provide parents information about schools, run by four full-time staff members who are bilingual in English and Spanish and who have access to a language line for live interpretation in other languages.

My School DC is probably the most successful cross-sector initiative in the District. It is now based in OSSE, a government agency, and therefore is a central and permanent mechanism of school choice in the District.

Equity Reports

Between the 2012/13 and 2016/17 school years, DC produced cross-sector Equity Reports to share common data on a set of metrics across all District schools, including both traditional public schools and charter schools. The metrics included enrollment, attendance, graduation rates, suspensions, expulsions, and midyear student mobility. Data for individual schools were disaggregated by demographics, including by racial and ethnic subgroups, and compared to citywide averages for the same populations. This provided families with a way to make apples-to-apples comparisons among DCPS schools and public charter schools. The Equity Reports represented one of the first instances of citywide reporting on discipline and mobility data.

This initiative grew organically out of conversations between DCPS's chief of data and accountability and, on the charter school side, the deputy director of DC PCSB. They realized that they were collecting and reporting on similar data for their respective websites — DCPS through its school report cards, posted on its website, and DC PCSB on its school quality reports for each charter school. They concluded that it would be useful to create a single report that could be usable across schools. At the time, there was no common set of data that parents or community members could use to evaluate schools across sectors. Charter leaders were interested in publicizing their data because they thought the data would challenge perceptions about charter schools — for instance, the perception that charter schools had very high expulsion rates or had higher student mobility, compared to traditional public schools — while DCPS leaders thought their own schools were enrolling the hardest-to-serve students. Given the finger pointing from both sectors, leaders of the two sectors saw a common interest in shedding light on what was really happening in the District, by providing data about the students served by their schools.

Charter leaders and representatives from DCPS and DC PCSB worked together to identify the measures and business rules (i.e., guidelines for using or modifying a particular data element) for the Equity Reports. DCPS and DC PCSB created a working group, which OSSE and DME staff joined as well, to jointly develop the business rules and design and produce the Equity Reports. They hired a third-party consultant to produce the data visualizations that would appear in the

report. After the first year of implementation, OSSE assumed responsibility for production of the reports. With the addition of OSSE to the effort, the group engaged a third-party facilitator, New Schools Venture Fund, to help it come to agreement on the business rules.

The Equity Reports initiative continued to build on the Race to the Top program's efforts toward cross-sector data collection and reporting. The initiative was managed by one of the first cross-sector data governance structures in the District, which included representation from DC PCSB, charter schools, DCPS, OSSE, and the DME's office, with all of these entities providing input for decision-making.

The Equity Reports drew attention to issues of high suspensions and expulsions in some schools, as well as high student mobility citywide. The Council of the District of Columbia, DC's legislative body, subsequently attempted to address these challenges through passage of the Student Fair Access to School Amendment Act of 2018, which limits out-of-school suspension of students in kindergarten through eighth grade to serious safety incidents and bans its utilization for minor offenses in high school.

The 2016-17 Equity Report was the last one and moving forward the equity data will no longer be published in a stand-alone report. Instead, they are being subsumed by DC's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Report Cards, which are required by the U.S. Department of Education for individual states and for the District. The District's ESSA report card will include many, but not all, of the original data elements. The report cards are hosted on an interactive website with full school profiles, which are separate from the profiles included on the My School DC website. The District's ESSA report card will be the first time that every school in the District will be assessed using the same accountability system, and will include a comprehensive report with the same information on every school in the District.

Bridge to High School Data Exchange and Kid Talk

The Bridge to High School Data Exchange is a cross-sector initiative that focuses on sharing student-level data between middle schools and high schools, including both traditional and charter schools, to support students' transition from eighth grade into ninth grade. As part of the data exchange, participating middle schools agree to provide student-level data on their graduating ninth graders who will be enrolling in a participating high school. OSSE also provides participating high schools with data that it maintains, including demographic,

attendance, and standardized-test data. The data exchange grew out of research, commissioned by cross-sector leaders in 2014, that analyzed DC students' pathways to high school graduation, their outcomes, and when and why students fall off the graduation track. The final graduation pathways report[15] included a number of critical findings, including that half of the District's ninth grade students were already off track. The authors identified seven factors that were predictive of not graduating on time and that were observable by a student's eighth grade year: special education status in grade 8, limited English proficiency in grade 8, overage at high school entry, basic or below basic performance on grade 8 DC Comprehensive Assessment System, suspensions before high school, absences, and course failures before high school. The graduation pathways report articulated a clear need to identify off-track students early and to provide them with academic and social support in their ninth grade year.

Raise DC, a nonprofit District-based organization, took those findings to heart. In response, it began convening its 9th Grade Counts Network (9GCN), bringing together LEAs that had already started addressing the issue of transition, to find out what these LEAs were learning and what they needed. As a group, 9GCN participants noted their need to receive more timely quantitative and qualitative information that would allow them to serve incoming ninth graders well. They wanted a systemic, citywide way of sharing data between middle and high schools, regardless of each school's LEA, and Raise DC was uniquely positioned to pilot a collaborative data-sharing effort of this sort because of its work facilitating cross-sector initiatives.

Raise DC's deputy director at the time began working with OSSE staff who were interested in figuring out what the state's role might be in supporting the middle-to-high-school transition. 9GCN and OSSE partnered to design and pilot a data-sharing initiative, which eventually led to the broader Bridge to High School Data Exchange. The partners focused first on the factors that the *graduation pathways report* had identified as predictive of students not graduating on time. Because participating schools would be sharing student-level data, Raise DC and OSSE staff also worked through student privacy issues. Lawyers from OSSE and from the U.S. Department of Education helped to develop data-sharing

---

[15] Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education. (2014). *District of Columbia Graduation Pathways Project summary*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from https://dme.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dme/publication/attachments/DME_GradPathways_FinalReport_20140924_vF.pdf

procedures that were compliant with Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act protections.

Middle schools participating in the Bridge to High School Data Exchange are required to submit students' final grades (with course names for eighth grade mathematics and English); final interim assessment data (e.g., MAP, ANet, or i-Ready); and, optionally, anecdotal information about students' strengths. OSSE then provides the receiving high schools with additional standardized data (e.g. demographic information, special-education status, English learner status, attendance, and PARCC scores) for each incoming student. In addition to facilitating the exchange of quantitative data about individual students, Raise DC and OSSE facilitate another kind of data exchange through an annual Kid Talk event before school starts. In the Kid Talk, staff from participating middle and high schools come together to share and discuss information about their transitioning students and to determine strategies for supporting these students through their ninth-grade year. The Kid Talk conversations follow a structured protocol.

After three years of running the Bridge to High School Data Exchange and seeing the initiative grow to 98 percent participation among DC middle and high schools, Raise DC is transitioning management of this work to a full-time OSSE staff member. The movement to OSSE management will allow the program to receive government funding, making it more sustainable.

Cross-Sector Task Force

In the 2013/14 school year, the DME's office and the DME-appointed DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment led a comprehensive review of the city's student assignment process, which resulted in revised boundaries for DCPS students. One recommendation resulting from the review was that the city convene a cross-sector body, representing the traditional public school and charter school sectors, to identify areas in which public education in the District could benefit from cross-sector collaboration. In addition, when the new mayor of the District took office in 2015, one of her personal initiatives was to increase cross-sector collaboration. The mayor appointed a cross-sector task force, which was housed in the DME's office and began working in 2016, with its final recommendations released in November 2018.

The task force spent most of its time in two working groups, one focused on improving outcomes for at-risk students and the other focused on the opening, closing, and siting of schools. The groups met for about two years, examined

research, heard expert testimony, and developed action-oriented recommendations for addressing these issues. In addition, the task force initiated two communities of practice — one focused on attendance and the other on trauma-informed practice — and two pilot projects that grew out of the task force meetings.

The first pilot project, which was managed by My School DC staff, was aimed at centralizing all midyear transfers and enrollment through My School DC. There had not previously been a centralized process for transferring, so students who wanted to change schools would usually transfer to their neighborhood school, without necessarily considering other options. A centralized process would allow the District to collect information on why students were transferring and to provide these students with information about school options throughout the city. During the pilot, My School DC collected useful information about the underlying causes of midyear transfers: the four reasons identified as driving midyear transfers for students who were not moving away were safety, current school culture, current school academics, and transportation-related challenges. Because the pilot project proved challenging for both school sectors, the task force opted to not continue it. One challenge was that, because school funding is based on an October 5 enrollment audit, charter schools are not financially incentivized to enroll students after that date, although DCPS schools must accept in-boundary students at any time. Another challenge was that the most popular schools in both sectors had long wait lists and, therefore, did not have room for midyear transfers.

The second pilot project, managed by the DME's office, also involved student transfers, specifically transfers for reasons of safety. The vision of the project was to provide students in crisis with better access to timely and appropriate options for midyear placement, in either a DCPS school or a charter school. In the past, midyear placements had typically been in DCPS schools, and the task force hoped to expand midyear transfer students' access to charters, with the hope of assisting students in finding the school that best matched their needs, thereby providing a more stable environment for the student. The DME's office convened a working group consisting of My School DC, DCPS, and four charter LEAs to advise on the pilot.

Two of the implementation challenges for the student safety project were identifying how LEAs could best transfer information about students in need and then facilitating the transfer. The group ultimately decided that the DCPS Student Placement Office (SPO) was best positioned to manage the process, given that

it was already administering midyear transfers for students who were crime victims. In that role, the SPO already worked closely with the police department and received information about gangs and other neighborhood conflicts and dynamics. The plan in the new initiative was that the SPO would work with a student's current school to verify that the criteria for a transfer were satisfied and that the student and the student's family were interested in transferring. Then, the SPO would contact participating charter LEAs and DCPS schools to determine whether a placement was possible. In that process, the SPO would also collect information about the dynamics on the ground at the potential transfer school, to ensure that it would be a good fit for the student.

The second pilot project was not successful for a couple of reasons. First, few charter schools in general — and particularly few high schools, the grade levels where most transfers were needed — participated. Second, the SPO and charter LEAs had difficulty communicating and trusting each other with sensitive information about students. In addition to issues related to sharing student information, the time constraints inherent in potential safety transfers further complicated the internal review process for many LEAs.

Although both pilot projects ended after one year, they both yielded helpful information about how such programs might work better in the future.

The two communities of practice established through the task force have been very valuable to participants and continue to meet. The DME's office manages a community of practice focused on attendance. Representatives from traditional and charter schools meet monthly to share knowledge and to learn from experts about best practices for improving student attendance and addressing chronic absenteeism. The community of practice is part of a broader cross-sector effort, led by DME, called Every Day Counts, which includes a citywide task force, a public campaign, and support for a variety of attendance programs. The other community of practice focuses on trauma-informed practice and is a collaboration among the DME's office, Education Forward DC, Relay Graduate School of Education, Georgetown MedStar, and Turnaround for Children. From September 2018 to June 2019, more than 25 assistant principals are meeting to learn about trauma-informed practices. The assistant principals are also developing and implementing action-research projects centered around these practices. This collaborative is preparing future leaders in both sectors who are knowledgeable about trauma-informed practice.

School-Level Initiatives

The citywide cross-sector initiatives have focused primarily on sharing data, providing information to families, and other systemic coordination activities to better serve students. There have been several school-level cross-sector initiatives as well, focused on improving teaching and learning. The two school-level initiatives described in the following sections were incentivized by federal dollars — the first with Race to the Top funding and the second with Charter Schools Program Dissemination Grant funding — and probably would not have occurred without external funding. As educators involved with the initiatives realized, collaboration takes time and resources, and is difficult to manage in addition to the regular business of running programs and initiatives within a school.

Cross-Sector Professional Learning

Using Race to the Top funding, OSSE awarded E. L. Haynes Public Charter School (E.L. Haynes) a grant to support a cross-sector lesson study collaborative—the DC Common Core Collaborative (Collaborative). Functioning as a professional learning community, participating teachers from across the District, in both the traditional and charter sectors, engaged in a lesson-study process to help them improve their instructional strategies and, in the process, to develop effective lessons that all DC teachers could then use to differentiate instruction and help students meet the Common Core State Standards. The Collaborative addressed a particular need to provide educators at small schools — many of which had only one or two teachers in a particular grade level or content area — with a professional learning experience with peers. The Collaborative brought together about 200 participants from 22 traditional and public charter school campuses between 2011 and 2014. The group used LearnZillion as its technology platform for sharing videos.

An E. L. Haynes project director led the effort, organizing teams of teachers in the same content areas and grade levels to work together. Each team had a facilitator and engaged in a six-month cycle of professional learning using a lesson-study protocol. At the end of the cycle, each team produced a short video summarizing the key instructional strategies that they developed for their content area. LearnZillion hosted the videos and also provided content experts to work with the teacher teams. As it turned out, many of the videos were not of sufficient quality for posting publicly; thus, instead of relying on their videos, many teams shared their learning in person at an annual conference, hosted by E. L. Haynes, that included teachers who had not participated in the

collaborative and who wanted to learn more about effective instructional strategies.

Unfortunately, the collaborative ended when the funding ended. However, another charter school, Two Rivers Public Charter Schools (Two Rivers), has been hosting an annual "Evening of Learning," with presenters from schools throughout the District. Although the Two Rivers initiative is not a direct outgrowth of the Collaborative, it continues the effort to engage DC traditional and charter schools in learning together. In this initiative, the LEA invites teachers to submit proposals to offer seminars on topics related to inquiry-based learning, and then selects the highest-quality sessions. For example, last year's sessions included "Problem-Based Tasks in Math: Turning Thinking Over to the Students" and "Synthesizing the Grapple: Orchestrating Effective Discussion Post–Problem Solving." Staff from several DCPS schools have presented, but most presenters have been from charter schools. However, District- and school-level educators from both sectors are invited to come and learn. The event is free and is typically attended by about 50 educators. The annual event includes 12 or 13, ninety-minute seminars, from which participants choose one to attend. Two Rivers also hosts a networking reception afterward and pays for the whole event.

Supporting English Learners

Beginning in 2012, the English as a Second Language (ESL) department of Center City Public Charter Schools (Center City) implemented an after-school language development program called ESL After the Bell. The program develops students' language skills, using a cross-curricular, Common Core–aligned curriculum. Additionally, ESL After the Bell promotes family engagement and participation, through parent meetings, celebrations, and projects that support learning at home. Each year, the program focuses on a different theme. In the 2018/19 school year, for example, students have been investigating how their community can become more responsible for the environment, water, and food sources to sustain a growing global population. Since the program started, English learners at Center City schools have consistently approached or met expectations on the Districtwide PARCC assessments in both ELA and mathematics at a higher rate than their English learner peers across the District.

In 2017, OSSE awarded Center City a two-year, federally funded Charter Schools Program Dissemination Grant to expand its ESL After the Bell programming to one of the District's traditional public schools, H. D. Cooke Elementary School. The ESL program manager at Center City leads a team that develops the curriculum

each year and shares it with H. D. Cooke. The ESL program manager trained the program lead at H. D. Cooke and provides monthly technical support. Center City also provides all of the resources that H. D. Cooke needs to run its program, such as templates for attendance trackers, guidelines for incentive programs, and instructional materials. The dissemination grant also paid for joint professional learning in effective strategies for teaching English learner students as well as training in project-based learning (through the Buck Institute). The program has worked equally well at H. D. Cooke as it has at Center City. After the first year of implementation at H. D. Cooke (2017–18), the percent of its English learner students who were approaching or meeting expectations on PARCC's English language arts assessment grew to 54 percent in 2018, up from 44 percent in the prior year. While this growth cannot be attributed solely to ESL After the Bell, staff at H. D. Cooke believe that the program contributed to that growth.

This collaboration, and the resulting positive working relationship between the two schools, would likely not have happened without the dissemination grant. The two schools likely would not have initiated the collaboration on their own, because providing resources from a charter school to a DCPS school is time-consuming, costly, and logistically challenging. Center City's ESL program manager attributes the success of the collaboration to the positive working relationships between staff at both schools and to the fact that H. D. Cooke's principal and staff value the program and its purpose of supporting English learners and, therefore, have been committed to implementing the program with fidelity.

Summary of District of Columbia's Cross-Sector Efforts

The District of Columbia's cross-sector efforts are intended to achieve two equity purposes: to promote equitable access to schools for all students, and to improve school quality for all students across sectors. The table below shows how each of the various efforts has worked in support of each of these purposes.

Table 1. Addressing Issues of Equity through Cross-Sector Work in the District of Columbia: Summary of Initiatives

Initiative	Equitable Access to Schools	Improving Educational Quality for All
My School DC	• Provides a common online application and lottery system for traditional public and charter schools • Provides families information about all of their school options in one location • Includes profiles of all participating schools	
Equity Reports	• Provided common data on a set of metrics across all District schools to provide families with a way to make apples-to-apples comparisons among DCPS and charter schools	• Provided common data on a set of metrics that District schools could use to inform strategies for improving the quality of academic and school cultural programs
Bridge to High School Data Exchange and Kid Talk		• Provides quantitative and qualitative data about students transitioning from middle to high school, so the receiving schools can better serve their new students • Facilitates conversations about individual studentstransitioning from middle to high schools, to determine strategies for supporting students
Cross-Sector Task Force	• Launched two pilot projects to improve the process for students making midyear transitions to new schools	• Created a community of practice focused on attendance in which representatives from traditional and charter schools meet monthly to share best practices • Created a community of practice to teach assistant principals in both sectors about trauma-informed practice
Cross-Sector Professional Learning		• Created a professional learning community for teachers from traditional public schools and charter schools to develop effective lessons that help students meet the Common Core State Standards • EL Haynes hosted an annual conference for members of the professional learning community to present what they learned to teachers from across the District • Two Rivers hosts an annual "Evening of Learning" for teachers from traditional public schools and charter schools to take seminars on inquiry-based learning

Initiative	Equitable Access to Schools	Improving Educational Quality for All
Supporting English Learners		• Center City Public Charter School partners with a traditional DCPS school to share its successful, after school language development program for English learners • H.D. Cooke is in its second year of implementing the program successfully (in 2018–19)

Insights and Lessons Learned

The District's range of cross-sector initiatives offers substantive ideas that other practitioners can draw from, as well as lessons to inform the design of future collaborative efforts, whether in DC or elsewhere. These initiatives also suggest ideas for state strategies to foster collaboration between traditional public schools and charter schools.

A Clear, Shared Purpose Focused on Students and Families Facilitates Collaboration

All of the cross-sector collaborative efforts previously described in this profile were motivated by a shared purpose that was clear and tangible and focused on improving education for students and their families. The collaborators came together because they had a shared goal that would not be attainable on their own and because they recognized that the only way to progress beyond the status quo was to collaborate. All partner staff interviewed for this profile cited the importance of being clear about the collaboration's purpose and how participation would benefit not only the partners, but students and families. This shared purpose is critical, in part, because, when obstacles or conflicts arise, the best motivation for pushing forward is participants' commitment to that purpose. If all participants are on board with a priority, it is easier for the parties to compromise and make concessions.

Trust and Relationship Building Are Critical to Success

All of the people interviewed for this profile spoke about the importance of trust and relationship building in sustaining a successful cross-sector initiative. One of the pilot projects initiated by the cross-sector task force failed, in part, because of lack of trust between the parties involved. The necessary trust may not come naturally. Because traditional public schools and charter schools compete for

students, cross-sector relationships may sometimes start from a place of inherent mistrust. Several interviewees referenced myths believed by each sector about the other, and all interviewees said that doing this work and maintaining the cross-sector nature of the relationships were challenging. Only by starting to actually work together, having regular conversations, and taking small steps to build individual relationships and to bridge barriers can cross-sector partners see beyond the myths and the lack of trust that these myths engender. In several initiatives, individual relationships were critical to launching the initiative. The trust and positive working relationships among two or three individuals can go a long way to help an initiative get off the ground, while subsequent organizational support can ensure sustainability. In some cases, top-down initiatives do not support building relationships or trust. Interviewees recommended starting with small collaborative projects and building trust and relationships among participants before tackling larger, more challenging initiatives. For example, the Race to the Top task forces were a way to start building trust and relationships through smaller cross-sector projects, before tackling larger projects such as the Equity Reports.

Committed Leaders Facilitate Collaboration

Many of the cross-sector initiatives were launched or expanded when leaders identified a problem that would be best solved using a cross-sector approach, and made a commitment to take on the challenge of solving that problem in a collaborative way. For example, leaders at DC PCSB led development of the common lottery when they realized that the existence of multiple enrollment systems was not working for families, and DCPS leaders proved to be equally committed to this cause. In a different example, two city leaders — the mayor and the DME — created the cross-sector task force because they thought it was important that the traditional public school and charter school sectors begin working together to solve common challenges. In both examples, leadership helped to elevate the issue at hand, provide resources to support it, and spur educators in both sectors to come together to address a common challenge.

Governance Structures Ensure Sustainability

Individual entities or schools initiated several of the initiatives and other efforts described in this profile, beginning at the ground level. But no matter how an initiative begins, if it is to become a permanent feature of the education ecosystem, governance structures and permanent funding are needed. Well-conceived governance structures ensure that cross-sector voices have input into

decision-making and that participants in the initiative feel safe and able to trust the process. Several interviewees noted that high staff turnover in urban schools and in government entities can present barriers to sustainable collaboration. A good governance structure can mitigate the effects of this turnover, helping to ensure that collaborations are sustained after the individuals who initiated them move on to other positions, retire, or leave a district.

My School DC, for example, is thriving, in part because it has a permanent governance structure, has government funding, and is based in a government agency. The Equity Reports were launched with a governance structure that included representation from both the traditional and charter sectors, and after OSSE took responsibility for their production, it continued to receive input from stakeholders from both sectors. The Bridge to High School Data Exchange and Kid Talk Initiative is now moving from Raise DC to OSSE, where it will have permanent staffing and funding. Although Raise DC was able to launch and develop the project, staff recognized that moving the program to a government agency would ensure sustainability. The cross-sector task force was housed in the DME's office and involved high-level representation from both sectors as well as from the community. Having key staff from both sectors represented on the task force facilitated the development of actionable recommendations. The DME can now move the recommendations forward, with the knowledge that both sectors are invested in them.

Massachusetts

Massachusetts offers a story of state- and local-level leadership of cross-sector work between the traditional public school and charter school sectors, to create more equitable opportunities and outcomes for the state's students and families. This profile is based, in part, on interviews with charter school leaders and others from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Massachusetts Charter Public School Association (MCPSA), as well as local leaders involved in cross-sector collaboration in Boston. It is by no means an exhaustive look at cross-sector collaboration in Massachusetts, but it points to important lessons from which others can learn and benefit.

The first section of this profile provides an overview of the Massachusetts landscape in relation to cross-sector collaboration. That section is followed by descriptions of roles that state leaders from DESE and MCPSA have played in supporting such collaborations. The third section provides descriptions of cross-sector initiatives in Boston. Following a summary of cross-sector efforts in Massachusetts, the final section provides insights and lessons on which others can reflect and act.

The Massachusetts Landscape

Massachusetts is well known for its success in public education, particularly since the passage of the state's Education Reform Act in 1993. Since 2005, the state's students have annually scored first, or statistically tied for first place, on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests in grades 4 and 8 reading and mathematics.[16] Charter schools have been part of this success story.

The Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) has been granting charters since the authorization of charter schools in the Education Reform Act. BESE ranks as one of the top charter school authorizers in the country, based on an 11-point evaluation of school portfolio and authorizer performance outcomes.[17] Some see its rigorous authorization process as the

---

[16] Education Week. (2018, September 5). State grades on K–12 achievement: Map and rankings. *Education Week*. Retrieved from https://www.edweek.org/ew/collections/quality-counts-2018-state-achievement-success/state-grades-on-k-12-achievement-map-and.html

[17] National Association of Charter School Authorizers. (2018). Leadership, commitment, judgment: Elements of successful charter school Authorizing: Findings from the Quality Practices Project. Chicago, IL: Author. Retrieved from https://www.qualitycharters.org/wp-

foundation for the overall quality of Massachusetts's charter schools, as evidenced, for example, by urban charter schools — especially those in Boston — generally outperforming non-charter district schools in the state. Notable differences between charter schools in Boston and those in other urban districts across the country are also believed to be linked to the rigor with which the state approaches authorization of its charter schools.[18]

According to DESE's Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign, as of October 2018, there were 82 charter schools serving an estimated 48,000 students — almost 5 percent of total public school enrollment — across the state. The high demand for charter schools in the state is reflected in the approximately 32,000 students that remain on charter school wait lists.

Despite the general success of the charter school movement, the deep skepticism about it that has been evident since its inception is alive and well in Massachusetts. In a hotly contested 2016 ballot initiative known as Question 2, a proposed expansion of charter schools in the state was voted down. The measure would have allowed up to 12 new charter schools each year.

Statewide Efforts to Support Cross-Sector Dissemination of Best Practices

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Charter schools operate, in part, to stimulate the development of innovative programs within public education and to provide models that can be replicated in other public schools. To that end, under Massachusetts's charter school statute, a charter school must document to the state's commissioner of elementary and secondary education that it has provided and is disseminating models for replication and best practices for other public schools in the district where the charter school is located.

To support charter schools in their sharing of successful practices, DESE, through its Massachusetts Dissemination Program, offers two-year competitive grants to fuel dissemination of practices and programs that have been developed, tested,

---

content/uploads/2018/03/LJC_Elements_of_Successful_Charter_School_Authorizing_FINAL_02.27.2018.pdf

[18] Moss, E. (2018, February 26). Massachusetts charter schools: Why do they outrank their counterparts across the nation? *Harvard Political Review*. Retrieved from http://harvardpolitics.com/united-states/massachusetts-charter-schools-why-do-they-outrank-their-counterparts-across-the-nation/

and proven successful in Massachusetts's charter schools. DESE bases priorities for the grant competition on statewide needs. Most recently, in its 2017 competition, DESE asked schools to apply for dissemination grants focusing on early-grade literacy and on practices supporting social-emotional development. Seven of 17 applications were funded in that competition. Program grants are supported by funding to the state from the U.S. Department of Education (USED)'s Charter School Program. "We work to fulfill our promise to USED that best practices in charter schools take hold in partner schools," said the director of DESE's Office of Charter Schools, which operates the grant program and conducts other activities to support dissemination of best practices from charter schools.

It is a statutory requirement that Massachusetts charter schools share best practices, but DESE has taken specific actions to bolster this practice. In 2014, charters were required to create dissemination goals as part of their statutorily mandated accountability plans. In 2017, DESE added a performance criterion for assessing charter school performance to its charter renewal determinations. In addition to evaluating a charter school's faithfulness to its charter, academic program success, and organizational viability, DESE now assesses whether and how the charter school has provided innovative models for replication and best practices to other public schools in the district where the charter school is located.

The Office of Charter Schools has focused its efforts on addressing equity through improving the quality of charter schools' education programs and other offerings. DESE has created resources to support dissemination and collaboration, and makes these resources available on a Massachusetts Charter Schools website. The website provides guidance and resources on the following webpages: _Creating Conditions for Successful Dissemination_, _Sharing Resources and Information_, _Sustaining Partnerships_, _Profiles of Dissemination_, _Resources_, and _Best Practices Archives_. The best practices in the archives cover a range of topics, including governance, leadership, professional development, culture and climate, and various instructional programs and practices.

For a long time, the Office's work to support dissemination of best practice was focused exclusively on charter school models and practices. This tight focus was most likely due to the fact that charter schools are statutorily mandated to share their best practices. In recent years, the Office has come to recognize the importance of sharing effective practices from _all_ public schools.

In 2016, the Office partnered with other offices across DESE to host a statewide dissemination fair. More than 240 educators participated in the fair, sharing best

practices across traditional schools, charter schools, innovation schools, and schools that feature expanded learning time. The fair, created with help from nearly 50 schools and districts, was designed to help educators working in some aspect of school redesign to share promising practices with their peers at other schools. Presenters from across the state addressed topics such as problem-based learning, recruiting and retaining teachers, evaluating curriculum, reducing chronic absenteeism, designing teacher and student schedules, fostering social-emotional learning in elementary schools, serving English learners, and serving students with disabilities.

Amid the aftereffects of a difficult political battle between charter school proponents and opponents, related to the 2016 ballot measure that sought additional charter schools, the Office continues its work to support charter schools in meeting their performance expectations. The Office continues to communicate and engage with other DESE staff to promote coherence and collaboration in DESE's work with districts and schools. Office leaders are also working to overcome the unintended negative consequences of DESE's history of one-way promotion of charter school best practices, including the resulting implication that traditional public schools had nothing to share. As an interviewed DESE leader said, "Best practice is about what you do, not who you are." DESE is engaged in ongoing work to change perceptions and narratives about learning from best practices in the state.

Massachusetts Charter Public School Association

Also prominent in Massachusetts's education landscape is MCPSA, which plays a critical role in advocating for, and creating community among, the network of charter schools in the state. The association is active in sharing innovative education models developed by charter schools, and has received three National Leadership Grants from USED, focused on capacity building to support students with disabilities. MCPSA provides the online MCPSA Knowledge Center to facilitate the real-time exchange of charter school innovations and best practices, as well as practical resources for leaders and staff from its member schools.

While these efforts support dissemination of best practices among charter schools, MCPSA also values cross-sector collaboration so that educators from traditional public schools and from charter schools can learn with and from one

another. To that end, in 2015, the association commissioned a case study[19] of the Boston Compact, a community consisting of educators, administrators, and other school staff, from traditional public schools, charter schools, and Catholic schools, who view multi-sector collaboration as a way of improving education overall for Boston students and who have been working together to do so since 2011. (The following sections describe the compact in more detail.) MCPSA commissioned the case study to highlight the compact's transferable principles that other communities can use to guide their own efforts to form strong, purposeful collaborative relationships among different school systems in their cities or areas.

Cross-Sector Collaboration in Boston

The nonprofit Boston Plan for Excellence (BPE) was founded in the mid-1980s to foster improvement in Boston schools through research and development. In 2009, the BPE formed the Boston Schoolchildren's Consortium, including leaders from the Boston Public Schools (BPS), charter schools, private independent schools, and the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston. As described by the MCPSA leader interviewed for this profile, that cross-sector group of education leaders was "put on a bus and went on school visits across the city. Over the course of a series of school tours and discussions, relationships began to form and strengthen." The mayor at the time then subsequently summoned leaders to a meeting, where, according to the interviewee, he told them, "None of you is doing a good job educating kids with special needs and English learners. Knock the [expletive] off and do right by kids." With this call to action — indeed, this *demand* for action — the seeds for the Boston Compact were planted.

In the same general time frame, a public-private partnership, the Boston Opportunity Agenda, was launched, with a commitment to ensure that all of Boston's children and youths are prepared to succeed in college, careers, and life. The partnership strives to improve Boston's cradle-to-career education pipeline by combining public and private resources, expertise, and influence around a single agenda. At the partnership's inception, the agenda was focused only on BPS, but it later evolved to include charter and Catholic schools. Through the partnership, education leaders in Boston have been working to

---

[19] School & Main Institute. (2015). *City-wide collaboration between district, charter, and Catholic schools: The Boston Compact start-up years 2010–2014.* Boston, MA: Author. Retrieved from https://www.masscharterschools.org/sites/default/files/docs/resources/mcpsa.case_study.boston_compact.june_2016_web.pdf

address issues of equity and quality through cross-sector collaboration over the past decade, supported by federal and state grants and private philanthropy. Interviews with leaders involved in some of these initiatives provide a window into this work.

The Boston Compact

In 2010, the year after the creation of the multi-sector Boston Schoolchildren's Consortium, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation hosted city leaders from across the country, including leaders from Boston, to discuss how sectors could come together on behalf of students and families. In September 2011, Boston leaders signed their first compact, agreeing to work together and outlining their intentions. With a $100,000 planning grant, leaders from the mayor's office, BPS, and charter schools worked to develop and implement governance and operational structures, build trust, and develop buy-in from those they represented. In the spring of 2012, the Catholic Archdiocese brought its schools into the compact as partners, and later that year, the Boston Compact received a three-year, $3.25 million grant from the Gates Foundation to support its work.

Of the 23 entities whose compacts were funded by the Gates Foundation, Boston was one of two cities whose compacts were subsequently rated as "advanced" because they addressed systemic issues of equity on a regular basis and because they were creating partnerships between the district and charter schools, which had become a defining feature of the city's education system.[20] While the initiatives and strategies developed by the Boston Compact have evolved over time, the compact's systems, structures, commitments, and relationships have endured.

Fueled by a hunger, among its founders, for cross-sector collaboration, the compact's initial work focused on "building trust, busting myths, and identifying needs," according to a Boston Compact leader who directs one of its participating schools, Boston Collegiate Charter School. The superintendent of BPS at the time and the executive director of the Neighborhood House Charter School in Dorchester were early champions whose drive and shared commitment set the table for honest conversation and partnership to address critical issues.

The compact supports initiatives working to address the needs of student groups who have historically been underserved across sectors. Addressing gaps in

---

[20] Lake et al. (2017).

student achievement among Boston's students became an early focus for the compact, leading to several initiatives. For example, a leadership initiative helped principals and aspiring principals from all three participating sectors (district, charter, and Catholic schools) to focus on issues of equity and to take equity-informed stances in their leadership roles. In another example, the compact offered a three-year professional development program for teachers from the three sectors to build capacity for addressing gaps in the performance of English learners.

Made up of teachers and school leaders from all three sectors, the compact's Teaching and Learning Committee advises the compact on content-specific initiatives, such as the Boston Educators Collaborative, through which teachers take credit-bearing professional development courses designed and taught by teachers. In another cross-sector initiative, small networks of schools focused on particular subgroups, such as African American and Latino boys or students with disabilities, as well as on opportunities for educators to see firsthand the practices of colleagues in schools where specific subpopulations are thriving academically and socially.

In 2015, compact leaders began to promote the idea of a unified enrollment system for all Boston schools, as a means of providing equitable access for students and families. The idea was backed by the mayor and was discussed in many community meetings throughout the city. However, charter school opponents organized fierce opposition to the idea, and the concept of having a unified enrollment system became a highly polarized and contentious issue. This effort was ultimately unsuccessful, but it may be taken up at a future date.

The compact has also undertaken work to address issues of equitable access across schools in the three sectors. For example, it produces a citywide open-enrollment month, and it launched the web-based site to help families more easily identify school options. All charter schools in Boston now have a common application and application timeline. In 2017, the compact led the development and adoption of a set of citywide school-climate questions, creating a common means to collect feedback from Boston parents and to have common data for guiding improvement.

The Archdiocese and BPS have leased buildings to charter schools that needed space, thereby assisting in providing greater access to charter school programs across sectors. To provide for consistency in transportation for students and families, charter schools voluntarily adjusted their school drop-off and pick-up

times to align with those of BPS, saving the city $1 million per year in transportation costs.

The compact's governance structure includes a steering committee whose 15 members are representative of all three sectors. Steering committee members, as a group, have key leadership roles in their respective organizations and have access to those with the highest level of authority within their organizations. A four-person executive committee, including representatives of the mayor's office, BPS, a Boston charter school, and the Archdiocese, works with the compact's chief collaboration officer to plan the work of the steering committee. The chief collaboration officer serves as project manager, facilitator, and plan developer.

Compact leaders describe the governance structure as being the connective tissue that holds the compact together, enabling it to sustain the collaborative work through changes in leadership. Although, thus far, the compact has seen four transitions each of BPS and Catholic school superintendents, its work has continued without interruption. The leadership structures that have been developed are lasting and are well positioned to drive ongoing changes to improve Boston schools for all students.

School-to-School Collaboration

In addition to the cross-sector work supported directly by the Boston Compact, some Boston schools, including schools participating in the compact, have initiated their own cross-sector collaborations, as recipients of DESE dissemination grants and other funding.

Boston Collegiate Charter School. Boston Collegiate Charter School has been a key player in the Boston Compact since 2011. Boston Collegiate, which serves students in fifth through twelfth grades, has a successful track record in achieving its aims of college acceptance and completion for all its graduates. With a mission to deliver on the promise of charter schools, the school has been involved in the compact and in other collaborative activities for some time.

The school's cross-sector work first focused on partnering with schools within a one-mile radius of its neighborhood of Dorchester to support school turnaround. Boston Collegiate partnered with Jeremiah Burke High School, designated by DESE as a Level 4 (i.e., low performing) school. Teacher leaders from both schools collaborated, with a focus on standards and data-driven practices. Boston Collegiate then applied for and received a national grant supporting exemplary charter collaboration. Although these efforts were successful and Burke exited

Level 4 status, changes in lead teacher positions at Burke prevented the work from being sustained.

Boston Collegiate has also received DESE dissemination grants to support its cross-sector work. The school was recently awarded a grant to partner with four BPS schools on a blended-learning middle school math project. In this project, Boston Collegiate is leading a team of 15 educators, from across the five schools, through an inquiry cycle for applying blended learning to a learner-centered challenge. In addition to this academically focused work, a local foundation approached a group of schools, including Boston Collegiate, and asked what these schools wanted to do together. When the schools identified achievement for young men of color as an area of need, the foundation provided a $70,000 grant to implement a mentorship program, which has now grown and been sustained over five years.

Boston Collegiate's executive director now serves as co-chair of the Boston Compact and as its sector leader for participating charter schools. Following a report that raised concerns about off-track youth (i.e., students with risk factors that might impede graduation) in Boston, the compact is now dedicating time and resources to tackling that citywide issue. While achievement and excellence at Boston Collegiate itself remains a priority for the school, its executive director is committed to improving education outcomes for all Boston students.

Neighborhood House Charter School. With one of the first charters awarded in Massachusetts, Neighborhood House Charter School (NHCS) opened in 1995, with 51 students and with a vision to become a beacon of excellence in a city with what its founders saw as too many failing schools. Today, NHCS serves 656 students in grades K-10, 80 percent of whom are students of color and nearly 30 percent of whom speak a language other than English at home. The school is undergoing an expansion that will serve students through grade 12 by the 2020 school year.

NHCS has a long history of cross-sector collaboration in Boston. NHCS's director, who also chairs the Boston Compact's teaching and learning committee, described NHCS's cross-sector involvement this way: "We cultivate relationships in Boston and engage with other schools to help others benefit [from] our approach and success. We have been working with schools to become the best versions of themselves." The school was also part of a compact-supported triad in which NHCS partnered with a BPS school and a Catholic school so that all three schools could learn with and from one another. In this particular case, NHCS's director noted, factors such as varying priorities and conflicting schedules

for professional development undermined the partnership. However, she reported that other triads supported by the compact were more successful, due to partners having the necessary capacity to effectively engage.

In 2013, NHCS received a large federal dissemination grant to support four BPS schools in implementing NHCS's Rich Structured Learning Experiences model program of standards-based arts integration. In 2015, it began its School Consulting Initiative, whereby NHCS staff partnered with BPS schools to develop and implement customized plans to address a school's instructional priorities and develop effective instructional leadership teams around those priorities. Today, NHCS provides direct professional development and coaching sessions to leaders of other schools to establish foundations of effective practice. A recipient of DESE dissemination grants and of support from a variety of philanthropic organizations, NHCS is one of four schools featured in DESE's Dissemination Profiles, which highlight the important work that charter schools and district partners are doing to share innovative practices in Massachusetts.

Boston Day and Evening Academy. Serving students who, for various reasons, have not been successful in traditional high school, Boston Day and Evening Academy (BDEA) is a Horace Mann Charter, which, in Massachusetts charter school law, means that its charter is sponsored by the local public school district — in this case, BPS. BDEA offers day and evening classes in a competency-based program to students aged 16 or over. Designed to help students with chronic absenteeism, mental health issues, and/or other risk factors, BDEA supports students in mastering competencies, using a trauma-sensitive, hybrid program of in-class and asynchronous online work.

BDEA is innovative in that it has developed and implemented a model that balances in-class learning, a support system, trauma-informed practices, and online learning. The school has received national grants, as well as grants from local philanthropies and businesses, to sustain its efforts. "We have been hard at work at this competency-based model and have a lot for others to learn from," said the head of BDEA's math department.

Supported by a DESE dissemination grant, BDEA collaborated with BPS's Brighton High School to assist in a pilot program for 20 to 30 special education students, using BDEA's trauma-informed, competency-based model. The curriculum from this initiative will be transferred to an online platform, to enable other schools to access it as a free resource. In addition, the school runs the annual Responsive Education Alternative Labs (REAL) Institute, a summer professional development program for others to learn from its model. The school also offers residencies

during the school year for visiting teams from other schools to receive topic-specific support designed to meet their needs. Teams spend two to four days at the school, working with an instructional lead, observing classes, meeting staff and students, and working on problems of practice.

Summary of Massachusetts's Cross-Sector Efforts

Massachusetts's cross-sector efforts at the state and local levels are intended to achieve two equity purposes: to promote equitable access to schools for all students, and to improve school quality for all students across sectors. The table below shows how each of the various efforts has worked in support of each of these purposes.

Table 2. Addressing Issues of Equity through Cross-Sector Work in Massachusetts: State and Local Examples

Organization	Equitable Access to Schools	Improving Educational Quality for All
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education	• Provides information about traditional and charter school performance on website • Partners with economic development agency to support acquisition of facilities	• Funds dissemination of best practices between charter and non-charter public schools • Provides resources on website to support dissemination • Requires charter school accountability goals for the dissemination of best practices
Massachusetts Charter Public School Association		• Improves education practices across charter schools • Researches and shares innovative models developed by charter schools

Organization	Equitable Access to Schools	Improving Educational Quality for All
Boston Compact	• Facilitates building leases • Provides web-based site for families • Produces tri-sector open enrollment month • Supports transportation savings through changes in bus schedules • Developed citywide school climate survey for families • Attempted adoption of unified cross-sector enrollment system • Developed common application among charter schools	• Offers Quality Teaching for English Learners, a cross-sector professional learning series • Supports tri-sector equity leadership initiative • Initiated district-, charter-, and Catholic-school triads working together to improve instructional quality for specific subpopulations • Supports teachers in leading and taking courses across sectors, through the Boston Educators Collaborative • Undertakes initiatives addressing needs of subpopulations • Developed networked improvement communities to better serve students with disabilities • Focuses on "off track" youth
Boston Collegiate Charter School		• Collaborating on standards-driven instruction in turnaround settings through a Dorchester cross-sector triad • Led five-school blended learning in middle school mathematics initiative • Joined a multi-school coalition to create a mentorship program for young men of color
Neighborhood House Charter School		• Partnered across sectors with schools on standards-based arts integration • Works across sectors to help schools design and implement customized plans to improve instructional practice and leadership capacity
Boston Day and Evening Academy		• Partners with a traditional BPS high school on implementing a trauma- sensitive, competency-based blended-learning model • Provides a four-day professional development institute on student-centered, competency-based learning • Created and hosts an online, open platform providing access to competency-based blended-learning curriculum

Insights and Lessons Learned

As in the previous profile, the wide-ranging cross-sector initiatives described in this profile offer substantive ideas from which other practitioners can draw, as well as lessons to inform the design of future collaborative efforts, whether in Massachusetts or elsewhere. They also suggest ideas for state strategies to foster collaboration between traditional public schools and charter schools.

Having Both Authority and Influence Are Critical to Success

Two key factors appear to have been critical to the success of cross-sector collaboration in Massachusetts: leaders had the *authority to compel and support* cross-sector work and the *ability to influence* others. Those factors worked in tandem to support educators in collaborating across governance boundaries to improve education opportunities and outcomes.

One clear champion of the early cross-sector work in Boston was the mayor of Boston — a no-nonsense, to-the-point person who set forth a call to action among education leaders across sectors in the city. It is impossible to know what would have occurred in Boston schools in the absence of that mayoral challenge to leaders over a decade ago. It is evident, however, that his actions, from a position of authority, served as the disruption that led to cross-sector work in Boston. At the state level, leaders from the DESE Office of Charter Schools have leveraged their legislative authority over resources to provide incentives for charter schools to disseminate best practices. Similarly, MCPSA has used its authority to advocate for and support charter schools through implementation of charter school models in district schools. At the local level, school boards, both charter and non-charter, are positioned to use their authority to compel leaders to engage in collaborative work. For example, the executive director of Boston Collegiate reported that her board of directors had set a goal of collaboration, and, given that goal, she went on to play a lead role in making such collaboration happen. Similarly, the BPS board has supported its superintendents in working for the betterment of education in Boston.

Authority alone is not always sufficient to build the kind of will, commitment, and political capital necessary to sustain cross-sector work, and sometimes people without authority have to take the first steps. Some Boston educators and other education stakeholders, who saw the value of cross-sector work, built on their respective networks and their impassioned beliefs to enlist leaders to join in and, in many cases, to fund collaborative work. The chief collaboration officer for the Boston Compact also noted that "it is important to have people across sectors

who are practitioners in their roles and who have access to authority in their organizations."

The qualities of leaders interviewed for this profile reflect those highlighted in the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation's research on successful collaboration.[21] In this review of research, Mattesich refers to "monster influencers," as leaders of successful collaborative efforts whose love for their work shows. The passion, conviction, and steadfastness with which leaders interviewed for this profile spoke about their cross-sector work reflect their commitment to and love for this work. Working persistently across traditional boundaries for a common good, leaders involved with the Boston Compact, either directly or tangentially, have created strong, trusting relationships. One of those leaders, the executive director of Boston Collegiate and a prominent leader in the Boston Compact, describes a key outcome of the work this way: "We now have strong connective tissue that allows us to respond to issues and needs that arise."

While leaders interviewed for this profile pointed to a high level of trust that was established over time among Boston educators across sectors, they also reflected on the failure to move forward with a unified enrollment system in Boston, with one citing "historic and deep barriers and the lack of successful community engagement" as contributing factors. Another reflected, "We did not involve the right people in the early conversations." Research on successful collaboration suggests that developing relationships and trust in the face of organizational, political, or ideological differences takes considerable time and attention. Leaders in Boston appear to have come to that realization and are committed to attempting the enrollment system innovation again at a later time.

Keeping Focused on the Larger Purpose While Advancing Initiatives Keeps Efforts Moving

In thinking about the purposes for which collaboration and dissemination activities were undertaken in Massachusetts, and in Boston in particular, the concept of deep focus cannot be ignored. In *deep focus*, the foreground, middle ground, and background are all in focus, with near and distant objects equally clear. The various unique purposes pursued by the interviewed leaders were all carried out with a larger unifying goal in mind. The chief of policy and practice at the MCPSA described that unifying goal this way: "We need to come

---

[21] Mattessich, P. (2001*). Collaboration: What makes it work: A review of research literature on factors influencing successful collaboration* (2nd ed.). St. Paul, MN: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation.

together to better serve students and their families. We all must put our heads together to create a better system of education." She added that the commitment to collaborate requires "the ability to see why it is important and to address barriers with the overarching purpose in mind." The pull of this greater good of better serving students compels these leaders to support, and, in some cases, to undertake cross-sector collaboration.

As these leaders designed and implemented strategies to address specific unique needs, they always had the larger unifying goal in mind. From this mission, they then worked to prioritize needs and develop solutions. Most of the cross-sector work focused on improving the quality of teaching, learning, and leadership. Many initiatives were explicitly designed to support historically underserved students (e.g., English learners, students with special needs, African American and Latino boys, students off track for graduation), and thereby to address important issues of equity. Keeping the larger picture in clear focus, leaders continuously work to prioritize needs that cross-sector collaboration can best address.

Building Enduring Systems and Structures Helps Ensure Sustainability

The various efforts to support cross-sector collaboration represented in this profile can be seen as a loosely coupled system.[22] Although state and local efforts are not intended to function as a statewide system, these efforts can be seen as functioning with a common unifying purpose, but without coordination between the state and local levels. One benefit of a loosely coupled system is that it allows local adaptations and creative solutions to emerge. The actors working to promote cross-sector collaboration in Massachusetts operated within their own structures, using their own processes, and leveraged resources that were needed to carry out the work. The DESE and the MCPSA worked within their governance structures to lead, fund, and support cross-sector work. Leaders in Boston worked from scratch to design and refine a structure and processes and to build relationships with philanthropies that would support the work and enable it to be sustained.

In the early 2010s, the mayor's convening of local education leaders, with his fiery call to action, was clearly an impetus for the subsequent cross-sector work in Boston. But translating leaders' shared commitment into a reality took a new

---

[22] Weick, K. E. (1976). Educational organizations as loosely coupled systems. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 21*(1), 1–9 (part).

organization and governance structure — a new metaphorical table around which leaders could come together to pursue the common goal of improving education for the children and families of Boston.

The Boston Compact, launched with Gates Foundation funding, has served as that metaphorical table, and the compact's governance structure has provided the necessary stability to support the work on top of it. Relationships, structures, and processes — including a dedicated chief collaboration officer, an executive committee with whom she consults on a regular basis to plan and support the work, and a larger steering committee representing three education sectors — have been key to the endurance of the compact, especially because, while each compact partner has its own accountability structure, the compact has become a means of building mutual accountability. As the chief collaboration officer noted, "the greatest accomplishment is the table itself," but having the right people at the table and the resources needed to build relationships, identify needs, and design and implement solutions has been key to making the compact's structure work. The relationships and "connective tissue" established over time have endured beyond the compact's Gates Foundation funding, even amid numerous changes in sector leadership.

Cross-sector leaders described how strategies and initiatives to generate more, and more effective, cross-sector collaboration have evolved over time. They noted that sustainability and scale can be difficult to accomplish, due to changes in priorities of agencies and funders. Referring to a DESE shift in English learner policy, one leader cautioned, "When you take on a programmatic initiative, you run the risk of it not being sustainable due to conflicting policy efforts and/or philanthropic priorities." Another interviewee touched on that issue when she said, "We have had many successful and not-so-successful initiatives. My interest now is in systemic issues."

Both Human and Fiscal Capacities Are Necessary Ingredients to Successful and Lasting Cross-Sector Efforts

The need to engage the right people in cross-sector collaboration, those who are best suited for the work, cannot be overstated. It is not work for the faint of heart, and it is not work that everyone is prepared to effectively conduct. Morten Hansen's research on collaboration in the private sector has revealed characteristics of effective collaborative leaders,[23] and these characteristics are

---

[23] Hansen, M. T. (2009). *Collaboration: How leaders avoid the traps, build common ground, and reap big results.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Press.

evident in the leaders interviewed for this profile. Most importantly, the leaders' individual agendas are eclipsed by a greater unifying goal; they have committed to taking on the challenge of working and learning together for the benefit of students and families. Leaders who were connected to the Boston Compact, either directly or tangentially, demonstrated openness — to ideas, to alternatives, and to debate, and rather than conveying a sense of having all of the answers, they recognized the power of the diverse perspectives, experiences, and ideas that are necessary to solve problems that they all wanted to see solved.

The ways in which leaders spoke of how they sought to address the complex tasks involved in cross-sector efforts attest to the importance of boundary spanning as a core capacity in cross-sector collaboration. Leadership actions associated with boundary spanning include reaching across borders to build relationships, interconnections and interdependencies. These leaders worked to develop sustainable relationships built on trust and managed through influence and negotiation. Spanning the boundaries among the Boston Compact and their individual schools, organizations, and/or sectors, these leaders were able to leverage influence from many directions.

Bringing the right talent together for cross-sector efforts without having fiscal resources to support the work undermines the efforts. In Massachusetts, DESE has long provided opportunities for charter schools to apply for grants specifically to engage in the dissemination of best practices. In recent years, recognizing the need to cultivate learning across all public schools, the Office of Charter Schools reached out to other DESE offices to find ways of supporting that broader effort. The MCPSA also played a key role in contributing resources to support collaboration, both within the charter school sector and across sectors, to improve educator practice. Since the infusion of the Gates Foundation funding that helped establish the Boston Compact on firm fiscal ground, the compact's leaders have worked to cultivate relationships with philanthropies and businesses, which have resulted in the necessary support to sustain cross-sector efforts beyond the Gates Foundation funding. Unlike many of the other compacts funded by the Gates Foundation, the Boston Compact has been able to sustain the work partially through efforts to cultivate interest and commitment from an array of partners and funders.

Conclusion

Although it is limited in scope, this overview of cross-sector collaboration among education leaders in the District of Columbia and Massachusetts provides opportunities to learn from their successes, challenges, and disappointments. Without exception, all of the leaders interviewed for these profiles indicated their belief that their cross-sector work is important — indeed, necessary — for addressing issues of equity and quality in the education of *all* students. The work is ever-changing and always challenging, and it continues to build on successes and lessons learned from experience.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to all of the interviewees, from the District of Columbia and from Massachusetts, who took the time to provide information, reflect openly on their experiences, and share lessons learned for others undertaking collaborative initiatives. Thanks, as well, to those who also reviewed drafts of the profiles. These individuals are listed below.

District of Columbia Interviewees

- Jennifer Comey, Director of Planning, Data, and Analysis, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education
- Naomi Rubin DeVeaux, Deputy Director, District of Columbia Public Charter School Board
- Celine Ferejan, Deputy Director, Raise DC
- Khizer Husain, Director of External Relations, Two Rivers Public Charter Schools
- Jeffrey Noel, Chief of Educational Research, Accountability, and Evaluation, Department of Defense Education Activity (Former Assistant Superintendent of Data, Accountability, and Research, Office of the State Superintendent of Education)
- Alicia Passante, ESL Manager, Center City Public Charter Schools
- Catherine Peretti, Executive Director, My School DC
- Richard Pohlman, Executive Director, Thurgood Marshall Academy Public Charter School

- Cate Swinburn, President, YouthForce NOLA (Former Chief of Data and Accountability, District of Columbia Public Schools)
- Ramin Taheri, Director of Cross-Sector Collaboration, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education
- Shana Young, Chief of Staff, Office of the State Superintendent of Education

Massachusetts Interviewees

- Michelle Allman, Mathematics Department Chair and Math Teacher, Boston Day and Evening Academy
- Allison Bagg, Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Erica Brown, Chief of Policy and Practice, Massachusetts Charter Public School Association
- Joanna Laghetto, Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign
- Kate Scott, Executive Director, Neighborhood House Charter School
- Shannah Varón, Executive Director, Boston Collegiate Charter School
- Rachel Weinstein, Chief Collaboration Officer, The Boston Compact