

REPORT

SUMMARY BRIEF

District-Charter Collaboration Grant Implementation: Findings from Interviews and Site Visits

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In November 2012, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation invested in seven innovative district–charter partnerships that brought the traditional public school districts together with committed local charter schools and charter management organizations (CMOs)—and, in some cases, Catholic schools—in the cities of Boston, Massachusetts; Denver, Colorado; Hartford, Connecticut; New Orleans, Louisiana; New York City, New York; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Spring Branch, Texas. These grantee cities were chosen from several cities that had previously signed district-charter Compacts in 2010 and 2011. These Compacts are public agreements that represent a shared commitment to improve college readiness for students, endorsed by district superintendents and charter school leaders and supported by other partners in the cities. To advance the goals laid out by their Compacts, the seven cities received funding intended to (1) facilitate collaboration on evidence-based solutions aligned with the Foundation’s College Ready strategy; and (2) improve equity of access, resources, and accountability across district and charter schools. The theory of action driving the collaboration grants is that strategic collaboration will advance innovative strategies and practices and promote the transfer and spread of knowledge and effective practice across schools, ultimately resulting in increased school effectiveness.

Approximately 12 to 15 months into the grant period, grant implementation has varied widely across sites. This implementation analysis aims to increase understanding of how collaboration and practice sharing can occur across sectors; therefore, it focuses on the collaboration activities proposed by the sites that target specific staff participants, rather than on broader policy changes (such as common enrollment systems or the provision of facilities). The Foundation suggested several forms of collaboration that might occur across sectors: (1) the traditional public school district and charter partners jointly tackle specific challenges, (2) high performers—one sector or specific schools within a sector—share expertise with lower-performing peers on raising students’ achievement, and (3) the traditional public and charter sectors exchange resources or expertise in a fair exchange. The collaboration activities differed by site but fall into five broad categories:

1. **School partnerships**, including specific school-level partnerships and triads that span different sectors (Boston and Denver), as well as co-located schools (Spring Branch) and school-CMO partnerships (Hartford)
2. **Leadership training**, including cross-sector aspiring leader residency programs (Hartford and Philadelphia) and cross-sector training for current and aspiring leaders (Boston, New York City, and Spring Branch)
3. **Teacher coaching**, including shared professional development not specific to the Common Core (Boston), as well as district participation in charter coaching or adoption of charter coaching models (Hartford, Philadelphia, and Spring Branch)
4. **Common Core State Standards transitions**: Cross-sector, collective approach to increase readiness for Common Core implementation, including shared professional development, coaching, and sharing of curriculum and assessment materials related to Common Core implementation (Hartford, New Orleans, New York City, and Philadelphia)

5. **Community outreach (specific to New York City):** The New York City Collaborative Council and sponsored school study tours to share best practices across sectors.

This summary brief focuses on early grant implementation from December 2012 through winter 2013–2014 and on direct participants in collaboration activities. The primary aim at this juncture in implementation is to understand whether and how collaboration and practice sharing in particular occur on a small scale through grant activities. Findings are based on several types of data: (1) semistructured telephone interviews with 4 to 6 central office-level administrators in the traditional public school and charter (and Catholic, when relevant) sectors in each site; (2) in-person and telephone interviews with 4 to 10 leaders of traditional public and charter (and Catholic, when applicable) schools in each site; (3) focus groups and telephone interviews with 7 to 16 teachers in traditional public and charter schools in each site; and (4) observations of 2 or 3 grant activities in each site. Taken together, these data address three key research questions.

To what extent do schools and staff collaborate across sectors? How have grant activities influenced collaboration among participating staff through the first 12 to 15 months of implementation?

- **Cross-sector relationships at the central office level have deepened substantially, but some rifts remain.** Most respondents believed that the Compact and collaboration grant had been instrumental in bringing leaders from the traditional public and charter school sectors (and in some cases, the Catholic school sector) together. Conversations and coordination related to the Compact have developed and deepened comfortable working relationships among leaders from all sectors. At the same time, central office administrators in every site believed that they still had substantial progress to make. For example, in many sites, although cross-sector relationships at the highest levels of administration were very strong, other staff within the central offices were less inclined to cooperate. Several administrator respondents across all grantee sites also expressed skepticism that even a high level of cooperation at a central office level could result in systemic change.
- **School leader collaboration has increased, but is concentrated among a core group predisposed to cross-sector work.** The extent to which school leaders in the seven grant cities collaborated across sectors varied across sites but was consistently perceived to have increased. In all grantee sites, respondents reported lower levels of collaboration at the school level relative to the central office level, in part due to a lack of opportunities for school leaders to collaborate in a structured way, either within or outside grant activities. Continued skepticism by some school leaders in both sectors that leaders of other types of schools were true peers also contributed to a lack of collaboration. In each grantee site, the school leaders participating in Compact activities included a select group of people with substantial experience working with school leaders from other types of schools. These school leaders, from both the traditional public and charter school sectors, tended to have large existing cross-sector social networks and often reported that Compact activities had little effect on their collaboration across sectors. They also acknowledged that they were unique among their peers in taking the initiative to reach outside of their own schools. Across programs involving school leaders, grant-funded principal residency programs stood out most as a promising mechanism for building cross-sector connections.

- For the most part, teacher collaboration across sectors remains minimal, perhaps by design.** Across the grantee sites, reported teacher-level interactions across sectors ranged from nonexistent to minimal. For the most part, respondents attributed the lack of cross-sector—and even within-sector—interaction to a lack of opportunity. Few grant activities brought together teachers in settings that facilitated interaction or practice-sharing. Many respondents were unaware of city efforts related to cross-sector collaboration, which might have been by design, particularly in sites with more contentious traditional public sector–charter sector relations. In many grantee cities, teacher respondents from traditional public schools expressed skepticism or a lack of understanding of charter schools. Despite these tensions, most teachers in either traditional public or charter schools consistently expressed a willingness to collaborate with teachers in other types of schools. They also were particularly interested in cross-sector school visits and opportunities for professional learning communities related to the Common Core.
- Practices are being shared through collaboration activities but not necessarily implemented across school types.** Across all sites, respondents reported at least some sharing of best practices across school types; in fact, the most frequently cited impact of the Compact and collaboration grant was the facilitation of this sharing. That said, practice-sharing was minimal in a couple of grantee sites and often had not progressed from knowledge-sharing to implementation of learned practices. When practice-sharing did occur, well-structured school partnerships (including co-located schools) and school leader residency programs were the primary settings across all grantee sites. Table ES.1 illustrates the most frequently shared practices via Compact activities.

Table ES.1. Most frequently shared practices via Compact, as reported across all respondents

Practices most shared from traditional public school sector to charter sector	Practices most shared from charter sector to traditional public school sector
Practices and systems for instructing English language learners or students with disabilities	School culture and behavior systems
Community and family engagement approaches	Interim assessments
Small-group instruction, especially guided reading	Teacher coaching models
	Strategic data use

What contextual factors currently play a role in implementation of the collaboration grant and in cross-sector collaboration more broadly?

- Across grantee sites, many school leaders and central office staff perceived the climate for collaboration in their grantee site as unfavorable in the years before the Compact began, with some improvement in recent years.** Most respondents gave a negative rating for the climate before the Compact. Since the Compact began, central office staff and school leaders in all but one grantee site felt the climate in their cities had improved. However, respondents from most grantee sites still perceive the current climate as not supportive of collaboration: respondents in only one grantee site rated the current climate as favorable.

- **Limited resources, teachers’ unions, and cross-sector tensions—such as misperceptions of the other sector—are the most frequently reported barriers to collaboration across sectors.** The most noted barrier to collaboration across grantee sites was limited time, even when respondents favored collaboration. Community groups and teachers’ unions might make statements against collaboration with charter schools, contributing to cross-sector tensions, but rarely explicitly interfere with the sectors working together. Negative perceptions of the other sector among staff at both traditional public and charter schools also contribute to tensions that prevent collaboration, particularly at the school level.
- **City, district, and school leaders can promote collaboration, and structural factors such as co-location and Common Core implementation can make collaboration easier or more appealing.** Respondents frequently referenced the mayor, superintendent, and/or district office as facilitators to collaboration. Although some respondents noted that co-location can be a source of tension, others noted that it can be a catalyst for collaboration, particularly when implemented as an intentional partnership between schools that have a shared investment in all students within the building. Other respondents noted that common districtwide or statewide mandates, such as the implementation of the Common Core or a shared curriculum, can foster a sharing of effective practices by school staff, in part by creating a sense of urgency.
- **Reported openness to adopting practices from another sector varied across sites and did not appear to vary by sector.** Respondents were most receptive to adopting practices with a proven record of effectiveness.

What have we learned about grant implementation midway through the grant period? What are the primary limitations of the grant or problems of practice reported by grantees?

- **Compact collaboration activities have yet to effect systemic change, but have resulted in strong working relationships and a greater understanding of different school types.** Many respondents found it too early to observe any grant impacts, and some found it too difficult to isolate the grant’s impact from the effect of other ongoing initiatives in their districts. However, a substantial portion of respondents believed that the Compact and collaboration grant had already resulted in improved instructional quality. The most frequently reported impact across all grantee sites was the development of important working and personal relationships, most often at the central office level. Across all sectors and at all staff levels, but particularly among school staff, the most tangible perceived impact of the collaboration grant has been an increased understanding of other types of schools. Collaboration activities that bring together school staff, most often school partnerships and leader residency programs, have helped break down misperceptions and stereotypes across sectors.
- **Grant implementation falls short in the thoughtfulness and clarity of goals and messaging.** Across all sites, the most common shortcoming of collaboration grant implementation was a perceived lack of focus and intentionality. This theme applied at both a citywide and an activity-specific level, especially in school partnerships. Another frequently cited shortcoming of the grants was the limited scope, both in terms of the number of collaboration activities and the number of participants within activities targeted

by the grants. Nearly half the respondents who believed that collaboration activities had successfully broken down misperceptions across sectors added the caveat that the impact was limited to school staff who were participating in collaboration activities. Some respondents also noted that a key limitation of the collaboration grant was that effective practices simply do not translate across different school types due to differences in structures and human capital. Additionally, across all grantee sites, the Compacts suffered from a lack of buy-in to varying degrees in both sectors, with some school staff uncertain of the value of collaboration. Some respondents perceived certain charter partners to be unwilling to share knowledge, either within or across sectors; other respondents in both sectors expressed concern about sharing being concentrated in only one direction, from charter to traditional public schools.

- **Collaboration could be improved via stronger structures and incentives and increased accountability.** Staff in all grantee sites offered many suggestions about how to make collaboration more beneficial:
 - **Provide better structures and incentives for cross-sector collaboration.** Teachers overwhelmingly suggested using the summer for institutes or think tanks focusing on specific areas and marketing those opportunities to teachers.
 - **Facilitate focused school walk-throughs or classroom visits for both school leaders and teachers.** Teachers and school leaders alike noted the value of school and classroom visits and suggested offering and encouraging those opportunities.
 - **Improve the alignment of school partnerships and be specific about goals.** Many respondents suggested that a more purposeful connection between schools with similar student populations or similar curricula is most useful.
 - **Build in more accountability at all levels.** School leaders requested more oversight from Compact leaders related to processes and outcomes for collaboration, and teachers suggested adding coaches or peer observers to help them implement practices learned through collaboration.
 - **Improve messaging, not only around the broad goal of collaboration, but also around specific opportunities for collaboration.** Principals and teachers in both sectors wanted to know more about their organizations' goals for collaboration and felt that more publicity of collaboration activities is needed.
 - **Involve students in cross-sector collaboration.** Several respondents, especially in sites with relatively smaller charter sectors, noted that tensions across sectors were not limited to school staff but also included students and suggested partnering with schools on student-based activities.

Overall, the summary brief findings have five specific implications for the Gates Foundation and the grantee districts as they seek to maximize the return on investment in district-charter collaborations going forward.

1. School co-locations or partnerships, intensive programs for aspiring leaders, and shared preparation for the implementation of Common Core standards have been three of the most promising avenues for cross-sector collaboration to date.

2. Teachers interviewed in all sectors are receptive to collaboration on average, but the proportion of teachers that grantee districts have involved in collaboration grant activities has been limited across each district. Continued roll-out of activities to a wider percentage of teachers is one avenue to increase opportunities for collaboration.
3. Leaders—at the city, central office, and school levels—are perceived to play a key role in promoting collaboration. Escalated conversation and action around cross-sector collaboration will depend on explicit support from these leaders.
4. Limited time—especially school staff time—has been a crucial obstacle impeding cross-sector collaboration. The Gates Foundation and grantee districts might consider devoting resources to identifying specific opportunities to overcome time constraints, whether by offering collaborative opportunities in the summer months, incorporating them into existing professional development days, or otherwise.
5. Grantee districts may benefit from assistance from the Gates Foundation related to the modes and content of local messaging about cross-sector collaboration. Grantee districts might also benefit more generally from additional clarity regarding the Foundation’s specific aims and theory of action around collaboration s well as around specific grant activities.

INTRODUCTION

In November 2012, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation invested in seven innovative district-charter “partnerships that have the potential capacity and commitment to accelerate student college ready rates through deep collaboration and sharing of best practices” (District-Charter Collaboration Grant Request for Proposal). These partnerships brought the traditional public school district together with committed local charter schools and charter management organizations (CMOs)—and, in some cases, Catholic schools—in the cities of Boston, Massachusetts; Denver, Colorado; Hartford, Connecticut; New Orleans, Louisiana; New York City, New York; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Spring Branch, Texas. All seven sites received grants intended to (1) facilitate collaboration on evidence-based solutions aligned with the Foundation’s College Ready strategy; and (2) improve equity of access, resources, and accountability across district and charter schools. The theory of action driving the collaboration grants is that strategic collaboration (described in more detail below) will advance innovative strategies and practices and promote the transfer and spread of knowledge and effective practice across schools, ultimately resulting in increased school effectiveness.

The seven grantee sites were chosen from among cities that had previously signed district-charter Compacts in 2010 and 2011. These Compacts are public agreements that represent a shared commitment to improve college readiness for students, signed by district superintendents and charter school leaders and supported by other partners in the cities. Through the Compacts, district and charter partners committed to replicating high-performing charter and traditional public school models and closing ineffective schools. Compact signees also pledged to address tensions between traditional public and charter schools and identified specific ways to leverage each sector’s strengths. (For additional information on the contents of the Compacts themselves, please refer to Yatsko et al. 2013.) The seven Compact sites awarded these additional funds further committed to collaboration in two areas: (1) strategic priority areas, including human capital strategies, college-ready tools and supports, innovative instructional delivery systems and school models, and rigorous use of data; and (2) equity in school-level accountability, resources, and access for all students to “highly effective schools.”

Grant implementation varied widely across sites. This implementation analysis aims to increase understanding of how collaboration and practice sharing can occur across sectors; therefore, it focuses on the collaboration activities proposed by the sites that target specific staff participants, rather than on broader policy changes (such as common enrollment systems or the provision of facilities). The Foundation suggested several forms of collaboration that might occur across sectors: (1) the traditional public school district and charter partners jointly tackle specific challenges, working side by side to solve a problem that neither has a clear advantage in addressing alone; (2) high performers—one sector or specific schools within a sector—share expertise with lower-performing peers on raising student achievement; and (3) the traditional public and charter sectors exchange resources or expertise in a fair exchange. All the grantees proposed forms of collective problem solving and sharing of best practices across sectors through grant activities. The collaboration activities that leverage collective problem solving and engage school staff in best practice sharing differ by site. However, they fall into five broad categories (listed here and illustrated in Table 1):

Table 1. Overview of types of current grantee collaboration activities

	School Partnerships	Leadership Training	Teacher Coaching	Facilitating Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Transitions	Community Outreach
Boston	<p>School Performance Partnerships: District-charter-Catholic school partnerships and triads focusing on specific areas, such as embedding study skills or using arts for teaching students with disabilities</p>	<p>Boston Compact Fellows: Leadership networking and shared development for district, charter, and Catholic school leaders facilitated by Boston College’s Lynch Leadership program</p>	<p>Quality Teaching for English Learners: Shared professional development (administered by WestEd) on teaching English language learners for teachers from district, charter, and Catholic schools</p> <p>Black and Latino Boys School Best Practice Sharing: Sharing of best practices in teaching literacy for African American and Latino boys by exemplar elementary schools in both sectors with lower-performing peers across sectors</p>		
Denver	<p>Peer-to-Peer Learning Labs: School partnerships, within and across sectors, in the form of teacher and/or leader coaching focusing on specific areas for improvement, such as interpreting and using data</p>				

TABLE 1 (continued)

	School Partnerships	Leadership Training	Teacher Coaching	Facilitating Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Transitions	Community Outreach
Hartford	Jumoke Academy at Milner: District partnership with Jumoke/Fuse 180 CMO to manage district turnaround school	Expand Achievement First (AF) Residencies to include Hartford Public Schools (HPS): Partnership with AF to include up to three slots for HPS principal candidates to participate in yearlong AF residency program	Implement teacher coaching and evaluation initiative in HPS based on AF model: High-level input from AF; coaching consultant hired from AF to help oversee peer coaching initiatives in several schools	Shared CCSS curricula, assessments, and standards-based report cards: HPS piloting standards-based report card based on Jumoke model; offering math and English/Language Arts PD focusing on Common Core standards with open invitation to charter partners	
New Orleans			Expand MATCH teacher training program: Intensive teacher coaching and training of teachers as coaches by third-party vendor Launch Center for Transformative Teacher Training: Teacher leaders trained as coaches by CT3 Incubate local CMO teacher training organizations: CMO residencies at KIPP and collegiate academies for 24 early career teachers in 2013–2014	Common Core Lead Fellows (seven CMOs/charters) lead Common Core implementation: Assessment item purchasing/analysis and work with the Achievement Network. Use third-party curricular resources to prepare school-site instructional teams. Validate teacher evaluation rubrics to ensure alignment with CCSS. Jointly use Better Lesson for ongoing sharing of resources.	

TABLE 1 (continued)

School Partnerships	Leadership Training	Teacher Coaching	Facilitating Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Transitions	Community Outreach
New York City	<p>Develop Coro Educational Leadership Collaborative (ELC): Cohort of charter and district teacher leaders participate in yearlong shared leadership development administered by Coro</p>		<p>New Visions for Public Schools provides in-depth, inquiry-based curricular and assessment support tied to CCSS.</p>	<p>Facilities Public Education Campaign: NYC Collaborates sponsors school study tours and workshops for district and charter staff; convenes collaborative council of charter and district leaders, as well as a broader public relations facilities sharing campaign on successful co-locations.</p>
Philadelphia	<p>Urban School Leadership Residency/Certificate Program: Philadelphia School Partnership and The New Teacher Project partnering to implement school leader residency program, with district, charter, and Catholic school residents placed in leadership roles</p>	<p>Scale up Mastery’s Teacher Effectiveness Institute: Yearlong training of district instructional coaches via Mastery’s “train the trainer” program; placed in select schools in December 2013</p>	<p>Develop benchmark assessments aligned to CCSS-based curricula.</p> <p>Shared professional development on Common Core assessments.</p>	
Spring Branch	<p>School-within-a-school model: YES Prep middle school located within traditional public middle school (Northbrook) and KIPP middle school located within another traditional public middle school (Landrum); teachers participate in some shared PD sessions.</p>	<p>Develop Leadership Competency Model for district based on KIPP model: During development phase, school-within-a-school leaders and additional Spring Branch Independent School District (SBISD) school leaders participate in KIPP Leadership Summit.</p>	<p>Develop teacher training model for district based on YES Prep model: During development phase, noncertified SBISD Teach for America teachers participate in YES Prep Teaching Excellence program with YES Prep first-year teachers.</p>	

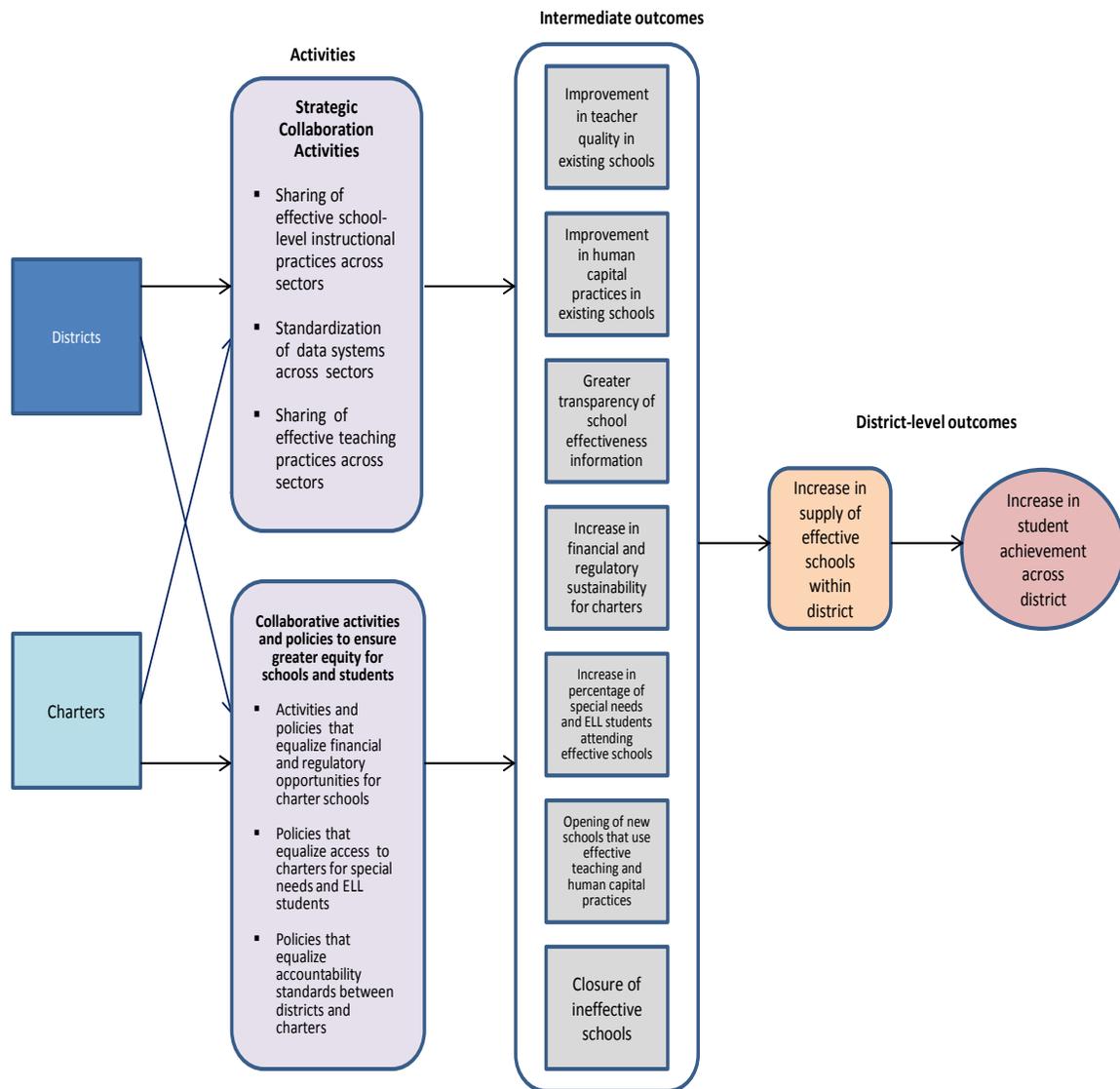
1. **School partnerships**, including specific school-level partnerships and triads that span different sectors (Boston and Denver), as well as co-located schools (Spring Branch) and school-CMO partnerships (Hartford)
2. **Leadership training**, including cross-sector aspiring leader residency programs (Hartford and Philadelphia) and cross-sector training for current and aspiring leaders (Boston, New York City, and Spring Branch)
3. **Teacher coaching**, including shared professional development not specific to the Common Core (Boston), as well as district participation in charter coaching or adoption of charter coaching models (Hartford, Philadelphia, and Spring Branch)
4. **Common Core State Standards (CCSS) transitions**: Cross-sector, collective approach to increase readiness for Common Core implementation, including shared professional development, coaching, and sharing of curriculum and assessment materials related to Common Core implementation
5. **Community outreach (specific to New York City)**: The New York City Collaborative Council and sponsored school study tours to share best practices across sectors.

The Foundation outlined a theory of action for the grants (Figure 1), whereby the successful implementation of collaborative activities—including sharing of effective school-level instructional practices across sectors and sharing of effective teaching practices across sectors—would lead to change in intermediate outcomes (bolding indicates intermediate outcomes most relevant to the collaboration activities we examined), including:

- Improvement in teacher quality in existing schools
- Improvement in human capital practices in existing schools
- Greater transparency of school effectiveness information
- Increase in financial and regulatory sustainability for charters
- Increase in percentage of special needs and English language learner (ELL) students attending effective schools
- Opening of new schools that use effective teaching and human capital practices
- Closure of ineffective schools

In turn, achieving these intermediate outcomes would then increase the supply of effective schools within the city, leading to an increase in student achievement (and, presumably, college readiness).

Opportunities for interaction across different school types via the collaboration grants are somewhat limited in scope and frequency, making it difficult to imagine how specific collaboration grant activities might contribute on a broader scale to the intermediate impacts outlined in the theory of action. Across each grantee site, the number of schools and staff participating in activities as currently implemented is most often slightly less than what was originally proposed in the grantee applications, but even the proposed scopes of participation were small. In the six grantee sites where the Compacts include both charter and traditional

Figure 1. District-character collaboration grant theory of action

public schools, only a minority of schools and school staff are currently participating or previously participated in cross-sector activities or programs implemented either as part of the Compacts or via the collaboration grants. As of early 2014, for example, the proportion of schools in a city reported as actively engaged in cross-sector activities, either via school-level participation or via individual staff participation, ranged from 8 schools (4 charter and 4 traditional public) out of more than 1,800 traditional public and charter schools in New York City to 32 schools (11 charter, 14 traditional public, and 7 Catholic) out of approximately 175 traditional public, charter, and Catholic schools in Boston. Across all seven sites, the proportion of principal and teacher staff active in collaboration activities relative to the total number of school staff is low. In sites where cross-sector school leader residency programs have been implemented, for example, the cohorts for 2013–2014 ranged from 3 residents in Hartford to 11

residents in Philadelphia. These gradual, limited rollouts were largely in line with what grantees intended.

We propose three mechanisms to help in thinking about how these small and targeted collaboration activities might have broader impacts:

1. **Participants as emissaries: “They’re not as bad as you think.”** District and charter participants in grant activities, who may initially have been wary or ill-informed about the other sector(s), end up playing roles as communicators and interpreters of the other sector(s) first, then bridge builders and collaborators on more substantial collaborations. Early participants may “recruit” others from their schools or organizations to participate, increasing the extent of collaboration.
2. **Observational effect of collaboration: “Different sectors can work together.”** As collaboration activities are implemented, other individuals who are not direct participants—other educators, as well as parents, citizens, and politicians—may see that cooperation is possible. They may begin to moderate their view that charters and traditional public school systems are engaged in a zero sum battle to increase their “market share” of students. These changes in perception could result in a more hospitable environment for additional or deeper collaboration.
3. **Demonstration effect: “Collaboration can actually help.”** In schools that grant activities directly target, teacher and school performance may improve. As evidence of positive results is generated and spread to others, additional schools may implement these lessons learned and adopt the same effective strategies.

Our three-year study of grant implementation will examine the extent to which any of these pathways might be leading to broader cross-sector collaboration in the grantee sites. We are reporting on the implementation of collaboration activities in summary briefs at three intervals. Later summary briefs will address potential impacts of collaboration more broadly across the grantee sites. This first summary brief focuses on grant implementation from December 2012 through winter 2013–2014 and direct participants in collaboration activities. The primary aim at this juncture in implementation is to understand whether and how collaboration and practice sharing in particular occur on a small scale through grant activities. The brief addresses three key research questions:

1. To what extent do schools and staff collaborate across sectors? How have grant activities influenced collaboration among participating staff through the first 12 to 15 months of implementation?
2. What contextual factors currently play a role in implementation of the collaboration grant and in cross-sector collaboration more broadly?
3. What have we learned about grant implementation midway through the grant period? What are the primary limitations of the grant or problems of practice reported by grantees?

Data collection and methods

To address the research questions, we conducted a comprehensive collection of data from multiple sources across each of the seven grantee sites. In December 2013 and January 2014, we conducted one-hour, semistructured interviews with 37 central office-level administrators (14 district staff, 18 charter staff, 2 Catholic staff, and 3 staff from third-party organizations). Administrator respondents were selected via purposeful sampling in each site to gather perspectives from administrators closely involved with the Compact and from administrators only peripherally aware of or active in the Compact. The managers of grant implementation and Gates Foundation program officers provided input during the sample identification process, and the relevant program officer for each site approved the final sample.

In February, March, and April 2014, we conducted 48 one-hour, semistructured interviews with school leaders (23 traditional public school leaders, 22 charter school leaders, and 3 Catholic school leaders) through site visits and telephone calls and 15 observations of collaboration activities. We also conducted in-person and telephone focus groups and interviews with 68 teachers (28 traditional public school teachers and 40 charter school teachers). To identify school leaders and teachers for interviews, we collected participant lists for all collaboration activities implemented through the Compact or collaboration grant in each site. We set target samples by sector for each activity based on the scope of participation by traditional public, charter, and (where applicable) Catholic school staff and drew corresponding random samples within each collaboration activity-school sector combination. We also randomly selected alternate respondents, who were recruited to participate when the selected participants (1) declined to participate, or (2) were unresponsive after repeated contact.

After completing data collection, we coded interview and focus group data using Atlas.ti in April and May 2014. The coding scheme was pilot-tested twice, and all coders were trained and had to code two test interviews satisfactorily before coding additional interviews. In addition, interviews were coded by multiple coders at several points during the coding process to check inter-rater reliability. After completing coding, the study team examined the data to identify common themes and categories of collaboration, contextual factors, and grant impacts and problems of practices.

Each section of the brief addresses one of the three research questions. The first section describes trends and changes in cross-sector collaboration across different staff types (central office administrators, school leaders, and teachers) in all seven grantee sites. The second section describes the general context for collaboration in each grantee site and the factors that enable or impede collaboration, as perceived by respondents. The third section presents initial findings on the impacts of the grant observed by respondents, as well as limitations or problems of practice that have emerged during grant implementation and potential steps to address those issues.¹

¹ There are three important clarifying notes for this summary brief. First, the Compact and collaboration grant in New Orleans are unique relative to other grantee sites in that all school partners are charter schools; although the Recovery School District (RSD) is a partner, no traditional public schools are named as partners, nor is the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB). Moreover, as of the 2014–2015 school year, all schools in the RSD will be charter schools. In this summary brief, “cross-sector” collaboration refers to collaboration among the RSD and all charter school partners, including those authorized by RSD and by OPSB. Second, throughout the brief, we use the term “traditional public school” to encompass all noncharter and nonprivate school types, including pilot and innovation schools. Third, to protect anonymity, individual grantees are not identified in the brief.

TO WHAT EXTENT DO SCHOOLS AND STAFF COLLABORATE ACROSS SECTORS? HOW HAVE GRANT ACTIVITIES INFLUENCED COLLABORATION AMONG PARTICIPATING STAFF THROUGH THE FIRST 12 TO 15 MONTHS OF IMPLEMENTATION?

Key findings

- Cross-sector relationships at the central office level (of districts, CMOs, and archdioceses) have deepened substantially, but some rifts remain.
- School leader collaboration has increased but is concentrated among a core group predisposed to cross-sector work.
- For the most part, teacher collaboration across sectors remains minimal, perhaps by design.
- Practices are being shared through collaboration activities but not necessarily implemented across school types.

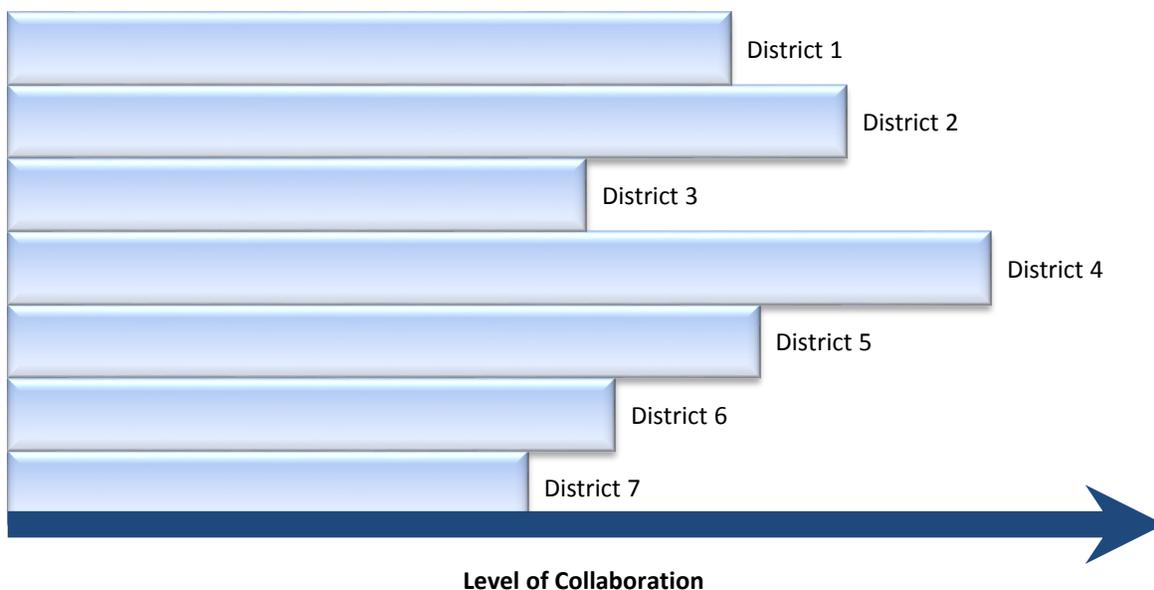
Cross-sector relationships at the central office level have deepened substantially, but some rifts remain.

In all seven grantee sites, central office administrators across all three sectors consistently reported an increase in collaboration at the central office level relative to before the city Compacts were executed. Both reported pre-Compact collaboration and current collaboration varied notably across sites, however. The average current level of collaboration in each site, as reported by central office staff, ranged from 2.8 to 4.4 on a 1–5 scale of increasing intensity of collaboration (Figure 2). Using the same scale, average pre-Compact collaboration ratings ranged from 1.3 to 2.7. In three grantee sites, respondents from the district central office perceived either the current level of collaboration or the extent of increase in collaboration to be much higher than did charter respondents. In these sites, charter respondents tended to indicate that, even if interpersonal relationships among sector leaders were positive, little of substance had been accomplished beyond friendly relationships. In the remaining sites, however, respondents from all sectors agreed on the level of collaboration, on average. In addition, respondents in multiple grantee sites noted that the working relationships were notably stronger with some charter partners than with others.

[The collaboration grant] built momentum; it gave us a common goal so that we could work together. Trust was built in the work, rather than through trust falls and icebreakers. We knew we had a deadline that forced people to work together to find common ground. Each [central office leader] was explicit that they wanted this to work. That galvanized peoples' beliefs that we needed to get the job done, even if they were a little bit resistant about working with each other.

– District office administrator

Figure 2. Current central office collaboration levels, as perceived by central office administrators



Notes: Based on responses from between 4 and 6 district and charter central office-level administrators in each site. In two districts, a response from a single Catholic school sector administrator is also included in the mean.

Each respondent provide a numerical rating of the level of collaboration across sectors at a central office level on a 1 to 5 scale of increasing collaboration. A rating of 1 corresponded to no cooperation, and a rating of 5 corresponded to the highest level of continuous, ongoing collaboration.

Most respondents believed that the Compact and collaboration grant had been instrumental in bringing leaders from the traditional public school and charter school sectors (and in some cases, the Catholic school sector) together. Conversations and coordination related to the Compact have developed and deepened comfortable working relationships among leaders from all sectors. Respondents also believed that the Compact had moved citywide cross-sector initiatives, such as universal enrollment, to the forefront in several grantee sites. In two grantee sites, however, the role of the Compact in increasing collaboration across different sectors was believed to be minimal. Respondents noted that strong working relationships and an inclination for collaboration had been in place before the Compacts. Others noted that the adoption of the Common Core standards, along with aging and stabilization of the charter sector, were the primary drivers of collaboration.

“...I don’t think that they have solved any problems yet.” – CMO Administrator

At the same time, central office administrators in every site believed that they still had substantial progress to make in fully leveraging the platform for cross-sector conversation that the Compact provided. One CMO executive explained that, although “there have been increased ways for collective problem solving among cross-sector groups...I don’t think that they have solved any problems yet. But I think they have contributed to and they have significantly

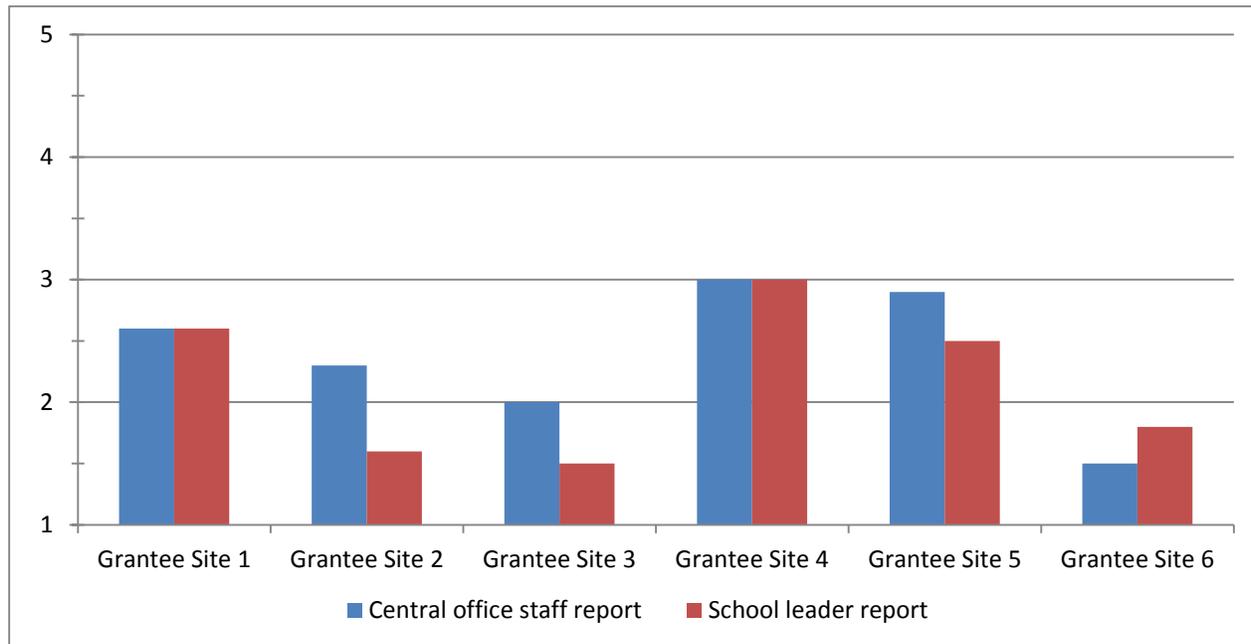
increased the level of understanding and the level of dialogue among the group that was not happening before. So [before the Compact] you didn't get the charter school leaders and the district leadership around a table for eight hours a month solving challenges related to the city at large.... We have never seen that before [now]." Charter and Catholic school sector respondents, as well as one district respondent, in several grantee sites raised concerns that, although cross-sector relationships at the highest levels of administration were very strong, an inclination for working together did not trickle down to other staff within the district central office: "We've got total cooperation up at the top. But then everybody 'inside the machine' drags their feet.... They get high marks for cooperation up at the top... but do not get high marks for having their bureaucracies implement their intentions."

Several administrator respondents across all grantee sites also expressed skepticism that even a high level of cooperation at a central office level could or should be expected to result in systemic changes. Although these respondents included a handful of district central office staff, they more often were central office administrators who were not among the Compact leadership but whose organizations were Compact partners. One CMO executive noted: "This idea of cooperation.... It's not the most important thing." Another CMO executive in a different grantee site explained that, although collegial working relationships with the district office were useful for solving problems related to operations or to specific students, little else could be accomplished through collaboration because "our needs and their needs are in different places." A district official in a third grantee site expressed a similar sentiment, noting that most of the collaboration grant activities were implemented in isolation by sector, even at a central office level: "In practice, I would say that really knowing how to collaborate is a challenge.... We come together and we have regular meetings and we share what we're doing, but we're so immersed in the work that we have to do, that we have ownership over, that we're responsible for, that we're accountable for, that weaving in other elements has been a challenge, especially when we can't see how it fits into our work." For example, the district office will "offer out things [like professional development], but others [charter organizations] are not always biting," and charter partners have "offered out opportunities for us [the district] that we don't always have the luxury of time for, and I think this is extremely unfortunate." Ultimately, even when there is a "desire" for collaboration, time and effort to "make the work that the different organizations are doing more relevant to your own work" can fall short.

School leader collaboration has increased but is concentrated among a core group predisposed to cross-sector work.

The extent to which school leaders in the seven grant cities are collaborating across sectors varies across sites but is consistently perceived to be at a lower level than central office cross-sector collaboration (Figure 3). To some extent, this lower level of collaboration at the school level was consistent with what was proposed in most grantee sites, where the most effort has focused on bringing together central office level leaders. However, even some school leaders in school partnerships and leadership programs across sites noted that these activities were sometimes undermined by cancelled and infrequent meetings or low attendance rates. In three sites, central office administrator respondents tended to have a more positive view of the degree to which school leaders were cooperating and sharing work across sectors than did school leaders, on average.

Figure 3. Average ratings of school leader cross-sector collaboration currently, as perceived by central office administrators and school leaders



Notes: Central office respondent means are based on responses from between 4 and 6 district and charter central office-level administrators per site. In two sites, responses from a single Catholic school sector administrator are also included in the means. School leader respondent means are based on responses from between 4 and 10 district and charter school leaders. In two sites, responses from a Catholic school principal are also included.

Each respondent provided a numerical rating of the level of collaboration across sectors at a school leader level on a 1 to 5 scale of increasing collaboration. A rating of 1 corresponded to no cooperation, and a rating of 5 corresponded to the highest level of continuous, ongoing collaboration.

In all grantee sites, central office administrators and school leaders alike believed that collaboration had increased but acknowledged that there were still few opportunities for school leaders to collaborate in a structured way, either within or outside the Compact activities. As one traditional public school leader noted, “I think that a few principals like myself may be doing individual things, but it’s not, it isn’t something that as a district we’ve crafted, created, provided opportunities for.” Compact activities are among the few formal opportunities school-based staff in the grantee sites have to interact with staff from other schools. Any initiatives outside of the Compact were almost exclusively facilitated by institutions of higher education or other third parties. As one traditional public school leader noted, school partnership work was the first platform for interaction across sectors in the city: [Before the Compact] “I had no interaction with charter schools or private schools or Catholic schools. None....I don’t even know if I even had an opportunity to talk to a charter school....I just heard about charter schools and really honestly knew very little.”

In addition to the limited number of opportunities for interaction across different school types, a perception that school leaders in other types of schools were not true peers also remained pervasive in most grantee sites and further contributed to a lack of collaboration. A district

official explained that “there’s no system in place that would cause principals from the different sectors to come together more regularly. And most importantly, I would say neither, in my experience, the charter principals that I interact with, nor the district principals that I interact with really see their colleagues in the other sector as being real colleagues, meaning people who they can rely on or call upon for support or help or networking.” This sentiment was reiterated by school leaders, including a traditional public school leader in another grantee site, as well: “Charter school leaders ‘stick to themselves.’ They don’t seem to like to interact with us. And part of it, I think, is a mindset on both sides that ‘We’re doing something different and better than you, so why should we want to interact with you?’ That’s the sense I have.” A charter school leader in the same city noted that, although the district administration and the school board are relatively receptive to charters, not all traditional public school leaders are similarly friendly.

In each grantee site, however, the school leaders participating in Compact activities included a select group of people with substantial experience working with school leaders from other types of schools. These school leaders, from both the traditional public school and charter school sectors, tended to have large cross-sector social networks developed through many programs and associations outside of the Compact. They reported knowing between 20 and 30 school leaders from other types of schools and noted that all of these connections had been forged before the Compact. These relationships had been developed through participation in leadership training programs, African American or Latino professional associations, and grassroots networks for sharing innovative practices. For these school leaders, even one cross-sector relationship was invaluable because it provided a gateway to connections with even more school leaders across sectors. As one traditional public school leader explained, “The networks that we’ve created through other people, either face-to-face or through email, have just widened the network. So, when I reach out [to charter school leaders]...if they don’t know me directly, they would know [a charter school director with whom I have a connection], and I could use him as a reference if I was looking to connect.”

At the same time, these school leaders acknowledged that they were unique among their peers in taking the initiative to reach out, suggesting that many principals were reluctant to reach out to anyone outside their own schools, let alone outside their sectors. They sometimes struggled to articulate exactly what motivated their efforts. One traditional public school leader explained: “I don’t know how to phrase this correctly, but typically principals who are actively seeking to improve their practice, whether you’re a charter school or a [traditional public school], seem to figure each other out. So people who are invested in their school and their school community will typically find other school leaders who are in the same place.” In another grantee site, a school leader with experience in both the charter and traditional public school sectors attributed this intangible inclination toward collaboration toward a concern for student outcomes above all else: “My attitude [toward collaboration] is different. I want to make it known that I am definitely a social justice person, I believe in pushing for our kids’ education—so, I don’t know if I’m unique, maybe I’m just different, because I’ve seen quite a bit, and, especially when it comes to inner-city students, learned quite a bit about them, and my goal is just to make sure that they are given every opportunity as long as I can push for it, as long as somebody will listen to me, I’m there to push for it. So, I think I’m different. I don’t believe in settling into anything, I believe in going above and beyond and going out on a limb in order to get children their best educations.” School leaders with a history of cross-sector collaboration

shared a growth mindset—“a commitment to learning”—and belief in continuously striving for improvement by looking to others outside their own schools. In several cases, these respondents had been leaders of struggling schools or schools classified as “turnaround” schools who sought out best practices not only in their own districts, but also in other districts and states. One district school principal described himself as a “shark ready to attack and get that information and get that knowledge” from successful charter schools. In two sites in particular, these school leaders with sizable cross-sector connections included, but were not limited to, traditional public school leaders with more autonomy than their peers because they led pilot schools or innovation schools.

Many of these school leaders who were well known for their experience with cross-sector collaboration reported that Compact leaders sought them out to participate in Compact activities. Although these school leaders welcomed the opportunity to participate, the impact of Compact activities on the size of these leaders’ cross-sector social networks or the depth and frequency of their interactions with school leaders in other sectors was minimal. Most reported no change in their cross-sector interactions as a result of the Compact, in many cases due to already overbooked schedules and sufficiently large existing peer networks. One charter school leader said of his participation in a Compact leadership program: “It just won’t deepen beyond a couple of cursory informal connections.” A traditional public school leader agreed that, although structured activities were “helpful,” she and her peers were already “taking the initiative” before and outside of Compact activities and “making it happen, even in our busy schedules.” Thus, although involving these already connected school leaders in collaboration activities may have been an efficient way to start school-level collaboration, this approach might have been merely a substitution of one form of collaboration for another and perhaps a lost opportunity for nonconnected leaders to start developing cross-sector peer networks.

“...although involving these already connected school leaders in collaboration activities may have been an efficient way to start school-level collaboration, this approach might have been merely a substitution of one form of collaboration for another and perhaps a lost opportunity for nonconnected leaders to start developing cross-sector peer networks.”

Strategy for consideration

Given the seemingly minimal influence of Compact collaboration activities on school leaders with preexisting cross-sector social connections, grantee sites might consider leveraging the structured networking afforded by collaboration activities to engage less experienced school leaders who may be interested in cross-sector collaboration but have had little to no prior engagement with leaders from other types of schools.

Grant-funded intensive residency programs established to develop aspiring leaders in two grantee sites were especially influential in helping form cross-sector networks that participants anticipated would be sustained. Although the two residency programs were structured somewhat differently (one coordinated by a third party and one coordinated by a CMO), both included school visits across sectors, school change projects, and intensive seminars or critical friends groups that facilitated the sharing of knowledge and valuable peer input on solving problems of

practice. The aspiring leaders participating in these programs were especially willing to reach out to other school leaders. As one charter school participant said, “I’m the kind of person who doesn’t like to reinvent the wheel, and like I said, in this role I don’t know enough to be perfect at it in this year, and I’m very comfortable with that fact, and because of that I’m very willing to reach out. So I’d say I reach out to somebody with some semblance of expertise in what I’m not sure about on a weekly basis. Whether it be email, phone call, text message, I’m constantly reaching out to these people.”

Developing sustainable cross-sector leader networks: The example of critical friends groups

Respondents regarded both formal and informal critical friends groups—a term trademarked by the National School Reform Faculty to describe communities of 5 to 12 members who meet regularly and commit to improving their practice through collaborative learning and structured interactions—as an important mechanism for developing wide cross-sector peer networks for school leaders.

Formal critical friends groups are embedded in an intensive leader residency program in one grantee site. Participants are required to meet informally with small groups twice per month for about 90 minutes. Four or five principal residents that span multiple school types compose these groups. Each week, one group member selects a problem of practice and selects a group member to facilitate discussion. The facilitator selects a protocol from the National School Reform protocols and helps the group work through the challenge using the protocol. Typical activities include role playing to help manage challenging staff, data analysis to help teachers target their instruction, and coaching strategies.

For residents, accountability to the program and accountability to their peers were key to ensuring consistent participation. Although limited time for collaboration is always an obstacle, respondents appreciated being held accountable to set aside this specific time for critical friends groups on a biweekly basis. The regular, sustained interaction with a small group of peers across sectors also helped to develop trusting relationships crucial to collaboration and practice-sharing. Respondents were more likely to reach out informally to their critical friends group than to other peers for information, materials, and best practices or for connections to other school leaders. As one respondent explained, the critical friends group is “the strongest place where I can have impact and people can have an impact on me.” Respondents believed that the cross-sector relationships developed via the critical friends groups would be sustained after the program.

Previous literature suggests that many different dimensions of collaboration—including information sharing, communication, shared leadership and decision making, shared goals and visions, and support for collaboration—may contribute to the overall level of cross-sector collaboration (Gajda 2004; Frey et al. 2006; Kellar-Guenther and Betts 2010). We conceptualized and examined five dimensions or measures of collaboration, as follows:

1. **Information sharing.** At the lowest level, sectors are aware of each other but do not share any information; at the highest level, sectors have a system for sharing information and ideas.
2. **Communication.** At the lowest level, communication across sectors is infrequent or absent; at the highest level, communication across sectors is clear, frequent, and both formal and informal.

3. **Shared leadership and decision making.** At the lowest level, all decisions are made independently by sector; at the highest level, leadership is centralized, with a clear mechanism for decision making, and consensus is reached on decisions.
4. **Shared goals and visions.** At the lowest level, sectors have divergent goals and interests; at the highest level, sectors have clearly defined mutual goals and are committed to the same short- and long-term outcomes.
5. **Support for collaboration.** At the lowest level, there is no structure in place for collaboration and no value in collaboration across sectors communicated by organizational leaders; at the highest level, there is a system for collaboration, and organizational leaders clearly value collaboration.

Across most grantee sites, school leader Compact participants reported that, on average, the amount of support by Compact leaders and by their districts or charter organizations for cross-sector collaboration and the extent to which the multiple sectors (or organizations) shared similar goals and visions were highest relative to other dimensions of collaboration (Table 2). Compact leaders and grant implementers in particular played a key role in supporting and facilitating collaboration for school leaders.

Table 2. School leader collaboration across multiple components

	Information Sharing	Communication	Shared Leadership and Decision-Making	Shared Goals and Visions	Support for Collaboration
Grantee Site 1	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium-High	High
Grantee Site 2	Low-Medium	Low-Medium	Medium	Low-Medium	Medium-High
Grantee Site 3	Low-Medium	Low-Medium	Medium	Medium	Low
Grantee Site 4	High	High	Medium-High	Medium-High	Medium-High
Grantee Site 5	Low-Medium	Low-Medium	Low	Medium-High	Medium
Grantee Site 6	Low	Low	Low	Medium-High	Medium
Grantee Site 7	Low	Low	Low	Low-Medium	Low-Medium

Notes: Based on responses from between five and seven traditional public school and charter school leaders per site. In two grantee sites, a response from a single Catholic school leader in the site was also included.

Component levels are averages of codes derived from responses to five questions, each corresponding to a different component: information sharing, communication, shared leadership and decision making, shared goals and visions, and support for collaboration across sectors in grantee site. In cases with wide variation across respondents about a component, we also considered the mode response. In NOLA, school leaders responded to the same questions about collaboration across stand-alone charter schools and CMOs.

Most respondents also believed that all school types ultimately shared a similar long-term goal of producing the best outcomes for students. However, they frequently noted that the visions or pathways to that goal, as well as more short-term goals, differed by school type. The different

sectors have “a totally different vision of what at the programmatic level it looks like to serve kids. But I have enormous respect for the work that they’re doing and we’re looking for some of the same outcomes, many of the same equity of outcomes. . . . There are many shared values,” explained one charter school leader. In some cases, these different pathways were simply attributed to different instructional approaches—for example, heterogeneous versus homogeneous groupings—and assessment systems. Other school leaders in both sectors perceived that, although traditional public schools might take a more holistic approach to learning or—in the case of neighborhood schools—be concerned almost exclusively with safety and attendance on a daily basis, charter schools focused more on data-driven instruction and short-term goals for student achievement outcomes. The common theme of divergent day-to-day goals, despite similar overall goals, led some leaders to question whether a truly high level of collaboration could be achieved.

All grantee sites, with one exception, reported lower levels of cross-sector (or cross-organization) information sharing, communication, and shared leadership and decision making (relative to support and shared goals/visions). School leaders reporting medium or medium-high levels of shared leadership and decision making tended to be in grantee sites that have substantially less third-party involvement in implementing Compact or collaboration grant activities. Information sharing and communication were commonly reported as low, both at a centralized sector level and across individual schools, primarily due to a lack of structure in place for cross-sector conversation. School leaders often expressed surprise about how little they communicated across sectors within the city. One charter school leader found it “depressing” and noted that “something was wrong” with not even knowing the names of other traditional public elementary school leaders in the city. Even at a building level, in co-located schools that were not intentionally co-located as part of the Compact, communication was often nonexistent. “It’s so weird. . . . They don’t even hold the door for us,” noted one school leader in a co-located school. School leaders in co-located schools often lamented the lack of communication within buildings but were uncertain of how to reach out across sectors. On the other hand, co-located schools also presented ample opportunity for cross-sector engagement, of which several principals availed themselves. These leaders began with “roommate” tasks—coming up with “common rules on how to share the space”—and progressed to a broader sharing of strategies, ideas, and vertically aligned student standards. Successful co-located relationships between traditional public and charter schools were most often facilitated by similar student populations or by vertically aligned grade structures such that students progressed from one school to the other, and both leaders had a “shared investment” around “our kids.”

For the most part, teacher collaboration across sectors remains minimal, perhaps by design.

Across the grantee sites, reported teacher-level interaction across sectors ranged from nonexistent to minimal. Within-sector, cross-school teacher interaction was somewhat higher, but still limited. For the most part, the lack of cross-sector, and even within-sector, interaction was attributed to a lack of opportunity. In at least two grantee sites, no activities brought teachers from different sectors together explicitly; the designs of the collaboration grant proposals did not include such activities and focused on collaboration at higher staff levels. In other sites, shared professional development attended by teachers from multiple sectors—proposed as professional learning communities or mechanisms for sharing best practices—was perceived to do little to

facilitate interaction or practice sharing across sectors. Many teachers reported that they “coexisted” at the professional development sessions but did not work together. Indeed, 59 percent of traditional public school teacher respondents and 34 percent of charter school teacher respondents were unaware of the Compact or of any larger effort to collaborate and share practices across sectors. Among these respondents, most were part of school partnerships, shared professional development, or teacher coaching initiatives. The remaining respondents attended school study tours or were coached by, or worked regularly with, school leader residents from collaboration grant leadership development programs. Perhaps this lack of publicity around cross-sector collaboration—particularly in sites with more contentious traditional public sector-charter sector relations and vocal teachers’ unions—was by design. As one charter school teacher participating in shared professional development said, “There is some sort of disconnect in how this is getting presented to the schools,” because no indication had been given that collaboration “was the point of this.” In three grantee sites, at least two-thirds of teachers reported knowing fewer than five teachers in other sectors. In fact, 11 of the 29 respondents providing data on their cross-sector networks did not know a single teacher in another type of school. As with school leaders, teachers in co-located schools across sites (via the Compact or not) often did not interact with or know other teachers in the same building. A charter teacher in one such co-located school noted of the traditional public school teachers in the building: “We never saw these people, but they were like literally right next door. It’s bizarre.”

Notably, many teachers pointed out that collaboration was not even encouraged across schools within their own sectors. Traditional public school teachers cited a scaling back of shared professional development time across their districts and elimination of common planning periods with team or partner teachers. Similarly, teachers in charter networks noted that they had “their own issues” trying to work together across schools in their networks. A charter school leader agreed, noting that she was not even certain teachers from her school would recognize teachers from other schools in the network if they passed each other on the street.

In addition to the lack of opportunity, teacher skepticism about cross-sector collaboration was a significant factor. Mistrust and a lack of knowledge or understanding of charter schools and charter school funding remained pervasive in many grantee cities. At the very least, many district teachers felt that “the doors were not open” to them at charter schools, and several charter teachers worried that reaching out to traditional public school teachers might be unwelcome or construed as offensive. As one district teacher pointed out, “I think teachers in general, I don’t know, are kind of guarded....I think it’s an attitude where we feel like ‘we’re doing great and who is this other teacher to come in and try to tell me how to be better.’” In a couple of grantee sites, mistrust and tension were particularly high. Teachers in neighborhood schools in particular were skeptical that charter schools were serving the same student populations, and budgetary issues led some teachers to express the perception that they were susceptible to losing their positions due to charter school takeovers. That said, traditional public school teachers across multiple sites noted that they blamed the “system” or the “administration” and not charter school teachers.

Despite a lack of opportunity and substantial tension across sectors across sites, most teachers consistently expressed a willingness to collaborate with teachers in other types of schools. School visits and opportunities for professional learning communities around the Common Core were particularly welcome. Some teachers simply wished to develop a better

understanding of other types of schools, and others considered collaboration with other types of schools to be an important vehicle for improving their own practice. “Every time I observe another teacher, I learn something,” explained one charter teacher. “I love to talk to other teachers, period,” was a refrain uttered by many teachers in both sectors. Other charter school teachers noted that they would particularly appreciate an opportunity to develop relationships with veteran teachers in traditional public schools. “The depth of knowledge [in my school] is just not there,” explained one charter teacher, noting the irony of being called a “veteran” teacher at age 28. Echoed a charter school teacher in another grantee site: “I’m like a veteran [relative to other teachers in the school], and I’m a fifth-year teacher. I’m not a veteran. You know I’m learning all the time, so I think that it would be so cool to meet people who have done this for years... who *are* Pinterest², like they’re real Pinterest, because they’ve like actually made all that stuff up, and implemented it, and worked it, and I think we’re definitely missing the acquisition of knowledge by having—or lacking some older teachers, more experienced teachers. So I would love that [the opportunity to interact with traditional public school teachers].”

Teachers who did have experience working with colleagues in other types of schools most often did so outside of Compact activities. The Teach For America network was most often cited as a mechanism for interacting and collaborating with teachers in other types of schools in each city. Teachers with relatively less experience were also more likely to try to reach out to teachers in other types of schools, through college and graduate school relationships, teacher residency programs, or cross-sector connections via their school leaders. Likewise, teachers in stand-alone charters who lacked the built-in network afforded by a CMO were also more likely to report seeking out collaboration activities, both within and outside of the Compact.

Practices are being shared through collaboration activities but not necessarily implemented across school types.

A key premise of the theory of action behind the collaboration grants is that strategic collaboration activities facilitate the sharing of best practices across sectors. Across all sites, respondents who did interact with staff across sectors reported at least some sharing of practices; in fact, the most frequently cited impact of the Compact and collaboration grant was the facilitating of this sharing. That said, practice sharing was minimal in a couple of grantee sites and often had not progressed from knowledge sharing to implementation of learned practices. Practice sharing occurred most often at central office and school leader levels among staff who were engaged in regular cross-sector activity.

Across all six grantee sites with cross-sector Compact members, many commonalities emerged in the types of practices reported specifically shared from one sector to the other, as shown in Table 3. Traditional public school and charter respondents both most often reported traditional public sector staff sharing three types of systems or practices with charter sector staff: (1) practices and systems related to students with disabilities or ELLs; (2) approaches to engaging families and community; and (3) small-group instructional practices. Within these broader characteristics, practices that were shared and subsequently implemented in a charter

² Pinterest is a virtual bulletin board—reported to have approximately 40 million active monthly users—used to share and collect ideas for different projects and interests; teachers can use the platform to find lesson plans and creative classroom activities, among other materials.

school included a community engagement committee and small-group instruction, usually guided reading. A concern about the lack of community knowledge and engagement in charter schools relative to neighborhood schools and a desire to emulate the success of neighborhood schools in that area was a common refrain by charter staff across several sites, although no respondents indicated that they had taken steps to learn more about how to replicate that success. As one teacher noted, neighborhood schools are “really good at making sure they know who’s where; everyone knows about everyone. Everyone knows what shelter they’re at and, I think that changes the dynamic of what schools represent to families and, kind of, drives teaching in a very different manner.”

Four types of practices were most often reported as being shared in the opposite direction, from the charter school sector to the traditional public school sector: (1) school culture and behavior systems, (2) interim assessments, (3) teacher coaching models, and (4) strategic data use. Traditional public school staff most often implemented student incentive systems and hallway transition systems borrowed directly from charter schools. Many traditional public school staff noted a desire to implement many more charter school culture systems, especially parent responsibility agreements, but believed they could not do so in a traditional public school setting because they had no power to enforce them by leveraging a consequence, such as expulsion. Coaching models, including intensive teacher coaching and peer coaching systems, from charter organizations were implemented directly by charter staff in traditional public schools and indirectly by traditional public schools themselves. Catholic school staff and traditional public school staff reported implementing some differentiated school administration systems to focus on instructional leadership. Although charter schools frequently shared interim assessments and approaches to using data, including data walls³, with traditional public schools, the extent to which such practices were ultimately implemented was unclear.

Table 3. Most frequently shared practices via Compact activities, as reported across all respondents

Practices Most Shared from Traditional Public School Sector to Charter Sector	Practices Most Shared from Charter Sector to Traditional Public School
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practices and systems for instructing students with disabilities or ELLs • Community and family engagement approaches • Small-group instruction, especially guided reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School culture and behavior systems • Interim assessments • Teacher coaching models • Strategic data use

Well-structured school partnerships (including co-located schools) and school leader residency programs were the primary settings for practice sharing across all grantee sites. Frequent interactions and the development of trusting, close relationships through these Compact

³ A data wall is a visual representation of data relevant to a specific question or area of concern, typically used to display goals for student achievement and progress toward those goals. Data walls can be visible to students or used only by teachers and/or school leaders.

activities were considered the most effective facilitators. In school partnerships without these close relationships, sharing was less likely. A traditional public school teacher reported not feeling “completely comfortable sharing what I’m doing for fear of judgment” by a charter school teacher partner. Indeed, the formal and informal critical friends groups developed both within the Compact and outside of the Compact were considered the most important settings for both the sharing of practice and knowledge and the support needed to implement effective practices. Formal small consultancies and critical friends groups—usually associated with leadership development programs—in particular provided necessary “built-in time and accountability” for school staff. School and classroom visits also were frequently cited as settings for practice sharing outside of the Compact. Respondents also noted that a sense of urgency was a key facilitator of practice sharing. In particular, the impending implementation of the Common Core standards in many grantee sites has spurred active sharing of Common Core materials and instructional approaches from the traditional public school sector to the charter school sector and vice versa. This sense of urgency has “triggered the need to partner with people” and “made people more motivated” to be ready for implementation and ensure student success.

Facilitating practice sharing: An example of a teacher leader program

In one grantee site, 20 teachers participated in a year-long leadership training program funded by the Compact and run by a third-party leadership training organization. Nine teachers from charter schools and 11 teachers from traditional public schools participated in the program during the 2013–2014 school year. The training included leadership retreat days, strategy sessions, mentorship, and informal workshops. Each participant implemented a school change project and engaged in peer consultancy sessions with other members.

Teacher respondents who had participated in the program reported sharing practices related to school culture, behavior management, co-teaching models, and special education instruction. Several teachers from traditional public schools mentioned that they had no contact with charter school teachers and little accurate information about charter schools before participating in the program. However, the program created an opportunity for cross-sector collaboration, whereby teachers could question one another about practices and strategies. For all respondents, participation facilitated the development of a network of “talented” and “very capable” people that could be maintained beyond the program. One charter teacher described it as “one of the best professional experiences that I’ve had.”

Several respondents cited a notable feature of the program: initially, each teacher was not explicitly linked to a sector. As one teacher from a traditional public school noted, “I wasn’t even aware that the full spectrum of the cohort was a really diverse mix between charters and [traditional public] schools until maybe midway [through the program]. In that sense, we were sort of really able to just respect each other as professionals.” Another charter school teacher agreed, stating “I haven’t thought about who’s public, who’s district—just [that] everyone’s an educator.” By not labeling teachers by their sector, respondents felt the program was able to avoid some of the more hostile rhetoric that is common in cross-sector conversations in the grantee site. According to one charter respondent, an activity that grouped participants by sector to discuss perceptions of the other sector “sparked maybe a little bit of tension between the groups, because I don’t think we had ever thought about that there was a divide between us” until the program made the differences more explicit.

Despite an increased sharing of practices across sectors (and across charter organizations) via collaboration activities, many respondents noted an implementation gap. Central office administrators in both sectors noted that “a lot of conversations” in which knowledge and practices were being shared would do little to result in systemic change without implementation. Even with more structured sharing of best practices, teachers in particular noted difficulty implementing without some form of feedback and accountability or follow-through. A charter school teacher explained that although “it’s great to be introduced to certain skills, or certain things I should be doing curriculum wise in my classroom, but when there’s no follow up with it, it’s hard for me to gauge whether I’m doing it right, and it’s hard for me to necessarily to stick with those things, because I haven’t really secured those skills down.” School leaders in particular also found it difficult to implement practices learned from other types of schools without teacher, and even student, buy-in. One district principal noted that “messaging” is crucial: “When implementing a practice adopted from another type of school, a ‘we’re better’ message can maybe be sent. But I think with caution, you can definitely spin it that, ‘Hey, they’re doing this. We’re going to do this. It worked there. It can work here. We have the same demographics.’”

WHAT CONTEXTUAL FACTORS CURRENTLY PLAY A ROLE IN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COLLABORATION GRANT AND IN CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION MORE BROADLY?

Key findings

- The climate for collaboration has mostly improved but remains negative in several cities.
- Negative perceptions create a barrier to collaboration across sectors.
- Community groups and teachers' unions may make statements against collaboration but rarely actively stop it.
- Limited time deters collaboration, even when it is desired.
- City, district, and school leaders promote collaboration in broad and specific ways.
- Structural factors such as co-location and Common Core implementation are key facilitators of collaboration.

Context can substantially influence the feasibility of collaboration across different school types. Structural factors, political factors, fiscal factors, and attitudes and perceptions across sectors all play a role in both enabling and hindering collaboration.

Climate for Collaboration

Each grantee site is a unique context for collaboration. The “climate for collaboration”—or general sense by educators of the ease of collaboration in a city—encompasses specific structural, political, and other factors influencing collaboration and less measurable attitudes and inclinations.

Across grantee sites, the climate for collaboration was frequently perceived as unfavorable in the years before Compact signing but more favorable currently. Most central office and school leader respondents gave the climate before the Compact a low rating (Table 4)⁴. In six of the seven grantee sites, respondents from traditional public schools felt there was a negative climate before the Compact signing. One traditional public school leader stated that previously there had been “a real contentiousness between the district and charter schools,” which limited collaboration across sectors. Respondents from charter schools had relatively

⁴ During school leader and administrator interviews, respondents were asked to rate the climate for collaboration on a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 being a climate that very much prevents different sectors from working together, 3 being a climate that neither helps nor prevents collaboration, and 5 being a climate that very much helps different sectors work together. If the mean rating for all respondents in each sector of a city is between 1 and 2, the climate is categorized as “negative.” If the average rating is 3, the climate is categorized as “neutral,” and if the average rating is between 4 and 5, the climate is categorized as “positive.” In general, a mean rating between 2 and 3 is categorized as negative-neutral, and a mean rating between 3 and 4 is categorized as neutral-positive. However, for mean ratings between 2 and 4, we also considered the range and mode of the ratings provided to determine the appropriate category.

Table 4. Trends in climate for cross-sector collaboration, by sector

	Traditional Public Respondents			Charter Respondents		
	Reported Current Climate for Collaboration	Reported Pre-Compact Climate for Collaboration	Change in Climate	Reported Current Climate for Collaboration	Reported Pre-Compact Climate for Collaboration	Change in Climate
Grantee Site 1	Negative-Neutral	Negative	Improved	Neutral	Negative	Improved
Grantee Site 2	Neutral-Positive	Negative	Improved	Positive	Negative-Neutral	Improved
Grantee Site 3	Neutral	Negative	Improved	Neutral	Negative	Improved
Grantee Site 4	Positive	Neutral-Positive	Improved	Positive	Neutral-Positive	Improved
Grantee Site 5	Positive ^a	Negative ^a	Improved	Neutral-Positive	Negative-Neutral	Improved
Grantee Site 6	Negative-Neutral	Negative	Improved	Negative	Negative	Declined ^b
Grantee Site 7	Negative-Neutral	Negative	Improved	Negative-Neutral	Negative	Improved

Note: For each grantee site, climate categories are based on responses from between 3 and 7 central office administrators and school leaders in each sector.

^a Only one respondent provided a rating.

^b Charter respondents perceived a decline in climate for collaboration to an even more negative level.

comparable but slightly more positive perceptions of the pre-Compact climate. In four grantee sites, charter respondents ranked the pre-Compact climate as negative, with charter respondents in two grantee sites ranking it as negative-neutral. In one grantee site, though, charter and traditional public school respondents both rated the pre-Compact climate as generally supportive of collaboration across the traditional public and charter sectors.

On average, school leaders and central office administrators in six of the seven grantee sites reported an improvement in the climate for collaboration over the past few years. Describing the change in climate for collaboration in the grantee site, one school leader stated: “I feel like there’s an openness to cross-sector collaboration much more so now than there was before...whereas five years ago it was like all political and there were no avenues really for any kind of collaboration and communication.” In another grantee site, one principal noted that the difference in the climate was “incredible.”

At the same time, a number of respondents reported a negative trajectory in their grantee site’s receptiveness toward cross-sector collaboration. In one grantee site, all charter respondents felt the climate had worsened in recent years. Several respondents in other grantee sites also perceived that the climate had recently become less receptive toward cross-sector collaboration. In several sites, political and economic conditions resulted in wide fluctuations in the climate. Issues such as budget shortfalls, union contract debates, mayoral turnover, and other changes in

district governance caused some respondents to rate the current climate more poorly than in the pre-Compact period. In addition, the rapid growth of the charter sector in some sites was perceived to have resulted in increased tensions and competition both between and within the sectors, weakening the sitewide disposition toward collaboration.

Perceptions of the Compact’s role in improving the climate for collaboration varied. Many factors contributed to the reported changes in climate, but at least one administrator in each grantee site named the collaboration grant as one component driving positive trends. Multiple respondents felt that the collaboration grant allowed focused communication and understanding across the sectors, which was a key beginning point for collaboration and sharing of practices across sectors. One CMO administrator noted, “I think the Compact is the first time that there has been an intentional focus on increasing the level of dialogue and putting forth a set of city-wide objectives in front of various stakeholders. So I think the Compact has allowed there to be [a] forum for dialogue and discourse.” A district administrator explained that the collaboration grant helped foster an improved climate because increased knowledge of charter schools and “what they can bring to your district that can help you to meet the needs of the students and the families” makes it easier “to communicate it to your stakeholders, and also to understand it yourself and not be closed minded about it.” The respondent felt the Compact “helped to move the needle as far as the climate and culture around collaborations with charter organizations.”

Not all respondents, however, felt the collaboration grants had a sizable impact, if any, on the changes in climate. Particularly in larger districts, respondents noted that existing political and budgetary realities were more influential. In addition, as one CMO administrator noted, some grantee sites were undertaking a variety of reform initiatives, so although the collaboration grants may have helped contribute to an improved climate for cross-sector collaboration, they were not necessarily the “key piece that made it better.” Therefore, it was difficult for some respondents to determine what, if any, role the collaboration grant might have played.

Despite increased openness toward collaboration in most grantee sites, a majority of respondents still perceived the current climate in their sites as not supportive of collaboration. Only one grantee site was perceived by its respondents to have a favorable climate for collaboration currently. Respondents across both sectors stated that there were many oppositional forces still pushing back against a climate of open collaboration. Noted one district administrator: “We have community misunderstanding. . . . We have union barriers related to contracts and pushback because of positions being lost or understanding about how all of that works. We have all of these barriers that make this chummy kind of relationship tough.” Misperceptions of both the traditional public and charter school sectors remained highly influential. One CMO administrator noted a divide within the charter sector between charter organizations that had a positive impression of collaboration with traditional public

Additional Context:

In the midst of this data collection, some major changes occurred in political and educational leadership in several cities. For example, Boston and New York City elected new mayors, and both cities, along with Hartford, faced subsequent district leadership turnover. This instability was widely referenced by respondents in those grantee sites and the longer-term consequences of those changes—yet to be determined—will be explored in additional detail in future analysis and reporting.

schools and other charters that “tend to generalize and say, ‘Well, they’re so dysfunctional it’s not worth it to work with them.’”

Conditions Influencing Collaboration

Specific factors can influence collaboration across sectors or, in all-charter districts, collaboration among different charter networks and stand-alone charter schools. These factors can include preconceptions, leadership and leadership transitions, and political and governance factors that affect the extent to which the sectors have complementary or conflicting interests. We categorize specific factors that play a role in cross-sector collaboration, as reported by central office staff, school leaders, and teacher respondents, into three domains:

1. **Perceptions.** Beliefs regarding the other sector informing whether or not central office and school staff see collaboration as a worthy goal
2. **Politics and Community.** Political and governance issues, and community leaders and groups influencing collaboration
3. **Structures and Resources.** Fiscal, logistical, and physical considerations related to the feasibility of collaboration

Barriers

Negative perceptions create a barrier to collaboration across sectors. Each sector battles against perceptions that create cross-sector tensions and negatively influence staff attitudes toward collaboration. When teachers, school leaders, and administrators see the other sector as fundamentally different from their own, cross-sector collaboration can seem unhelpful or unnecessary. Frequently cited negative perceptions of the charter sector include that charter school student populations are easier to serve than traditional public school student populations and that the teachers are young, uncertified, and more likely to leave the field after a few years (Table 5). Charter respondents noted that many colleagues perceived traditional public schools as less effective and not sharing goals or vision with charter schools. Across both sectors and all respondent types, misperceptions were believed to be particularly pronounced among teachers. Even if respondents themselves did not espouse these perceptions, many thought the negative stereotypes of the other sector were still pervasive enough in their grantee site to deter collaboration.

Some degree of variability existed across sites in the perceptions domain, particularly in the charter sector. In addition to the two specific barriers related to perceptions listed in Table 5, charter respondents in two grantee sites frequently mentioned a lack of trust between sectors. In another grantee site, charter respondents mentioned the perception that traditional public staff are not open to reforms.

Table 5. Primary barriers to collaboration, as reported by all respondent types across grantee sites

Charter Respondent Barriers	Traditional Public Respondent Barriers
Perceptions Domain	
1. Traditional public schools are less successful	1. Charter schools serve a different student population
2. There is not a shared vision or goals across sectors	2. Charter school staff are less experienced and have high turnover rates
Politics and Community Domain	
1. Teachers' union resistance ^a	1. Teachers' union resistance ^a
2. Cross-sector competition	2. Cross-sector competition
Structures and Resources Domain	
1. Limited time	1. Limited time
2. Limited financial resources	2. Limited financial resources

^aIndicates that central office staff were specifically asked what role the factor plays in collaboration. School leaders and teachers may also have cited this factor as a barrier, but were not specifically asked about it.

Community groups and teachers' unions may make statements against collaboration but rarely actively stop it. Among factors specifically asked about in interviews, the teachers' union was most uniformly identified as a barrier to collaboration across sectors and grantee sites. Forty-four respondents, including 21 traditional public sector respondents, identified the union as a barrier to collaboration, and only three described the union as a facilitator. Among teachers' union member respondents, two identified the union as a barrier, and none described the union as a facilitator. A majority of respondents in both sectors felt that anti-charter messages produced by the union were unhelpful to collaboration, although for the most part this messaging represented the extent of the barrier. However, several respondents noted logistical obstacles raised by the union (related to, for example, contractual hours or to compensation for time in shared professional development). Opposition to charters by parent and community groups in a few grantee sites was seen as a barrier to collaboration in that convincing both traditional public school staff and local school boards of the value of cross-sector cooperation was more

Overcoming Barriers to Collaboration

Across the grantee sites, Compact participants pursued two avenues to overcome cross-sector tensions and resource constraints: (1) aligning of practice and goals across sectors to build trust; and (2) dedicating more resources to collaboration, particularly time and money for collaboration activities. One approach to building trust that was implemented in a leadership training session involved participants openly discussing stereotypes and negative opinions across sectors. By tackling these misconceptions head on, participants developed a better understanding of conditions and practices in other types of schools. In other sites, school locations and the substantial travel time sometimes involved in school partnership meetings were often cited as a disincentive to attend. Some teachers tried to eliminate that problem by using teleconferencing.

challenging under such conditions. In these sites, community anti-charter attitudes were perceived to contribute to tensions across sectors and enhance misperceptions, limiting staff interest in collaboration and district willingness to authorize charter expansion.

Competition for students, enhanced in some grantee sites by the threat of charter expansion, was also commonly seen as a hindrance to collaboration. In one grantee site, for example, the political debate surrounding charter expansion has created more tension in traditional public-charter relations. Across sectors, but particularly within sites with sizable numbers of charter schools, competition is also perceived to result in some charter organizations being unwilling to share resources and best practices.

Teachers' unions and competition were cited in a majority of grantee sites as primary barriers to collaboration, but in some cases other factors were the most reported barriers. In three grantee sites, community resistance to charter schools was the most reported barrier, particularly by charter respondents. In two grantee sites, school closings were an often cited barrier, exacerbating the larger challenge of competing for students.

Limited time deters collaboration, even when it is desired. Limited time is the most frequently cited barrier to collaboration across all respondents. Charter sector respondents mentioned time constraints slightly more frequently than did traditional public respondents, specifically citing extended day schedules as an obstacle.

Financial limitations and limited communication were other frequently mentioned barriers. Limited budgets—and sometimes budget crises—heightened tensions across sectors at a sitewide level, particularly with regard to charter authorization and competition for facilities. At the school level, teachers had limited resources for collaboration outside of Compact activities. Some teachers who wanted to meet up with teachers outside their own sector said there was so little communication across sectors that they didn't know anyone from the other sector. Respondents in this category tended to be traditional public school teachers with limited exposure to the charter sector. One traditional public school teacher sharing this sentiment stated: "I know a lot of people in other district schools [in this city]. I know some people in other districts. I don't know anybody in charters, or even parochial schools."

Limited time and resources were the top most mentioned barriers in the structures and resources domain for charter respondents in all seven grantee sites, but there was more variation within the traditional public sector when compared across sites. Co-located schools were identified as a source of tension in one grantee site by both charter and traditional public sector respondents (although a couple of teacher respondents in this site highlighted co-located schools as a positive mechanism for collaboration). School leaders from co-located schools, who more often identified co-located schools as a barrier to collaboration, noted operational challenges (such as tensions over shared space and resources).

Facilitators

A shared vision and respect for educators in the other sector help make collaboration possible. Respondents shared a common view that collaboration facilitates more collaboration (Table 6). Many respondents reported having positive views of teachers or leaders in the other sector, particularly after developing closer relationships through Compact activities. One

Table 6. Primary facilitators of collaboration, as reported by all respondent types across all grantee sites

Charter Respondent Facilitators	Traditional Public Respondent Facilitators
Perception Domain	
1. Traditional public teachers respected as partners and colleagues	1. Shared vision and/or goals across sectors
2. Shared vision and/or goals across sectors	2. Charter teachers are respected as partners and colleagues
Politics and Community Domain	
1. School leader support ^a	1. Superintendent support ^a
2. External organizations (for example, CityYear and Teach For America) ^a	2. District office support ^a
Structures and Resources Domain	
1. Recent similar mandates for both sectors, like implementing the Common Core	1. Co-located schools*
2. Co-located schools*	

Notes: In the politics and community domain, the same number of traditional public school respondents listed superintendent support and district office support as facilitators.

In the structures and resources domain, there was too much variation among traditional public school respondents to identify a second facilitator with more than a very small number of respondent citations.

^aIndicates that central office staff were specifically asked what role the factor plays in collaboration. School leaders and teachers may also have cited this factor as a facilitator, but were not specifically asked about it.

traditional public school teacher described her experience before the Compact as: “The charter schools think we [traditional public school teachers] don’t know what we’re doing, and we think that charter schools don’t know what they are doing.” The teacher noted that “it is very good for me to see how they actually write their curriculum, teach their classes, [and] run their school” and that the collaboration through Compact activities had made her “more open-minded.” Respondents also recognized that, when traditional public schools and charter schools had common goals or recognized a shared vision across sectors (such as prioritizing student achievement or preparing for Common Core implementation), collaboration was easier and more likely to occur. These facilitators were largely shared across all sites and both sectors.

City, district, and school leaders promote collaboration in broad and specific ways. Key city and district leaders create an environment where collaboration is viewed as a priority in some grantee sites. In five of the seven grantee sites, respondents noted that the mayor, superintendent, and/or district office encouraged collaboration and open communication across the sectors. Traditional public school staff were much more likely to list these people as facilitators of collaboration, although charter respondents across the five grantee sites also included at least one as a top facilitator. The mayor, superintendent, and district office shaped the climate for collaboration within the sites and often set cross-sector collaboration as a priority. One traditional public school leader stressed the importance of the superintendent in setting the tone for the district at large: “I think [collaboration] has really started with our superintendent, and his belief in collaboration, and sharing, and working together, and what that brings” to the

district. More traditional public school respondents than charter respondents listed the district office as a clear conduit for collaboration.

Charter respondents across all grantee sites listed school leaders, external groups, and third-party organizations like CityYear and Teach For America as top facilitators for collaboration. School leaders provided teachers with contacts and connections in traditional public schools, facilitating collaboration. In addition, some teachers noted that their school leaders encouraged them to leave their classrooms to visit other schools or attend collaboration activities, and ensured that substitute teachers were available to cover their classes. In addition, Compact leaders and implementers were frequently credited with greatly facilitating collaboration. One charter school leader described the organization implementing the Compact as helping by “educating charters in opportunities” to collaborate.

Structural factors such as co-location and Common Core implementation are key facilitators of collaboration. Both charter and traditional public school respondents listed co-location as a top facilitator of collaboration across all grantee sites. In a couple of sites, respondents at all levels noted that co-located schools sometimes cause increased tensions across sectors, particularly when facilities are scarce and co-locations are the result of convenience rather than thoughtful partnerships. Elsewhere, however, respondents at all levels perceived that co-located schools spurred collaboration, particularly when implemented as intentional, purposeful partnerships between two schools, including but not limited to Compact partnerships. In strong co-locations, respondents noted a sense of shared investment in all students within the building, particularly when the schools share services, extracurricular activities, or elective courses. One charter school teacher stated that “my school actually has a good relationship with the co-locators,” and a shared monthly meeting included attempts to brainstorm how to collaborate across the schools but had yet to result in actual collaboration. In addition to co-location, traditional public school respondents listed closely located charter schools as a facilitator of collaboration; even if not located in the same building, physical proximity of schools in the other sector can facilitate opportunities for collaboration.

District- or statewide mandates, like the implementation of the Common Core or a shared curriculum, were also commonly cited as factors that foster collaboration by both sectors, but particularly by charter respondents. Following the same mandates can give a sense of shared vision or goals, as discussed previously. As traditional public and charter school teachers both work to implement the Common Core in their classrooms in most of the grantee sites, many teachers mentioned that they were looking for assistance and strong examples of how to help students meet the new standards. Therefore, they were seeking out and welcoming opportunities to collaborate. As one charter school leader stated, the “common purpose” of implementing the Common Core “makes people think, ‘we have to do this.’” This same leader cautions, though, that the common purpose was not a sufficient condition for collaboration, and without the Compact, the collaboration “wouldn’t be happening, because there’s not a space to do it.” Only with strong support and structure can teachers and school leaders leverage their interest in sharing practices in effective collaboration.

Relative openness to adopting practices from other types of schools varied by grantee site. Opinions on adopting practices across sectors were evenly split on several metrics. Of the 7

grantee sites,⁵ more respondents said the sectors were receptive to adopting practices in 5 grantee sites, and most respondents in the other 2 grantee sites thought the sectors were not receptive to adopting practices from the other sector. When examined by sector, most charter respondents in four grantee sites said staff would be receptive to adopting practices from the other sector, while respondents were split or thought staff would not be receptive in the other three sites. A majority of traditional public school respondents in three grantee sites felt staff would be receptive while most traditional public school respondents in the other three grantee sites largely felt staff would not be receptive. In summary, no strong trends emerge until we look at specific reasons respondents felt staff in their grantee site may or may not be open to sharing practices across sectors.

Many respondents acknowledge that fresh ideas are needed, and say they will adopt practices from other types of schools if they are proven effective. Respondents who perceived both themselves and their colleagues as open to adopting practices from the other sector often noted that proof of effectiveness is crucial. Others were oriented only toward specific strategies or toward areas where they are looking to build capacity. For example, one charter school leader observed that the collaboration was really only happening on the specific strategies that are the focus of the Compact. A traditional public school leader in another grantee site joked that, in areas of need, charter schools would often implement a traditional public school practice but “reinvent it and call it their own.”

Both sectors are wary of adopting practices from the other sector. Charter and traditional public school respondents who felt staff would not be open to adopting practices from the other sector cited “anti-district” or “anti-charter” attitudes and misperceptions as the biggest obstacle. In two grantee sites, district administrators and school leaders stated that even identifying a practice as being from a charter school would result in school staff rejecting it. A charter respondent commented that charters may be “reluctant [to collaborate] because charter schools were founded because district schools weren’t working.” Others noted a lack of interest in collaboration by charter schools that are part of larger CMO networks that allow for ample opportunity to share best practices internally.

⁵ In New Orleans, respondents were asked about their openness to adopting practices from other charter networks and schools. Their comments are included in this analysis.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED ABOUT GRANT IMPLEMENTATION MIDWAY THROUGH THE GRANT PERIOD? WHAT ARE THE PRIMARY LIMITATIONS OF THE GRANT OR PROBLEMS OF PRACTICE REPORTED BY GRANTEES?

Key findings

- Compact collaboration activities have resulted in strong working relationships and increased understanding across school types.
- Grant implementation falls short in the thoughtfulness and clarity of goals and messaging.
- Collaboration could be improved via stronger structures and incentives and increased accountability.

Compact collaboration activities have yet to effect systemic change but have resulted in many strong working relationships—especially at a central office level—and a greater understanding of different school types.

Across most of the intermediate outcomes proposed for the grants via the theory of action described in the introduction, about which central office administrators were questioned, respondent perceptions of the impact of the Compact and collaboration grant on the outcome varied widely (Table 7). Many respondents noted that the time that had elapsed since the awarding of the grant was too short to observe any impact. A small handful of central office respondents (none of whom were Compact leaders in grantee sites) believed that a few of these impacts—most often the closure of ineffective schools and increased charter sustainability—were beyond the scope of the grant as they understood it. Respondents also found it too difficult to isolate the impact of the grant from the impact of other initiatives ongoing in their districts. However, a substantial portion of respondents believed that the Compact and collaboration grant had made at least incremental impacts along the six outcome measures. Central office administrators were especially confident that collaboration activities geared toward teachers had resulted in improved instructional quality. In addition, respondents credited initiatives like intermediate steps toward common enrollment systems and the opening of new charter schools with increasing equity of access to quality seats for all students.

Although many remained skeptical of the ability of cross-sector collaboration to effect systemic change, respondents in all grantee sites consistently credited the Compact and collaboration grant with improving cross-sector (or cross-charter organization) relations. The most frequently reported impact was the development of important working and personal relationships, most often at the central office level, but occasionally at a school leader level. At a minimum, the Compact and collaboration grant were a mechanism for increasing interaction. More important, even in sites where strong cross-sector central office networks were already in place, the collaboration grant provided an incentive for action, a focus on shared goals and commonalities, and explicit accountability for progress.

Across all sectors and at all staff levels, but particularly among school staff, the most tangible impact of the collaboration grant perceived has been an increased understanding of other types of schools. Collaboration activities that brought together school staff, most often school partnerships and leader residency programs, helped break down misperceptions and stereotypes

Table 7. Perceived grant impacts on long-term outcomes

	Proportion of Central Office Administrator Respondents Reporting an Favorable Impact (Percentage)	Proportion of Central Office Administrator Respondents Reporting No Impact (Percentage)
Closure of ineffective schools (N = 29)	17	76
Opening of effective schools (N = 30)	20	63
Improved instructional quality or human capital practices (N = 37)	68	22
Increased equity of access to quality seats (N = 33)	45	36
Increased charter sustainability (N = 31)	29	45
Increased transparency of school effectiveness information (N = 35)	37	51

Note: Rows do not sum to 100 percent because, for each outcome, some respondents reported being uncertain or not knowing whether the grant had an impact.

of both charter and traditional public schools, as well as of Catholic schools. School staff reported increased trust and respect across school types and an improved perspective of “how something can be done in a different way.” Charter school staff in particular reported an increased appreciation of the working conditions in their own schools after interacting with traditional public schools. One charter school teacher explained, “A lot of times, we’re so isolated that we don’t know what to be grateful for here, in terms of, like, the fact that we have a hole-puncher in our printer and we have paper.” A charter school teacher in another grantee site expressed a similar sentiment that the daily concerns of a neighborhood school teacher worrying about having enough desks or getting students to attend class were markedly different from her own daily concerns. For district school staff, however, a better understanding of the structures and resources available to charter school staff was sometimes discouraging. As one traditional public school leader stated, “When you get those people in a room and we hear that the charter school principals can call an incompetent teacher downstairs at the end of the day and terminate them. And we’re here and we’ve got to write almost a book to get rid of a teacher, it’s a little frustrating.” In another site, even a traditional public school leader in a type of school with relatively more autonomy than other traditional public schools noted, when you are in a partnership and “you find out all of these things that these schools can do and you know you can’t do it, it’s very difficult.” At the same time, that knowledge can still “empower leaders to advocate for certain things in schools...for everybody to have these autonomies, and you have to know what to do with these autonomies once you get them.”

Grant implementation falls short in the thoughtfulness and clarity of goals and messaging.

Across all sites, the most common shortcoming of collaboration grant implementation was a perceived lack of focus and intentionality. This theme applied both at a citywide level and at an activity-specific level, although it is unclear who should be held responsible for identifying and

communicating goals at different levels. In several grantee sites, school staff pointed to a lack of cohesion and strategic direction for the Compacts. One charter school leader noted: “It’s been really hard for me to kind of have a sense of: is this really successful or not? Although we’ve developed relationships with people that I think are positive, and...there’s been a lot of collaborative sharing work that is individually rated as very positive experiences, I feel like it’s been really hard to get traction on: what are we really building towards?” School leaders in another site similarly noted that there had been no “intentional campaign or communication strategy.” Teachers across all sites expressed confusion about any sort of goal around collaboration: “I don’t see promoted ways—like, school-promoted ways—to collaborate with other teachers. And I might be missing some of those. You know? I might just not be aware. But that would still be a problem,” noted one district school teacher. The success of school-level partnerships in particular was often hindered by a lack of clear communication and accountability for school staff about goals and expectations for collaborative work. The school partnerships reported as most successful involved a clear, well-thought focus and often incorporated a third-party facilitator, teacher incentives, and clear expectations for attendance.

Getting the most out of school partnerships: Problems of practice and solutions

A lack of clear communication and accountability for school staff about goals and expectations for collaborative work often hindered school-level partnerships (including school-to-school and CMO-to-school partnerships and co-located schools) across multiple sites. In some cases, staff attendance at scheduled sessions was limited and inconsistent; in other cases, the schools themselves had difficulty even scheduling or adhering to scheduled meetings. School leaders in these struggling partnerships cited a lack of specific direction from Compact administrators related to goals and processes. Several respondents noted that partnerships seemed to have been created too quickly, without sufficient planning and preparation around the specific focus, methods, and outcomes of an individual partnership; in some cases, schools (or charter networks) were perceived to be thrown together as partners without sufficient consideration for how well they were matched. Partnerships that struggled most tended to have very broad themes and/or be hindered by staff personality differences.

The school partnerships reported as most successful involved a clear, well-thought out focus and often incorporated a third-party facilitator, teacher incentives, and clear expectations for attendance. One observed school partnership perceived as useful and effective by both school and central office staff regularly brought together the same small group of teachers (and administrators) from different school types about twice monthly. The partnership focused on specific subject areas, student subgroups, and targeted instructional strategies, and respondents viewed the student populations of their schools as very similar. The small group of teachers collectively participated in a sustained cycle of inquiry facilitated by an education consultant, sharing their own classroom data and working together to interpret it. One participant viewed this process of pooling data across classrooms and schools as a “much more scientific approach than one could take in one’s own classroom.” School walk-throughs with classroom observations early in the partnership helped build understanding, trust, and respect across school staff and facilitated sharing and discussion of observed practices (even those outside the specific focus of the partnerships). Providing stipends tied to a specific attendance threshold also incentivized regular participation by school staff. In addition, a nonparticipating school staff member assumed responsibility for note-taking, scheduling, and other logistical considerations, easing the management burden on participating school leaders and freeing their time to focus on the substance of the partnership.

The limited scope of the Compacts and collaboration grants was consistently highlighted by respondents across all grantee sites, enhancing skepticism that the grants would have much of an impact. The number of collaboration activities and the number of participants within activities targeted by the grants were considered far too small in scale. Nearly half the respondents who believed that collaboration activities had been successful in breaking down stereotypes and misperceptions across sectors added the caveat that the impact was limited to school staff who were participating in cross-sector collaboration activities. “You have to actually be in the room” to change your perception, explained one charter school leader.

Respondents who felt that effective practices simply did not translate across different school types cited those implementation obstacles as a shortcoming of the grant. “Sharing practices is difficult. Success has more to do with structures and staff than with the practice,” explained a charter administrator. A district school leader similarly grappled with the question of “How can we do it? It’s not just about instruction; it’s about the structures of schools and so much more.” Control over staffing decisions and parental involvement mandates were often cited as charter practices that could not be implemented in a traditional public school setting. However, the same school leader acknowledged that often structural obstacles are more of a perception than a reality. As a school leader sharing structures with colleagues in less autonomous schools outside of the Compact, the respondent had faced skepticism from traditional school leaders who “just feel very constrained in what they can do. It’s so much of a mindset and so much of perception and just so much of feeling constrained. Those things have to be lifted or people are just never going get out of their own way.” A traditional public school leader in another grantee site noted that there are many options for traditional public school leaders to obtain waivers or increased autonomy without having an officially autonomous school status.

Across all grantee sites, the Compacts suffered from a lack of buy-in to varying degrees in both sectors. Respondents in two sites noted that the largest CMOs were “unwilling to share” or only shared materials amongst themselves. Some charter teachers were skeptical that their networks were truly invested in adopting the practices shared via grant activities. A traditional public school leader in one grantee site described the difficulty of trying to find a charter school, even from among those that had signed the Compact, that was willing to collaborate. The lack of buy-in was not limited to charter schools. Some traditional public school staff participating in Compact activities, most often unaware that activities were intended as collaborative, were unconvinced of the value of collaboration for them. As one teacher put it, “We all want to see every student go to college but what many of us probably want more is our students to go to college.” More broadly, collaboration among school staff across sectors was perceived as unsustainable without clear structures and incentives in place.

Respondents in three grantee sites expressed concerns about the potentially one-sided nature of the Compact and collaboration grant because of a focus on charter to district sharing. One district administrator noted that the very term “district-charter collaboration” has the unintended consequence of reinforcing the notion that charter schools are separate from the district and viewed as problematic the perceived assumption of collaboration grants that charter schools have a monopoly on best practices. Similarly, traditional public school staff expressed discomfort with the notion of charter school staff as “mentors.” Charter respondents were similarly disappointed at the lack of opportunity to improve their own practice. One charter-school administrator expressed annoyance with the perceived general assumption that charter schools were expected

to be responsible for disseminating best practices. In another site, respondents in both sectors continued to struggle with a lack of clarity about district-charter partnership as a mutual existence centered on bartering resources or as true collaboration involving exchange of effective practices.

Collaboration could be improved through better structures and incentives, more school visits, better alignment of school partnerships, and increased accountability.

School staff respondents in all sectors offered many suggestions for how to improve collaborative activities to maximize the benefits.

Provide better structures and incentives for cross-sector collaboration. A majority of teachers expressed a strong interest in cross-sector collaboration but face a lack of time and competing priorities. Teachers and school leaders suggested offering explicit incentives, such as stipends or graduate credits, as an indication that their time is valued. Even simply recognizing and highlighting success was perceived as a way to promote collaboration. Teachers also noted that the timing of collaborative activities is crucial.

Teachers overwhelmingly suggested using the summer for institutes or think tanks focusing on specific areas and marketing those opportunities to teachers. “I think these are definitely some things that could happen over the summer as far as schools working with each other—I don’t know why no one has ever thought of institutes over the summer [at a well-known university]....Sometimes teachers have to hear something to want to be a part of it,” suggested a traditional public school teacher. Particularly in a couple of grantee sites where even Compact activities were not really collaborative at a school staff level, the need to provide any structured opportunities for collaboration was repeated not only by teachers, but also by their school leaders: “I think the work is really, really hard. If you fall into feeling isolated even within the building, it really zaps people’s energy....More attention for those collaborative opportunities for teachers can be super powerful, and I think to have teachers from charter and public interface with each other maybe breaks down some of those stereotypes and some of those perceptions about ‘Your job is so easy and my job is really tough. I got the real world kids. You got the good kids’.... Anytime you can bring teachers together and give them that forum it’s super important.”

Facilitate focused school walk-throughs or classroom visits for both school leaders and teachers. Teachers and school leaders alike noted the value of school and classroom visits and suggested offering and encouraging those opportunities. Noted one charter teacher, “That piece that’s missing is the peer-to-peer collaboration of peer observations that I think is so valuable....You’re going to learn something from any class you walk into, about your own practice.” Traditional public school teachers in particular noted that release time for classroom visits or other collaborative professional development is essential. “Something has to be put in place that incorporates the hours we already work,” explained one teacher. Although charter schools in general were perceived as better facilitators of professional development via regular release time, even charter school respondents expressed the need to have collaboration time built into the school day. One charter school leader also noted that visits should be very well targeted: “So I could imagine a school visit in which principals come together...to share something very specific [for example]...how we real-time coach teachers, how we go into their classrooms, and we support them in the moment to improve. And then I would say I want your input, and your guidance, and your feedback about how we can take the math program to the next level by using

more inquiry-based learning. So very, very specific. I'd come away with a best practice and I'd also come away feeling like I'd really supported the school in a very targeted, specific way.”

Improve the alignment of school partnerships and be specific about goals. School staff noted that collaboration could only be useful when it was very intentional, focused, sustained, and mutually beneficial. Many respondents suggested that a more purposeful connecting of schools with similar student populations or similar curricula is most useful. One charter school principal noted: “Just because I am in an apartment building, it doesn't mean I have anything in common with my neighbors, and sometimes, people are very focused on the collaboration within the co-located facility. For us, we have a working relationship in our co-located facility, but we have nothing in common philosophically or educationally, and I don't think that's really a powerful place to start sharing ideas. I think there are lots of opportunities to share between district and charter, but it can't come from this place that I think is very dangerous of 'charter schools are the innovators and therefore they have all this important knowledge to share with their district counterparts.' It's more like 'there are great district public schools, there are some great charter schools, let's connect the ones that have something in common and see where the sharing can happen.’” Teacher respondents also commented that partnerships that nurtured sustained, long-term relationships with repeated, regular interaction are crucial.

Build in more accountability at all levels. School leaders and teachers suggested building increased accountability into collaboration activities for both processes and outcomes. Teachers suggested adding coaches or peer observers to help them implement practices learned through collaboration. School leaders requested more oversight from Compact leaders on “agendas, making sure that we are staying focused on our objectives, and holding us accountable to meeting the right outcomes.” Even central office administrators felt that some form of increased accountability could encourage more meaningful change. One administrator suggested a “prize philanthropy approach with milestones tied to additional funds,” incentivizing grantee sites to implement more innovative or widespread changes to try to earn prizes for attaining milestones (for example, a specific proportion of effective seats or a specific increase in student outcomes).

Improve messaging, not only around the broad goal of collaboration, but also around specific opportunities for collaboration. Across all grantee sites, respondents expressed a need for more clear messaging and communication around collaboration. School staff expressed a need for “more clarity around things going on in the city.” In another site, a school leader explained, “I get hundreds of emails every day, and so if there's no buy-in to the group or no shared philosophy, it's hard for me to then decide like I'm going to send teachers here or I'm going to go here. I think there needs to be a little more connection between educators and a real look again at a philosophy that would align people to want to do certain things.” In the same site, a charter teacher who was not aware of the connection between an activity and the Compact or collaboration grant stated: “I think that if the purpose was more explicit we might've gotten a greater impact in terms of some collaboration from teachers and administrators in attendance. I think also that if it was explained that it was a grant, people might've treated it with more passion...maybe more seriously...I think it's important to know. I would've loved to know it was from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and I wonder, what was the reason why I didn't know that, or why they don't put it out there as that. I don't know if it might draw more people to want to be a part of it, because there is popularity, or if it would sincerely draw people who earnestly want to collaborate.” At a school level, one traditional public school principal noted

that his success in implementing charter school practices with his teachers revolved around using data via a cycle of inquiry to sell the practice and increase buy-in.

Involve students in cross-sector collaboration. Several respondents, especially in sites with relatively smaller charter sectors, noted that tensions across sectors were not limited to school staff but also included students. Respondents in many sites noted that collaboration could be valuable for students, as well as for school staff. Teachers suggested partnering with schools on student-based activities: “I mean, I would actually love to see more school partnerships, not necessarily in the formal academic sense, but even just working in terms of the community.... We have an enrichment program at the end of every school day, and that’s a really good opportunity to collaborate with other schools, because it’s typically structured in a way that the activities are more universal.... I think that sort of stuff, even though it’s not in an academic sense, would be really neat in terms of working with other schools and experiencing how life is in a different community outside of [the neighborhood] and getting the kids out to play with other students from other schools. I think that could be really valuable on a whole bunch of levels.”

Use technological platforms to facilitate sharing. Respondents in three sites suggested a better use of technology to aid in sharing materials across sites and in publicizing collaboration activities. Organizing calendars and sharing platforms by “department instructional area or grade” would be especially useful.

IN CONCLUSION

Halfway through the implementation period, the collaboration grants (and Compacts) have been most successful in fostering stronger ties across the highest level staff in the traditional public and charter school sectors and increasing cross-sector exposure for staff at all levels. The grants have been credited with some increases in instructional quality and breaking down misperceptions about other types of schools. However, the grants remained constrained by a limited scope of implementation and a lack of clear messaging around collaboration across sectors and across charter organizations. In addition, the climate in multiple grantee sites remained somewhat hostile to cross-sector interaction. Grantees should consider building in better structures, incentives, and accountability for collaboration.

During the next year, the study team will continue to collect implementation data from multiple sources in each grantee site to observe changes and produce two additional summary briefs. The next summary brief will describe findings from surveys of principals and teachers in grantee sites conducted during the 2014–2015 school year. The final summary brief will describe findings from an additional round of site visits and interviews with central office and school staff, focusing on longer-term impacts of the grants and changes relative to this initial summary brief.

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