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RECOMMENDATION FOR A COLLABORATIVE COMPACT AMONG SCHOOLS THAT SERVE CITY OF WILMINGTON STUDENTS

The Challenge Facing Wilmington

As of 2015, twenty-three separate governing units have been responsible for delivering public education to approximately 11,500 Wilmington children with no unified plan, few efforts at collaboration, and virtually no requirements to function as a coordinated public education system. Wilmington students attend a mix of charter, district, and vo-tech schools, each of which is responsible for the education of a part of the City of Wilmington student population, but none are responsible for improving the education of all City of Wilmington students.

Incoherent and fragmented governance, and disjointed and uncoordinated educational programs have been accompanied by consistently poor educational outcomes for low-income City of Wilmington students, most of whom are black or Latino. On virtually every indicator, Wilmington students perform at a lower level than their non-Wilmington peers. Significant disparities exist between Wilmington students and non-Wilmington students, on academic performance, graduation rates, and drop-out rates.¹

Efforts to improve student learning for City of Wilmington students seldom follow a unified or coordinated strategy across districts and charters, even when such strategies are proposed. Coordinated implementation is rare—and often resisted. Additionally, when a district or charter does succeed in improving educational outcomes, there is no consistent formal structure to share these successes, making it difficult to scale-up success to the entire public education system. Cooperation, collaboration, and shared learning across the public education sectors in Wilmington are the exception rather than the norm. While particular schools or districts have made efforts at collaboration, there is no framework to scale up or sustain collaboration over time across all schools that serve similar students. Additionally, public resources are increasingly dispersed in a manner that encourages competition rather than collaboration.

The Commission believes that this situation must be changed in order to support the effective education of all students. Given the many different districts and charters serving City of Wilmington students, it is essential that a framework be developed and implemented through which all schools work together for the improvement of all students. Other cities have demonstrated that this can be achieved through the voluntary commitment of all public education institutions to shared principles for collaboration and continuous improvement.

District-Charter Collaborative Compacts

The Commission believes that a key first step toward greater collaboration among schools serving City of Wilmington can be achieved through a collaborative compact. A compact is a document that outlines key strategies and objectives for districts and charters to work together to strengthen public education. Compacts are voluntary agreements that strive to improve education for all students by developing inter-school relationships and building upon shared goals and commitments. Compacts are often

¹ Wilmington Education Improvement Commission (2016). Initial annual report, July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016. Retrieved from: <https://sites.udel.edu/cas-weic/files/2016/07/weic-final-annual-report-12816-10kdy16.pdf>

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promoted by key educational stakeholders, such as district superintendents and charter school leaders, and supported by external stakeholders, such as city mayors and school boards.² Some compacts are financially supported through outside sources, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation which has invested in compacts through competitive grants.³

The major objective of a compact is to help cities overcome barriers to collaboration and produce successful outcomes for all involved. As the Center for Reinventing Public Education explains, diffusing barriers can lead to tangible benefits for communities, students, districts, and individual charter schools, such as: reduced political tensions, access to charter innovation and district expertise, streamlined information, and sharing of burdens among all schools.⁴ Despite differences among stakeholders, a fundamental aspect of compacts is that stakeholders explicitly agree that all schools are committed to the success of all students and that better collaboration will enhance the student experience and improve student outcomes overall.

Developing a compact among districts and charters serving City of Wilmington students should be the first step towards a statewide compact that includes all Delaware public schools. The development of a compact should be informed by the experiences of the 23 cities that already have such compacts.

Best Practices and Lessons Learned

In order for a compact to be successful, it must be specific about agreements and responsibilities.⁵ The Center for Reinventing Public Education (CRPE), which monitors current compact agreements nationwide, has found that compacts just starting out have been most effective when they push tangible accomplishments and focus on early wins.⁶ Early wins help compact participants build partnerships, establish trust, and enable some of the more complex and controversial issues to be addressed over time. Early wins also foster a sense of accomplishment, serves to strengthen new relationships, and provide incentive for participants to continue the work.

At the beginning of a compact it may be difficult for district and charter leaders to overcome their preconceived judgements of each other. This may be a particularly important barrier to overcome for districts and charters serving Wilmington students, since there is a two-decade history of uncoordinated and competitive development that often has been accompanied by divisive views in the wider community about the value and quality of both district and charter schools. Strong compacts are helped by stakeholders, internal and external, who draw from and promote collaboration that already exists.⁷

² Hanover Research (2012) "Best Practices in Charter School Collaboration." Retrieved from: <http://gssaweb.org/webnew/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Best-Practices-in-Charter-School-Collaboration.pdf>

³ Gates Foundation (2011). *Foundation announces investments for cities supporting collaboration, bold reform, and high performance*. [Press release]. Retrieved from: <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/Media-Center/Press-Releases/2011/12/Foundation-Announces-Investments-for-Cities-Supporting-Collaboration-Bold-Reform-and-High-Performance>

⁴ Gill, S., Lake, R., Opalka, A, & Yatsko, S. (2017). Bridging the district-charter divide to help more students succeed. Center for Reinventing Public Education. Retrieved from: <http://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/crpe-bridging-district-charter-divide.pdf>

⁵ Yatsko, S., Cooley Nelson, E., & Lake, R. (2013) "District- Charter Collaboration Compact: Interim Report." Retrieved from: <http://www.crpe.org/publications/district-charter-collaboration-compact-interim-report>

⁶ Yatsko, S., Cooley Nelson, E., & Lake, R. (2013) "District- Charter Collaboration Compact: Interim Report." Retrieved from: <http://www.crpe.org/publications/district-charter-collaboration-compact-interim-report>

⁷ National Charter School Resource Center at Safal Partners (2015) "District-Charter Collaboration: A User's Guide" Retrieved from: https://www.charterschoolcenter.org/sites/default/files/files/field_publication_attachment/District_Charter_Collaboration_A_Users_Guide.pdf

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Building upon successful collaborations that already have occurred can incentivize stakeholders to participate in creating a framework that sustains collaboration and scales up success.

Stakeholders enter into collaboration with different motivations. For example, one school may be motivated by their need for facilities whereas another may want to boost school-level and student performance.⁸ A suggested best practice for collaboration encourages district and charter schools to first view each other as “trading partners” with a collective obligation to all students.⁹ It is, however, necessary for a “trading relationship” to evolve to something stronger that is grounded in mutual trust, respect, and support with the common understanding that the collective work is to transform public education for all children. Below are some examples of compact achievements in other cities.

Boston, Massachusetts

Since signing in 2011, the Boston compact has generated substantial improvements due to collaboration. In the area of transportation, for example, collaboration has resulted in saving an estimated \$1 million in annual transportation costs.¹⁰ The compact also has helped improve teaching and instruction for English Language learners through the Quality Teaching for English Learners (QTEL) program in which all schools may participate. The compact funded this three-year sequential program of professional development for district, charter, and catholic school teachers.¹¹ Additionally, grants were provided to schools that demonstrated strong academic success among male students of color. The grants were used for shared instructional practice across sectors to help increase achievement for male students of color at all schools.¹²

Denver, Colorado

Denver has had continuing successes since the creation of their compact including the implementation of a universal enrollment system, development of shared facilities, and collaborations in special education. District facilities have been made available to high-performing charters, and a more transparent policy on facilities allocation has been created city-wide.¹³ The compact has enabled approximately 20 programs serving high-needs special education students to open at charter schools and created professional development “Learning Labs” to best serve this student population.¹⁴

⁸ National Charter School Resource Center at Safal Partners (2015) “District-Charter Collaboration: A User’s Guide” Retrieved from: https://www.charterschoolcenter.org/sites/default/files/files/field_publication_attachment/District_Charter_Collaboration_A_Users_Guide.pdf

⁹ Doyle, D., Holly, C., and Hassel B.C. (2015). “Is Detente Possible? District-Charter School Relations in Four Cities.” Thomas Fordham institute, Public Impact. Retrieved from:

¹⁰ School & Main Institute (2016). City-wide collaboration between district, charter, and catholic schools: the Boston compact start up years 2010-2014. Retrieved from: <http://www.bostoncompact.org/wp-content/uploads/MCPSCA.Case-Study.Boston-Compact.June-2016-high-res.pdf>

¹¹ Center for Reinventing Public Education (2016). Boston district-charter collaboration compact 2016 city summary. Retrieved from: http://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/city_summary_boston_1.2016.pdf

¹² Center for Reinventing Public Education (2016). Boston district-charter collaboration compact 2016 city summary. Retrieved from: http://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/city_summary_boston_1.2016.pdf

¹³ Center for Reinventing Public Education (2016). Denver district-charter collaboration compact 2016 city summary. Retrieved from: http://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/city_summary_denver_1.2016.pdf

¹⁴ Center for Reinventing Public Education (2016). Denver district-charter collaboration compact 2016 city summary. Retrieved from: http://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/city_summary_denver_1.2016.pdf

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Central Falls, Rhode Island

This compact city has seen some improvements due to collaboration. For example, the district and Blackstone Valley Prep Charter began to share best practices for special education in 2014. Since then, the arrangement has expanded, leading to noted improvements in teacher instruction and confidence at Blackstone Valley Prep Charter, and advisement on general special education program improvement from the district.¹⁵

Proposed Wilmington Compact

The Commission believes that a successful compact for the City of Wilmington should be based on the shared commitment that all public education sectors schools work together to ensure the delivery of high quality education, to enable all students to achieve academic and personal success.

The creation and implementation of a compact should lead to the *delivery of a more equitable, higher quality education across all schools that participate*. Some outcomes of the compact could include an increase in highly qualified teachers, greater resources available to students, more efficient use of facilities, and extended in-school and out-of-school services. These improvements should translate to greater and more measurable student growth and achievement among City of Wilmington students.

Goals of a Wilmington Compact

A successful collaboration compact in the City of Wilmington should reflect the unique reality of the city and promote the following goals.

- Shared resources, dissemination of effective practices, and cross-pollination of ideas to address vexing issues impacting all sectors of public education.
- Shared goals for student success and educational opportunities that demonstrate school leaders' shared commitment to success for all students.
- Shared responsibility to provide an equitable and quality education for all students, specifically in the City of Wilmington, and to collaboratively make decisions in the best interest of students.
- Celebration and promotion of success across all schools that serve City of Wilmington students.
- An improved public education system that generates the most value out of public resources for students, schools, and the broader community.

Proposed Guiding Principles

A successful compact may be guided by the following principles.

- Make all decisions in the best interest of all students. Participants should strive to provide all students with access to a high-quality education, regardless of school type or location, to improve student academic and life outcomes.

¹⁵ Center for Reinventing Public Education (2016). Central Falls district-charter collaboration compact 2016 city summary. Retrieved from: https://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/city_summary_centralfalls_2.2016_1.pdf

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- Build the necessary trust, mutual respect, and environment of inclusiveness across all delivery models for public education.
- Share commitment to clear, honest, and open communication to create a sustainable culture of collaboration and overcome the current competitive and sometimes combative atmosphere.

Proposed Compact Characteristics

- *The compact should be voluntary and inclusive of all public schools that wish to participate. All schools that serve City of Wilmington students should have a shared responsibility to effectively educate all students.*
- *The public education system serving City of Wilmington students is unique in that multiple districts and charters serve this population. Given the lack of a Wilmington School District, and the abundance of charters, the compact must include multiple district and charter leaders.*
- *A Wilmington compact should include support from state and local leaders, community members and organizations. One characteristic of a successful compact is the willingness of all sector leaders, including city leadership and central office officials, to participate, support, and consistently advocate for the work.¹⁶ Given Delaware's size, support from state level officials could help drive the effort in Wilmington and then expand to a compact, or multiple compacts, statewide.*
- *Given that some schools serving City of Wilmington students already collaborate, it is important for the compact to build on the work and partnerships that are underway and whenever possible be expanded to include others.*
- *Having a facilitator knowledgeable about the existing public education system but not a part of it could be valuable for the initial creation of and early discussions on the compact.*
- *The compact should include an implementation timeline for carrying out strategic objectives that specifies outcomes for each phase of action. The more specific and targeted the approach, the higher the likelihood of a sustained commitment to collaboration.*
- *The decided goals must be rigorous yet realistic to achieve plausible success.*
- *The compact would be a living document that must be updated to reflect the changes in the environment and context of the work.*
- *The compact must include tangible benefits and prove to be of substantial value for all stakeholders involved. The compact must contain joint commitments from the group and*

¹⁶ School & Main Institute (2016). City-wide collaboration between district, charter, and catholic schools: the Boston compact startup years 2010-2014. Retrieved from: <http://www.bostoncompact.org/wp-content/uploads/MCPSA.Case-Study.Boston-Compact.June-2016-high-res.pdf>

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individual commitments from both charter schools and district schools that would produce positive outcomes for the group as a whole.

Opportunities for Collaboration within a City of Wilmington Compact

Compact cities initiate a variety of action items for collaboration that depend on factors such as: the stakeholders at the table, political environment, and public education law. A Wilmington compact would be no different in that areas for collaboration must be decided by those who agree to create this agreement. Below are some suggested early opportunities for collaboration identified by the District Charter Collaboration Committee. For some items, compact participants could build upon initiatives already underway.

Teacher and Educator Preparation and Effectiveness	Recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers to Wilmington and the surrounding schools that serve Wilmington students.
	Shared mentoring of new teachers, specifically for unique programs, school psychologists, and other essential student support personnel.
	Creation of a partnership among schools for dual-language immersion programs that extend from kindergarten through high school.
	Shared professional development (PD) that includes areas of common practices and development. Schools could agree to bring in a trained professional for a collaborative PD day. Shared PD could include topics on trauma-informed care, compassionate schools model, and cultural competency.
Expanding Educational Opportunities	Creation of dual-language programs at institutions of higher education to prepare pre-service teachers.
	Work with institutions of higher education to develop a dual enrollment program for college credit.
Operational Efficiencies	Consolidate transportation to collectively save financial resources.
	Shared use of facilities which could include full school co-location of empty or abandoned buildings. This could also include either the creation or use of current facilities for partial use, such as sports facilities.
Educating Students with High Needs	Agreement to collectively discuss mid-year placements of students so that students with complex needs are placed in the environment and school that are in their best interest, and no school is unduly burdened with responsibility for highest needs students.
	Shared best practices, resources, access to programs, and supports for students with complex and high needs. There should be a collective effort to help each student achieve.