

**Promising Strategies for Partnership:
Can Durham district and charter schools collaborate to improve
opportunities for all children?**

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Executive Summary

This report examines collaborative actions that Durham Public Schools (DPS), charter schools and other stakeholders can take to promote equitable access to high-quality learning opportunities for all of Durham's students.

The report proposes that Durham's education leaders convene a taskforce of stakeholders to jointly consider how collaborative action between the school district and area charter schools could improve educational outcomes for all of Durham's children. The proposed taskforce would include a wide range of perspectives including DPS, Durham charter schools, non-profit organizations, local political action committees and parents.

Led by a neutral facilitator, the taskforce would form subcommittees to study key topics that are of interest and concern among Durham's education community. By the end of the 10-month taskforce, each subcommittee would have a set of recommendations for actions that could be taken at DPS, charter schools and across Durham to strengthen schools and serve all kids. Many proposed actions would likely involve collaborative effort from DPS and some (or all) Durham charter schools.

By collaborating, this group could aspire to move away from historic divisions and tensions between the school district and charter schools. Engaging in a taskforce also positions leaders to maximize operational efficiencies and enhance knowledge across schools by sharing expertise and engaging in mutual learning and problem solving. This effort could demonstrate to the community that DPS and charter schools are committed, above all else, to working together for the betterment of educational opportunities for all of Durham's children.

The documents that make up the report can serve as tools for Durham's education leaders.

This report is comprised of four related documents that can collectively serve as tools for leaders if they embark on collaborative work between the district and charters.

The documents in this report include:

1. A one-page **call to action** that provides context on the current dynamic between DPS and charter schools and demonstrates the potential for change that could be brought from collaborative efforts.
2. A three-page **strategy document** that provides a high-level overview of how a taskforce could help progress Durham's education landscape.
3. A **taskforce action-plan** that outlines steps for creating a taskforce, recommended elements of a taskforce and a discussion of the proposed taskforce subcommittees.
4. **Analysis of potential collaborative actions** that could be used as a resource for a taskforce to consider the benefits, challenges and feasibility of various efforts.

To complement the key documents, this report also includes:

- Three case studies that illustrate how varying components of these recommendations have taken shape in other cities around the nation.
- A literature review that surveys the available research and best practices on interactions between school districts and charter schools and how they have worked collaboratively in other cities around the nation.
- A history of charter schools in NC from 1996 to the present that can serve as a primer on additional context and history on the issues related to these recommendations.

The report strives to serve the needs of Durham's education leaders and stakeholders.

This report aims to take a neutral perspective on the dynamics of DPS and area charter schools and sourced a wide range of perspectives, locally and nationally, to inform the recommendations.

The Chair of the Durham Board of Education, Heidi Carter, and Board of Education member, Natalie Beyer, served as the clients for this project. However, the recommendations are aimed at challenges that face the entire Durham community and which require action from a wide range of actors. Therefore, these documents are framed to address and serve the broad community of Durham's education leaders and stakeholders.

This report was created to complete the Master's Project requirement at Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy. The research and analysis for this report was conducted from August 2013 through April 2014.

Methodology

The policy question driving this research and recommendations is:

What are the most effective, collaborative actions Durham Public Schools, charter schools and other stakeholders can take to promote equitable access to high-quality learning opportunities for all students?

The research for this report was conducted from August 2013 through April 2014. The recommendations are based on findings from the existing academic literature on the topic, from interviews conducted with experts nationwide, and from local Durham stakeholders.

The accompanying literature review includes a combination of peer reviewed academic literature and non-peer reviewed sources such as newspaper articles and reports from think tanks and research organizations. This reflects the available sources of information on the topic of district-charter collaborations. The literature review surveys the available research on school district and charter school interactions and tensions. It also examines how and why school districts and charter schools in other cities around the country have forged collaborative actions (*see Appendix 3: Literature Review*).

Thirty-one people were interviewed for this report (*see Appendix 1: Interview List*). Interviews with people who live in Durham or Raleigh were conducted in person; all other interviews were conducted by phone. The interviews were conducted using an interview protocol (*and Appendix 2: Interview Protocols*). The recommendations contained in the report represent a synthesis of key themes and trends that emerged from these interviews.

The people interviewed for this report represent a wide range of perspectives, experiences and expertise. The interviewees represented three categories of perspectives:

- Local Durham school district leaders, charter school leaders and community stakeholders (*12 interviews*)
- Academic researchers and other experts on education and district-charter collaboration (*11 interviews*)
- School district and charter school leaders and education non-profit sector advisers from across the country (all non-local) who have experience creating and implementing collaborative actions between school districts and charter schools (*8 interviews*)

Joining forces for change

Durham's school leaders, educators, parents and community advocates have a pervasive desire to improve educational opportunities for all children. However, these groups have historically been splintered because of their differing opinions around how to best provide education and state charter school legislation that is rooted in competition rather than collaboration. Every day that passes where Durham's education leaders are not working together toward a common goal of improving opportunities for children is another day that students suffer because of the political barriers of adults. Conversations with Durham's school and community leaders reveal their common desire to shift away from conversations about their differences and maintain focus on identifying and pursuing efforts that are in the best interest of children.

Durham County is facing changes as school choice expands and the community aspires to increase focus on school quality. This time of change brings uncertainty and tension but it also presents an opportunity for Durham's leaders to rise above the political fray and bring the community together to focus on what is best for educating all children.

We need to change the paradigm from one of competition to one of cooperation.

**-Heidi Carter
Chair, Durham Board
of Education**

Durham is in the midst of a shifting education landscape. Charters currently educate about 12% of Durham's students¹ and the number of charters is expected to expand in the coming years. People throughout the community recognize that parents want school choice and that charter schools will have a lasting presence in Durham. Like the county's magnet schools, many charters in Durham, regardless of their academic performance, have long waiting lists of students hoping to be selected by each school's lottery.

The 2011 lift of the state's cap of 100 charter schools and Durham County's relatively high local funding to charter schools² guarantees that Durham will experience a significant expansion of charter schools in the coming years. This change also increased tension between Durham Public Schools (DPS) leaders and charter school leaders. The Chair of the DPS Board of Education (BOE), Heidi Carter, has made clear her concerns that charter schools drive school segregation.³ There is a widespread perception among charter school leaders and community members that the Durham School Board has a strongly "anti-charter" sentiment. Many people sense that some school board members are still "wishing charter schools away."

Durham's education leaders are ready for change. Leaders within both the traditional school district sector and the charter school sector express concern that the animosity that exists between them inhibits progress toward improving education countywide. There is widespread consensus that the quality of education provided within both sectors would improve from greater accountability for school performance and increased focus on drivers of school improvement. Many stakeholders also express concern that charter expansion will increase segregation in Durham's schools. Additionally, there is a pervasive desire in the community for school leaders and teachers to share best practices and work collaboratively for the betterment of all of Durham's schools.

The time has come to move away from the us/them mentality and to focus on ways in which we can strengthen one another for the common good of all of Durham's children.

-Michael Palmer, Board Member of Carter Community Charter School

1. NAPCS Dashboard, Durham Public Schools - 2012-2013

2. Strauss, V. *Washington Post*, February 4, 2014.

3. Barnett N. Charter schools press Durham's district schools. *News & Observer*. Published February 1, 2014.

A path of progress for all of Durham's schools

Overcoming historic tensions and political challenges

Durham has a proud reputation as a progressive community that comes together to tackle challenges and improve opportunity for its citizens. Nationwide, some cities are tackling challenges of educational quality by overcoming the political barriers to cooperation and bringing education leaders together to share their resources and expertise for the betterment of educational opportunities for all students.⁴

Durham has the opportunity to be a trailblazer in the state by showing that its leaders can overcome long-standing tensions and join together to focus on what is best for kids. Many people throughout Durham, from DPS to charter schools to the county government, express the desire to see all schools working together and the belief that collaborative action will improve the quality of educational opportunities available to all students.

By taking bold and innovative actions toward improving high-quality learning opportunities available to all students, Durham can be a model of cooperative collective action across the traditional and charter sectors. This strategy document provides recommendations for the immediate next steps that education and community leaders can take to pursue joint efforts that are aimed at improving education outcomes for all children in Durham.

We need to identify all of the levers that everyone in our community has their hands on and make sure we are pulling them in the same direction. Decisions made at each school, whether it be charter or traditional, should be based on our shared values.

- Community forum, NC Charter Schools: Excellence and Equity through Collaboration⁵

Working together to enact change for Durham's students

A first step to enacting change is bringing the community's leaders and community stakeholders to the table. Inviting participation from a wide breadth of community stakeholders is a best practice from other cities that have pursued a similar strategy. Community stakeholders could include people such as leaders of non-profit organizations, representatives from Durham political action committees, members of the Chamber of commerce and parents. Cities that have experienced the greatest success with improving relationships and combining resources and expertise for the greater good of students have started with working groups that represent the city's education landscape.

Durham has its own unique challenges and relationship dynamics. Many people around the community see the need to create space that allows the diverse range of voices to express their perspectives and feel heard. Only then can the barriers to productive relationships start to dissolve, making room for the range of stakeholders to build a common vision and foundation of trust. This relationship building is a critical step toward the community embracing each other's expertise and sharing resources for the betterment of educational opportunities for all children.

Instead of directly adopting practices from other cities, Durham may experience the greatest success by bringing together its diverse range of stakeholders to identify common goals and the opportunities for implementing bold and innovative change.

4. Best Cooperative Practices, Charter & Traditional Public Schools; 2010.

5. North Carolina Charter Schools: Excellence and Equity through Collaboration. In: Durham: Center for Community Self-Help and the A.J. Fletcher Foundation; 2014

A taskforce will bring together a wide-range of voices and expertise to study a broad question centered on pursuing efforts that will improve educational outcomes across Durham. A first step of the taskforce will be to identify the right question to guide their work. One example of a question that could meet the needs of this group is, *“How can the Durham community work together to enhance the educational opportunities available to all students?”*

The goals of the Taskforce will be to:

1. Transform systems and incentive structures from ones that foster adversarial competition to structures that promote productive and efficient collaboration.
2. Identify the mechanisms through which all education and community leaders can promote high-quality learning opportunities that are equally accessible to all students.

Potential Taskforce Benefits

Experiences of other cities as well as local perspectives of a taskforce’s potential indicate that a taskforce comprised of a wide range of community stakeholders could help Durham progress in several critical areas.

The taskforce could see immediate benefits by driving positive action that:

- Builds trust and breaks down misperceptions
- Fosters a shared sense of accountability across sectors for all Durham students
- Utilizes the expertise and resources of different stakeholders
- Identifies and generates buy-in for common goals
- Serves as a state-wide model of innovative collaboration
- Fosters community trust in schools by demonstrating leaders’ commitment to work together for the betterment of opportunities for all children

In the long-run, efforts made by the taskforce could yield benefits for Durham’s children and for the community at large by promoting actions that:

- Increase school quality Durham-wide by fostering a common vision of excellence and shared accountability for all students that spans across school sectors
- Improve the quality of resources available to all Durham teachers and school leaders by utilizing the expertise and resources of different stakeholders
- Strengthen Durham’s standing by improving public perception (both locally and statewide) of Durham’s schools

Taskforce Structures

Based on experiences of other cities as well as local perspectives of how a taskforce could successfully take shape in Durham, the recommendation is that the taskforce meets every other week for two hours over the course of 10 months.⁶

Taskforces like this commonly split into subcommittees that study a certain topic. This helps the group work efficiently and maximize resources. The subcommittee groups could report back to the full taskforce at a few points throughout the study period and give a final report and recommendations with next steps at the conclusion of the taskforce work.

Subcommittee focus areas:

- Improving school performance and accountability for all schools
- Increasing equity of access to high-quality educational opportunities
- Increasing equity of funding
- Promoting shared learning
- Maximizing opportunities for economics of scale

6. Reyes-Newberry M. Personal Interview. March 5, 2014.

Taskforce action plan

This document provides a mock action plan for forming and carrying out a taskforce. This plan could be used as a starting document that a taskforce then amends to meet their needs and vision.

A taskforce as the first step

A group called the Durham Educational Opportunity Taskforce spends ten months studying the question: *“How can the Durham community work together to enhance the educational opportunities available to all students?”*

The taskforce brings together representatives from Durham’s school district, charter schools, teaching force, school boards, non-profit sector and business sector to identify the best ways in which the community can work together to improve educational opportunities available to all students. A dynamic and representative taskforce would likely aim to include expertise on specific challenges and capabilities of district and charter schools, a high level of knowledge about North Carolina’s current charter school legislation and the avenues through which legislative change can be successful.

Durham is a community with a wealth of knowledgeable leaders who have valuable insights and expertise to contribute to the conversation about improving educational opportunities. Bringing them together is the first step toward sharing knowledge and finding common ground.

Opinions in the community about the best way to approach education are varied and at times oppositional. However, there exists across all sectors a pervasive desire to improve educational opportunities for all of Durham’s children. In order to overcome tensions and build trust across stakeholders it is critical to provide a neutral space for everyone to express their perspectives. Cities that have formed a taskforce that brings together disparate education sectors contend that its greatest benefits are breaking down hostilities, correcting misperceptions across stakeholders and building trust.

Durham will experience the greatest success in improving education opportunities by bringing its leaders together to identify common goals and the unique opportunities in Durham for implementing bold and innovative change.

Creating the Taskforce

Leadership

Stakeholders and experts consulted for this project agree that a taskforce will only be successfully convened if there is strong leadership at the helm. Oftentimes when this work has been done in other cities it is the Superintendent who leads the effort. It is especially challenging to identify leadership for this work when Durham is under the leadership of an Interim Superintendent and in the midst of hiring a permanent Superintendent.

Currently (as of April 2014) the Durham BOE has an open call out for Superintendent applications and the new Superintendent is expected to be in place to begin the 2014-15 academic year. While the perspective and buy-in from the future Superintendent will be critical to the work of this taskforce, current leadership in the community may want to pursue a district-charter taskforce before a the Superintendent hire is made. Many people consulted for this report agree that now is the time to pursue collaborative work across education sectors in Durham. It could help the sustainability of the taskforce's work if it creates a plan for securing buy-in from the new Superintendent and to integrate him/her into the work.

There is ample leadership with the Interim Superintendent, other DPS senior staff and community leaders to step up and instigate these efforts. People consulted for this report made suggestions for people or organizations that would be strong leaders of a district-charter taskforce; the most common suggestions included Heidi Carter and County Commissioners. It could lend greater credibility to the efforts if multiple leaders from different sectors spearheaded the efforts.

Facilitator

Identifying a skilled and neutral facilitator is critical to the taskforce's success. Local stakeholders, national experts, and school leaders in cities that have formed taskforces agree that the facilitator is one of the most important components to a successful taskforce.

Facilitators of similar taskforces around the country have come from a variety of sectors, such as a local university or the county government. Experts agree that there is no one type of facilitator that is best, but rather that it is most critical that they meet two criteria.

The most important qualities of a facilitator:

Neutral. The facilitator must not be perceived by any participants as biased toward the school district or toward charter schools. A neutral, third party facilitator is the most critical component to a successful taskforce.

Skilled. A successful facilitator will build trust while applying pressure to participants to pursue meaningful change. The facilitator should move the group toward forming specific and actionable recommendations that represent a feasible scope for implementation.

Funding

The primary funding needs of a taskforce are for costs for the convenings such as space, food at meetings and materials (e.g., printing, paper and pens). Many of these costs, especially space, can often be secured by donation. There could potentially also be costs for a facilitator and/or mediator. If a taskforce decides that it wants to have a final report written about the process and findings there could also be cost associated with securing a report author (the author could be the same person who serves as facilitator, depending on the facilitator background and skillset).

Cities that have formed taskforces have secured funding to support the work through myriad sources. Commonly there is a non-profit organization that supports the work either through direct funding or grants. Other times the school district funds the efforts.

In Alameda, California the Superintendent said that many non-profits in the area offered funding for their taskforce but that she perceived them all as bringing some bias. Instead of taking outside funding

the Superintendent used district resources to fully fund the efforts. However, some participants of the taskforce said that neutrality of the work was somewhat compromised because it was fully funded by the district. A mix of funding sources is one strategy to mitigate the potential for perceived bias.

Durham has a robust non-profit sector that may be willing to provide funds to support this work. Additionally, the Durham County government is a viable option for funding and a minimal per pupil contribution from each district and charter school would demonstrate buy-in.

Outcomes

The goals of the Taskforce are to:

1. Transform the systems and incentive structures from ones that foster adversarial competition to structures that promote productive and efficient collaboration.
2. Identify the mechanisms through which education and community leaders can promote high-quality learning opportunities that are equally accessible to all students.
3. Make recommendations to the General Assembly for improvements to N.C.'s current charter school legislation and oversight procedures.

The result of the taskforce's 10 months of work will be a set of recommendations for actions that leaders county-wide can collaboratively take to improve the educational opportunities for Durham's students.

Recommendations should be:

Specific. The recommendation clearly describes an action to be taken and which actors are accountable for it. Actions can be clearly understood by all stakeholders. Next steps and measures of success are explicitly stated in order to ensure follow-through.

Actionable. The implementation of the action is feasible and realistic. The actors responsible for carrying out the recommendation (or portions of it) have complete buy-in.

Meaningful. The recommendation has the potential to improve student outcomes. Actions address the most pressing issues facing Durham.

Recommendations will have greater impact if they are narrow in scope but are specific and actionable than would actions that are grand in scope but vague and unrealistic. The taskforce should look for recommendations that will secure small wins early on in the process. The facilitator will have a key role in helping the taskforce focus on pursuing recommendations that meet these criteria.

CASE STUDY: Alameda Charter School Policy Taskforce

Creation of the taskforce

In 2004, the Alameda County Superintendent of Schools Sheila Jordan called for the creation of a taskforce to bring together stakeholders representing divergent views on the policies and practices related to interactions between charter schools and district schools. Jordan's reputation was one of a charter skeptic, and at times a charter critic.⁶ As the charter sector grew and solidified in Alameda, Jordan realized that the historic tensions between the district and charters and her perceived anti-charter stance¹³ were barriers to success and ultimately not good for students. Jordan decided the time had come to take bold actions to move past animosity and toward partnership.

A local university professor was identified to serve as the taskforce chair and lead author of the final report because he was viewed as a skilled, neutral facilitator who was knowledgeable about charter schools and the broad field of public education. It was important to Jordan to ensure that the district fully funded the initiative¹⁴, a decision that some participants saw as a hindrance to full objectivity.⁶

Jordan's primary goal for the taskforce was to "reduce antipathy between charters and districts and move Alameda County off the present collision course and **into a new era where charters and district schools could begin to see each other as partners** in providing high-quality education to all of the children in the county."¹⁵ The taskforce aimed to identify and build pathways by which charter and district schools could learn from each other and gain valuable knowledge that might improve teaching, school governance and academic accountability for all schools.

Taskforce composition and process

The Alameda Charter School Policy Taskforce was comprised of 21 public education stakeholders who represented a diverse range of perspectives. Members included school district leaders, charter school founders, state department of education representatives, non-profit leaders, community advocates and parents. The taskforce met over a six-month period for a total of nine sessions that were each three hours long. Smaller working groups met independently more frequently.

The taskforce began their work by creating a master list of over 100 items that provide impetus for conflicts across school sectors; the diverse range of items ranged from micro- to macro-issues. They then grouped the items into broad categories and prioritized them within smaller working groups. The five broad categories for which they decided to focus their recommendations were: (1) oversight and accountability, (2) funding, (3) governance, (4) facilities, and (5) compatibility models.

Participants say...

Superintendent Jordan and other participants say that the greatest outcomes of the taskforce were building strong working relationships across sectors and breaking down misperceptions across groups.^{13,14}

"Many of us came in with strong beliefs and powerful preconceptions and were surprised to find many areas of common ground and a common commitment to respectful dialogue and support for excellence in public education."¹⁵

"We ask now for educators and policymakers to shift their perspectives, resist seeing themselves narrowly and rigidly as pro-district or anti-district, pro-charter or anti-charter, and embrace a wider perspective, a big-picture perspective rooted in a clear commitment to one central mission: providing excellent education that prepares all of our children for today and the future."¹⁵

6. Reyes-Newberry M. Personal Interview. March 5, 2014.

13. Newman J. Personal Interview. February 23, 2014.

14. Jordan S. Personal Interview. February 19, 2014.

15. Rofes E. *How can we reduce conflict between charter schools and school districts ?* Alameda; 2005.

Taskforce Subcommittees

Taskforce Structure

The Taskforce will be organized into subcommittees that study a given topic over the 10 months that the group convenes. Each subcommittee will represent a range of perspectives and expertise. It is crucial that subcommittees be balanced and not demonstrate a strong bias in any direction. The taskforce facilitator will oversee each subcommittee and hold them accountable for making progress.

At several points throughout the taskforce process each subcommittee reports its findings to date to the whole group. This provides some degree of accountability as groups plan for upcoming presentations to the group. It also allows taskforce members to provide input and contribute expertise to subcommittees on which they do not serve.

The subcommittees are encouraged to consult with national leaders and experts on their study topic. This report also includes research and analysis that can serve as a resource and starting point for the teams.

Analysis of Collaborative Actions: An analysis of key areas of collaboration that can serve as a resource for the subcommittees. The collaborative actions included were selected for analysis because cities around the nation have experienced some success with them and local education stakeholders have expressed interest in implementing these partnerships in Durham.

Appendix 3: Literature Review: A survey of the existing literature pertaining to district-charter school collaboration.

By the end of the study period, each subcommittee will provide recommendations for how stakeholders countywide can take collaborative action aimed at promoting high-quality learning opportunities and increasing equity of access to those opportunities.

Subcommittee Study Areas

These subcommittee study areas represent the most common themes of concerns and goals expressed by local stakeholders during interviews. They additionally reflect input from school leaders and education experts nationwide on the key areas of collaboration between districts, charters and other leaders.

This proposed list of subcommittees is a starting point for the taskforce. Once the group is convened the participants will review these study areas and make additions or changes as they see necessary.

Improving school performance and accountability

While improving school performance is the central tenant to the broad goal of all actions taken by school leaders, certain actions will directly drive performance and accountability.

Support for a common school performance and accountability framework is the most common theme in conversations with stakeholders about performance. Experts agree that having a common school performance framework that allows parents to discern which schools, district and charter, are high-performing is the most important factor in improving the quality of education district wide. Cities

around the country are increasingly adopting a common accountability framework that holds all schools to the same standard. Local leaders agree that Durham needs a common definition of what is high quality and accessible. In addition to data from high stakes standardized testing, school performance measures typically include a qualitative measures that reflect shared values of the Durham community (e.g., attendance, principal observations, student surveys, attrition, discipline, extracurricular activities).

Example action: Include charter schools in the district “portfolio” of schools. In this structure, the charters performance is included as part of the district performance. This could further incentivize the sectors to work together toward increasing school performance.

In building and supporting a high performing network of schools it is critical that the system incentivizes schools that meet district needs. Stakeholders across the community echo the need for charter schools to serve a specific purpose and help improve the options available to families rather to creating redundant services. There are opportunities for the district to increase its influence over the type of charter schools that open in Durham.

Charters should fulfill their original intent of bringing new options that meet the needs of the district.
-David Beck, Center for Community Self-Help

Conversations with many people around the community who strongly support charters have shown that they also want the district to help them foster a charter network that better meets district needs. Overall there is consensus among stakeholders from both sectors that new charter schools need collaborative input into their mission and that there can, and should, be systems that incentivize them to meet district needs.

Example action: The taskforce lobbies the State Board of Education to close underperforming charter schools and revise the charter application to incentivize innovative charters that meet district needs. Before the application cycle begins, the district submits a list of priorities for new schools. The charter Advisory Committee then gives extra points to applications that address these district priorities.

Leaders from both the district and charters have a strong desire to see the growth of high-performing schools across sectors. Local stakeholders repeatedly speak to their belief that charter accountability laws in the North Carolina are especially weak. The leaders of high-performing charter schools do not want to see the spread of poor charters or unchecked expansion charter schools. Many stakeholders around the community see opportunities for the district and charter schools to work together to close low-performing schools and support and replicate high-performing schools.

Increasing equity of access to high-quality educational opportunities

Ensuring that all students in Durham have equitable access to every publicly funded school is often cited as one of the greatest challenges facing Durham’s education landscape today. There is growing concern both within the district and charter sectors that the expected increase in charter schools in Durham will further accelerate segregation of the County’s schools.

This subcommittee will study the various mechanisms that affect students’ access to schools and make recommendations for reforming existing systems and/or implementing new systems. Key topics of interest for this group will include the process of lotteries and sibling preference that affect access to schools.

One common argument against charters is that their application process inhibits equitable access to enrollment because it is biased toward families that are highly involved and have resources of time and information. Changes to charter school policies, which address barriers to admission and procedures for how Durham’s families apply for school enrollment could mitigate these effects.

Example action: Common enrollment systems are an increasingly popular system cities nationwide. Centralizing enrollment levels the playing field and creates a singular process that gives each student one school placement, based on their preference.

Another barrier to access to some charters in Durham is the lack of transportation or meal services to students. By not providing these services a charter creates large barriers to serving high-needs populations. Because of scale, those charters that do provide these services incur costs that are much higher than those faced by the district. Another barrier to admission can be the translation of charter school marketing materials and applications into Spanish and outreach into low-wealth areas of the community.

Example action: Shared transportation and meal contracts between the district and charters could reduce the costs that charters otherwise face in providing these services. This could incentivize charters that do not offer these services to begin doing so. It could also reduce the financial burden on charters that are making efforts to serve high-needs populations, thus free up resources for them to allocate to areas such as instructional support. By increasing the presence of these services at charters the district could see charter schools that more closely reflect the district demographics.

The taskforce may also find there are state-level policy changes they want to advocate for. For example, changes to how charters conduct their lotteries or offer sibling preference are mandated at the state level. If the group identifies that the Durham community wants changes to some of these laws they could lobby the state for a local bill to support a moratorium on new charter schools, more autonomy for district schools or for exemptions from, or permanent changes to, the laws.

Increasing equity of funding

There is consensus among local stakeholders and school leaders from across the country that scarcity of resources is a key driver of tensions between the school district and area charter schools. People in both sectors interviewed for this report acknowledged that it would be a powerful shift if the district and charters could share a commitment to the equitable allocation of resources.

Increased transparency around funding could be a critical change in easing tensions across the sectors. Discussions in this subcommittee could help each sector understand the challenges around funding and transparency that the other faces. By better understanding the unique challenges of each actor, the groups can better work together to identify which systems could be reformed to better serve schools. By utilizing the broad expertise of the subcommittee members, the group can generate innovative solutions that can help increase service and funding equity.

Example action: One idea that a charter school leader suggested is that if a charter returns a student mid-year to a traditional public school then the charter also returns a portion of the funding they received for that student.

This subcommittee may also want to consider ways in which the taskforce can utilize its resources and expertise to lobby the state for increased funding.

Example action: If the district wants charter schools to enroll more special education students, they group can work together to lobby the state to increase funding that charters get to support special education services.

Promoting shared learning

The foundational premise of charter schools is that they can serve as laboratories of innovation, creating successful classroom and school-level efforts that benefit student learning. The goal is that these innovations can then inform the practices of schools across the district and benefit all children.

Additionally, fostering the success of all schools will utilize district expertise toward improving charter schools. However, people across Durham acknowledge that there is little to no sharing across district and charter schools. This is largely a result of district and charter school leaders seeing each other as adversarial competitors rather than collaborative partners working toward a common goal. Leaders across the county recognize that all schools could be stronger if they embraced opportunities to learn from each other.

Talking with your adversaries turns them into your colleagues.

-Josh Newman, California charter school founder and participant in the Alameda Taskforce

Example actions: There are many ideas that community leaders have identified for promoting shared learning, including:

- The district opens its professional development to charter schools for a fee
- Heads of schools form working groups that meets periodically to share challenges and best practices
- Create an online forum where teachers can share resources such as Common Core support
- Leaders at district and charters share best practices
- Charters participate in district trainings on cultural competency
- District leaders meet with charter leaders to learn about successful teacher preparation programs
- District and charter leaders form a group to support and inform new charters around the challenges of opening a new school

Maximizing opportunities for economics of scale

Inefficient allocation of resources inevitably persists in a system where two education sectors exist side-by-side but do not work together around mutual services that they provide. This subcommittee will identify areas where the district and charters can partner around services that they both provide in order to reduce inefficiencies. By reducing inefficiency, each sector will have additional resources that they can reallocate to other things that directly impact student learning, such as instructional support.

The most common suggestions among both local stakeholders and experts are for districts and charter schools to have shared transportation and meal contracts. While another subcommittee will study how efforts such as shared contracts could affect equity of access, this group will study how the contracts could reduce the inefficient allocation of resources. Additionally, they will make recommendations around the processes of implementing these changes.

Analysis of potential collaborative actions

There are myriad collaborative actions that school districts and charter schools have taken across the country in efforts to combine efforts and work toward system-wide changes that improve educational opportunities for all students. In Durham it will be critical that the community's leaders, experts and stakeholders work together to identify the strategies that best fit the needs of this community.

The collaborative actions analyzed in this section were selected based on research of best practices nation-wide and extensive interviews with Durham stakeholders about the local needs and context. In interviews, people who have pursued collaborative efforts in other cities discussed the process and content of their efforts, the impact of those efforts and how the local context affected the process and implementation. In other interviews, local stakeholders identified the greatest needs for Durham's education landscape, the key tensions in need of resolution, the need for improvements to North Carolina's charter school legislation and policies, and how the local context and political climate could affect viable implementation of various collaborative efforts. The analysis provided here matches strategies from other cities with the local need and context of Durham. The content is informed by both extensive interviews as well as academic research.

All of the collaborative actions analyzed here were selected because they rose to the top in conversations around the right actions for Durham to consider. Research suggests that all of these could benefit Durham but they vary in their scope of impact and feasibility for implementation. A process in which the taskforce sets goals for collaborative action will help the participants prioritize which of these actions Durham may want to pursue first.

Many of these efforts could happen simultaneously and all could feasibly occur in Durham in the next several years, given the adequate leadership and stakeholder commitment. Some efforts, such as shared professional development, could be relatively easy "quick-wins" while others, such as a school performance framework, could have significant and wide-reaching impact but requires greater investment of time, resources and political will.

This analysis can serve as a resource for the taskforce subcommittees as they study various issues and form recommendations for collaborative action.

Criteria

Successful collaborative actions will meet these criteria:

Increases school quality. A strong collaborative action will be aimed at increasing school quality countywide. Improving the quality of educational opportunities that are available to all of Durham's students is a central tenant to every recommendation.

Increases equity of access. A strong collaborative action will make progress toward ensuring that all students have access to all of Durham's school options.

Sustainable. There is a reasonable expectation that the action will be sustainable over time. One of the greatest barriers to success in cities that have attempted collaborations is that the efforts are

contingent on a certain school or district leader. When there are leadership changes (e.g., a change in Superintendent) the actions can be especially vulnerable.

Politically feasible. The recommendation takes into account the political context and ensures that there is a reasonable expectation that the action could be successfully implemented.

Cost effective. In the long run, the effort increases the efficient use of resources. Efforts that increase cost savings in one area (e.g., decreased transportation costs) could identify how the money can be reallocated to efforts the impact student learning.

Existing capacity to implement. In the short run, the costs and structures required to implement the action are not excessive to the point of prohibiting successful implementation.

Improves relationships. The collaborative effort makes strides toward building trust and improving communication between stakeholders.

Analysis

Partnership: [Shared transportation and meal contracts*](#)

Description

The school district contracts to provide charter schools with access to its transportation services and meal providers. Charter schools pay the district a fee for participating in the district's programs. The price point is higher than the actual cost to the district of the added transportation or meal service but lower than the actual cost of the average charter school's expense of providing these services.

The district assesses the cost of adding charters to transportation or meal contracts and provides the option for charters to opt-in to the contract(s). Charters voluntarily choose to participate in transportation contracts and/or meal contracts.

**The analysis for shared transportation contracts and shared meal contracts is combined here because there is a great deal of overlap in the potential benefits of each and there is overall strong support for both across sectors.*

Feasibility & Implementation

District leaders, charter leaders and other stakeholders and experts in Durham express a strong interest in pursuing shared transportation and meal contracts. Charter leaders are especially enthusiastic about participating in transportation contracts. Shared transportation and meal contracts will likely face lower political obstacles than many other types of collaboration because they pertain more to back-office procedures than high-profile actions.

The district currently has the capacity to assess the cost, feasibility and legality of offering contracts to charter schools. While there is some upfront effort required to create new contracts and change busing routes accordingly, the infrastructure to do this work may currently exist.

Potential Benefits

DPS can increase revenue by charging charter schools to utilize district services. This opportunity to charge charter schools for use of transportation services could help reduce the financial burden on the district.

One of the district's key concerns regarding charter schools is that some do not provide transportation and thus all children do not have equitable access to the school. By offering transportation and meals at a cost that is more feasible for charters than their current options, the district is making a clear effort to assist in equity of access.

While it is unknown exactly how transportation and meal contracts could alter school demographics, it is possible that the effort could alter school make-ups in a way that better reflects the district demographics. Given that increased school segregation and under-representation of poor students is one of the district's greatest concerns, it seems worthy to further investigate a strategy that has the potential to, at least moderately, increase equity of access.

If charter schools choose to offer transportation, charters face exorbitant costs in busing and operate buses that might not pass comply with state regulations for school districts. Shared contracts could improve student safety and provide significant cost savings to charters that provide transportation. It could also incentivize charter schools that do not currently provide transportation to do so. Because school districts have large transportation contracts and fleets of busses, the per pupil cost of transportation is almost always significantly lower than the transportation costs faced by charters.

The extremely high cost of providing transportation detracts from funds that charter schools could otherwise put toward efforts more directly aimed at educational quality (e.g., classroom instruction). By reducing the financial burden of transportation and meal contracts on charters, and creating a new revenue stream to the district, the county's schools will more efficiently utilize resources. This could provide the opportunity for all schools to reallocate some resources currently spent on services to other efforts that more directly impact student learning.

Potential Challenges

It is difficult to predict how increasing access to lower-cost transportation and meals will impact charter school demographics. Further, it would be difficult to measure how reduced costs for charters and increased revenue to the district from these contracts would impact the allocation of resources.

It would be beneficial to long-term planning if there is a plan to study the impact of these contracts on the district and charter demographics and allocation of resources. Such a study could be beneficial to informing future district policy.

Description

The district makes its professional development (PD) opportunities available to charter schools, at a fee. Charter schools may also have PD or other trainings that district teachers or leaders could attend.

Feasibility & Implementation

Opening existing professional development opportunities to teachers and leaders from other education sectors would be logistically simple.

Among school leaders and stakeholders interviewed for this research, there is overwhelming support for sharing PD opportunities across sectors. However, there could be political challenges to opening district resources such as professional development to charter schools. There are people within the school district and public school community who oppose charter schools and will not be welcoming of the inclusionary practices. Thus, it is critical that leaders within the school district and charter school community express strong support and buy-in toward efforts that promote shared learning across sectors.

Potential benefits

Different schools and education sectors have different strengths. While one sector may have strong teacher training in educating special education students another sector may have a strong new teacher-training program. Individual schools could also be displaying excellence in innovative projects such as a project-based learning classroom. By fostering a district wide culture of shared learning and access to trainings, school leaders are demonstrating their commitment to continually learning and improving in order to do what is best for kids.

All of the different actors in the community have resources. We need to figure out how to utilize those and combine efforts to support our common values.

**-Meredith Flowe,
Self-Help**

There is broad consensus that opening PD across sectors would be beneficial for strengthening performance and growth across all schools. Many people also identified the positive benefit of building relationships and breaking down misperceptions across sectors by bringing teachers together.

Potential Challenges

Not all of the district or charter PD and other trainings will be appropriate for the other sector. For example, a charter school may have a new teacher-training program that is strong but is specifically tailored for the unique culture of that charter school and thus is not useful to teachers from other schools.

Description

A common enrollment system implements a centralized process by which families apply to schools and districts assign students to schools. The process includes all district schools and charter schools that choose to participate.

There are a few core features to common enrollment systems⁷:

- Common dates across all participating schools are established for application submission and match announcements.
- Families submit one application form that lists their school preferences for any publicly funded school in the district. The preferences can include any combination of traditional and charter school.
- All matches are made through a common process and matching algorithm that is agreed upon by the district and participating schools.
- Students accept their match, or they appeal and re-enter the matching process.

In designing the common enrollment system, the district and participating schools work together to customize the system to reflect local needs and school preferences. For example, schools may declare priorities for certain types of students (e.g., weighted lottery for students with free/reduced lunch).

Feasibility & Implementation

Common enrollment systems are most commonly implemented in districts with a high concentration of charter schools.⁸ This strategy could be a good fit for Durham given the high concentration of charters.

There will be upfront costs to creating and implementing a centralized enrollment system. Cities that have done this have hired outside consultants to implement the technology for the new system.

Cities that have adopted common enrollment systems have utilized the services of the non-profit organization The Institute for Innovation in Public School Choice (IIPSC). IIPSC is the primary provider nationwide for designing and implement common enrollment systems. While there are upfront costs for the technology and design of the system, IIPSC works with cities to identify and secure third-party funders. A Duke economist, Atila Abdulkadiroglu, serves as the Board Director of IIPSC. He has expressed a strong desire to consult with this Durham taskforce on common enrollment systems. He would be a valuable resource for the taskforce and could request pro-bono or reduced-fee services from IIPSC.

There may be some reasons why charter schools would not opt to participate in a common enrollment system. A charter school that aims to enroll a certain demographic of student may not want to participate in a system to promote equitable access to all of the city's students. However, evidence from cities that have implemented this system indicates that the vast majority of charters are eager to participate in common enrollment.

Some families may initially oppose a centralized enrollment system. Parents that are accustomed to utilizing their resources to apply to multiple schools of choice could be frustrated by a system-wide change that feels like it takes away the advantage they have over families that do not invest the same amount of time in school applications. Additionally, some families may feel uncomfortable with the

7. CRPE, *An Overview of Common Enrollment Systems*; 2014.

8. Yatsko S. Personal Interview. January 24, 2014.

notion that an algorithm selects their child's school. Experiences in other cities that have implemented common enrolment systems have shown that parents can express initial frustration or mistrust in the new process. However, researchers that have studied common enrollment systems in other cities have indicated that they take a huge burden off of parents. Communicating these benefits to parents will be key in ensuring successful implementation.

Conversations with local stakeholders reveal a strong interest in a common enrollment system. It is clear that both district and charter leaders see strong potential for this effort think it could have benefits for the city.

Potential benefits

Cities around the country are increasingly utilizing common enrollment systems because of several key benefits they provide⁹:

- ***Ensuring that all students have equitable access to the school options.*** One of the key barriers to equitable access of schools is that the current system requires parents to invest high levels of resources (time and information) to learn about all of the school options, navigate different application processes, and fill out multiple school applications. A common enrollment system eliminates these barriers to access. Additionally, a centralized school assignment process takes lotteries out of the hands of individual schools. Overall, there is broad consensus that a common enrollment system levels the playing field and increases equity of access.
- ***Helps reduce the burden on families by streamlining the application processes.*** Families can significantly benefit from a clearer and streamlined school assignment process. Parents citywide now have one application, one deadline and one match. This can reduce the burden on parents and equalize the process across families. It will also appeal to parents that have been frustrated by a lack of success in the traditional lottery system.
- ***School assignments can reflect community wide priorities and needs.*** In designing the matching process, the participating schools can decide on preferences that drive the matching process. For example, in Newark special education students are designed as such on their applications and their placement is prioritized in schools to ensure equal representation in all of the city's schools.
- ***Helps schools forecast enrollment.*** A centralized enrollment process allows schools to know their enrollment much earlier than the current system. Currently, students can hold multiple offers to charters and the school does not know which students they will actually have in the fall. Knowing their enrollment numbers further in advance is critically important in helping schools planning around critical decisions such as funding and teacher hires.

A decentralized enrollment system favors parents who have greater access to information, resources and time. A common enrollment system levels the playing field.

-Atila Abdulkadiroglu

Duke University, Professor of Economics

Potential Challenges

While streamlining and centralizing enrollment processes can eliminate one important barrier to children's equitable access to schools, it does not remove all barriers. Other important factors affect equity of access, such as families' access to reliable information about school quality.

It is critically important that leaders from both sectors communicate the benefits of a common enrollment system to families. They can be honest with families about some of the things that they are giving up, such as the possibility of being able to hold multiple offers from charters and deliberate their options. However, they can also communicate how universal enrollment helps address system problems of fairness, inequality and operational inefficiencies.

Partnership: [Charter access to district services](#)

Description

The district makes available access to services that charters identify a need for, such as special education services and Durham's Safe School program. These are services and resources that the district has that are either not available, or would be prohibitively costly, to charter schools. The district would provide access to such services to charters at a fee that full covers the added cost to the district.

Feasibility & Implementation

Giving charters access to existing district services would be logistically simple. It could face some of the same political challenges identified for shared PD.

Potential benefits

Charter school leaders have expressed interest in being able to access district services that will help them strengthen the services they offer to students. For example, because of the district's large scale they have a much greater breadth of services for special education (SPED) students than are available to charter schools. Opening these services to charter schools could give them a financially viable option for serving SPED students. Ensuring that these students are well served and have access to the best services possible is in the best interest of all education leaders committed to excellence and equity.

Providing services at a fee to charter schools also provides an additional revenue stream to the district. Maximizing opportunities like this can help mitigate the financial impact that charter schools have on the district.

Potential Challenges

The district needs to ensure that it fully recoups the cost of making its services accessible to charter schools. If the processes were not carefully designed to assign an appropriate fee for services, it could strain district resources.

Description

School leaders (e.g., middle school principals) form working groups that have on-going regular meetings to discuss common challenges and share best practices. The frequency and structure of meetings depends on the needs of the participants. Some levels of working groups may meet once a month while others meet twice a semester. While groups such as these most commonly involved principals lead the same level of school, they could expand to include other school building leaders such as instructional coaches.

The general practice of working groups is to collaborate around common challenges. However, groups may identify other areas where they can collaborate around efforts that serve all of Durham. For example, they could provide guidance to new charters/charter applicants to help them (1) best meet the needs of the district and (2) utilize the existing expertise of charter and district leaders. As a result, charter applicants could help strengthen the educational opportunities in Durham and they could avoid wasteful expenditures on things such as consultants to help them figure out many school operation pieces that local leaders are already experts in.

Feasibility & Implementation

Implementing the working groups would not involve high costs or difficult logistics. The group would need to secure a space for regular meetings. Finding a regular time and holding school leaders accountable for attending could also be challenging. The success of these pieces will rely on participants feeling like the meeting times produce meaningful conversations that help them in their jobs. DPS has experience creating a model of professional learning communities to varying success. Learning about how these experiences have been successful or challenging could help inform a similar effort between district and charter school leaders. Setting up clear structures and goals in the beginning stages of the work will help ensure this success. The group needs to be clear about what the participants hope to get out of the work time.

Potential benefits

School leader working groups can strengthen all of Durham's schools by creating an opportunity for school leaders to share knowledge and expertise. School leaders face many common challenges and are gaining valuable knowledge every day as they run their schools. Yet, school leaders very rarely interact and in the case of cross-sector leaders they may never interact. This is currently a missed opportunity that could be remedied by increased collaboration. School leaders could learn from each other's expertise around everything from delivering effective teacher feedback to administrative challenges around running a school.

School leader working groups could also help instill community confidence in Durham's schools. By demonstrating their commitment to continually learning best practices and working collaboratively to overcome challenges Durham's school leaders can show parents and other stakeholders that they are, above all else, committed to providing excellent educational opportunities.

Potential Challenges

The largest hurdle at the start could be getting the buy-in of school leaders who have not traditionally collaborated with each other. School leaders have busy schedules and in order for them to prioritize this initiative they will need to believe that the meetings will be meaningful and provide them with concrete strategies for making their schools stronger.

CASE STUDY: Hillsborough County School's Charter School Advisory Council⁴

The Superintendent of Hillsborough County School District in Florida created a Charter School Advisory Council (CSAC) that includes district and charter school leaders. CSAC was created to address what was once a hostile climate between the district and charters. This initiative demonstrated the Superintendent's belief that close collaboration and partnership between district and charter schools could help the county provide the best education for all students.

The council operates with a simple but profound mantra: **to place the best interests of children ahead of political agenda or desires for control and autonomy.**

CSAC meets monthly and, while the topics of meetings vary, the ultimate focus of all convenings is working together to create the best learning environment for all children in the county. The monthly meetings are seen as a way to facilitate communication, project management, problem solving, and innovation in district-charter partnerships. The goal of meetings is to improve school performance, operational efficiency and student learning.

The group has produced many concrete and direct impacts on the district. For example, the district made scanning equipment available to charter schools and, as a result, charters now have data systems that allow them to implement a proven continuous-improvement model and the district provides training to charters on implementing this model.

As a result of CSAC's success, the district is now viewed statewide as an exemplar of collaboration. The group has expanded the impact of their collaboration by offering their perspective on state panels and in joint presentations between district and charter schools at state and local conferences.

Partnership: Combined lobbying efforts

Description

Stakeholders from Durham's education community join efforts to lobby the state for desired changes that require state-level action, such as legislative changes. This could be a next step of the taskforce. Some recommendations from the taskforce may be addressed to the state. The taskforce may consider forming a smaller committee that takes on efforts to lobby the state to pursue taskforce recommendations. These efforts could happen during and/or after the time period during which the taskforce convenes.

Some examples, identified during interviews with local stakeholders, of state-level changes that this group may consider advocating for include:

- Increased funding for special education services
- Local authorization of charter schools
- Changes to the charter lottery parameters
- State provided funding or other incentives for district-charter collaborations

Feasibility & Implementation

Targeted and effective lobbying efforts require a skillset and level of investment that may be difficult to find. Successful lobbying takes a lot of effort and skill. There would need to be people willing to take on this work. The taskforce could have conversations specifically aimed at identifying the scope of lobbying efforts that could be both effective and feasible.

Potential benefits

Joint lobbying efforts focused on identifying the common goals of the district and charters puts them on the same side of an effort. The process of this work could be helpful in shifting the mindset from one of adversarial competition to one of a network of schools with a shared mission of providing excellent educational opportunities.

There are several actions that local stakeholders interviewed for this report identified as being important to creating positive change but which require state-level action. Presenting a unified voice of traditional district and charter schools around issues that are important to Durham could have persuasive powers at the state-level. This could be a powerful next-step to pursue recommendations generated by the taskforce.

Potential Challenges

If the feasibility and implementation challenges could be overcome, the buy-in for this work would likely be high as it pursues mutual goals. If the stakeholders were not able to come to consensus on what mutual goals would look like (e.g., how changes to charter lottery could be beneficial to both sectors) then this effort would not gain traction.

Partnership: [School performance framework](#)

Description

A school performance framework (SPF) provides a comparable and consistent way to measure the performance of all schools in Durham, both traditional and charter. This would provide a set of indicators against which all schools are measured. Typically, SPFs incorporate both status and growth measures to assess school performance.

Durham would design the SPF that met the needs of schools across sectors and helped drive increases in school performance. The taskforce subcommittee studying “Improving school performance and accountability” may choose to focus on investigating if an SPF would benefit Durham and, if so, how it could be designed and implemented.

Cities that utilize SPFs commonly include these dimensions:¹⁰

- Measure multiple aspects of school performance
- Use multiple data sources and collection methods
- Compare performance across similar schools
- Incorporate trends over time
- Assess financial health
- Report in a user-friendly format

Feasibility & Implementation

Designing a SPF would require an investment of time and resources from the district and charter schools. The scope of the work would depend on the goals of Durham's SPF and whether leaders could identify a similar model used elsewhere that could easily be adapted for Durham. If district leaders are interested in pursuing this strategy they would also need to consult with state-level official to determine if state approval would be needed for the district to use an SPF.

Potential benefits

Districts that use SPFs believe that it helps improve school quality by supporting school leaders in identifying what successful schools are doing and how they can take those best practices to support struggling schools.^{11,12} A shared performance framework is a crucial step toward understanding where there are strengths to learn from and areas for growth to improve upon the education opportunities available to Durham's students. By providing a common assessment across all schools, Durham's education leaders can better see how schools compare, where schools are succeeding in certain areas and where schools could benefit from extra support.

SPFs also provide parents with clear information that can inform their choice in selecting schools. This benefit is greater when the SPF data is communicated to the public in a clear and accessible way.

Potential Challenges

Though SPF's exist in many cities nationwide, there are myriad challenges that education leaders would need to address if they pursued an SPF. Some critics may be skeptical of the measurements used to make school assessments, especially if there is a heavy reliance on standardized tests, which can be a controversial measure.

School leaders could feel concerned that the SPF will not accurately assess their school or provide useful feedback and support. Community members may be concerned that an SPF could ultimately lead to school closings that negatively impact their neighborhood.

11. School Performance Framework Guide, Los Angeles Unified School District.

12. Copeland B. Charter Authorizing Policy & Practice, Denver Public Schools. January 27, 2014.

CASE STUDY: Denver's School and District Performance Framework¹²

Denver, CO designed a School and District Performance Framework in an effort to pursue these goals:

- Provide high quality information in a transparent manner
- Hold all schools accountable to high standards
- Respect diversity in school type, model and approach, while protecting school autonomy
- Inform district decision-making about schools (opening, closing, etc.)
- Inform parent choice

In the Denver model, four indicators determine school performance: (1) academic achievement, (2) academic growth, (3) academic growth caps, and (4) post-secondary workforce readiness.

School performance is measured annually and is largely based on standardized test data. Every year, each district and charter school in Denver gets an SPF rating and scorecard. Schools are rated on a five rating scale, from probation to distinguished status. Denver identifies key ways in which its SPF has helped it improve school quality, including reducing the number of schools in 'probation' status, increasing the number of schools receiving 'meets expectations' or 'distinguished' status and enhancing the district's ability to customize how it supports struggling schools.

Key areas to setting up this success in Denver include:

- Common school performance standards
- Transparent and rigorous charter authorizing practices grounded in a school quality framework
- Student-based budgeting and transparent funding formulas for both district-run and charter schools
- Transportation flexibilities
- Facility support

Collaborative actions scored against criteria

COLLABORATIVE ACTIONS	CRITERIA								Total Points
	Increases school quality	Increases equity of access	Sustainable	Politically feasible	Cost effective	Existing capacity to implement	Improves relationships		
Shared transportation and meal contracts	1	3	3	3	3	2	1	16	
Shared professional development opportunities	3	1	3	2	3	3	3	18	
Common enrollment system	2	3	3	2	2	2	0	14	
Charter access to district services	2	1	3	2	3	3	3	17	
School leader working groups	3	0	2	2	2	3	3	15	
Combined lobbying efforts	2	2	1	2	2	1	3	13	
School performance framework	3	2	3	2	2	1	1	14	

Scale of meeting criteria

0: Fails to meet criteria

2: Mostly meets criteria

1: Minimally meets criteria

3: Fully meets criteria

Note about matrix: This scoring matrix is not intended to provide a recommendation of which collaborative actions Durham’s school district and charter school leaders should pursue. All of these collaborative actions were included for analysis because research and interviews indicate that they have strong potential for improving Durham’s education opportunities and could reasonably be implemented. Durham’s education leaders and stakeholders need to decide which criteria are most important to them in order to pursue common goals that address the most pressing challenges in the community.

Conclusion

Leaders from both Durham Public Schools and Durham charter schools interviewed for this report reflected similar perspectives that the community is currently at a crossroads. Given recent changes in the state charter school legislation and trends in charter school growth, the expansion of charter schools in Durham appears likely. However, the pace of this growth and the type of charter schools it will bring to Durham is far from clear.

DPS and many Durham charter schools share similar concerns about potential negative effects of uninhibited charter growth. Similarly, community members and education leaders interviewed for this report voiced concerns that a lack of cooperative action between district and charter schools misses opportunities to influence how charter growth manifests in Durham and to work together to strengthen and improve schools across Durham.

This report recommends that DPS and charter school leaders unite around shared goals of improving educational opportunities across all schools. Forging a taskforce that takes advantage of the diverse perspectives and expertise of district leaders, charter leaders and area stakeholders could help the community create a pathway toward improving the equitable distribution of high-quality educational opportunities for Durham's children.

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Appendix 1: Interview List

Category**	Interviewee***	Organization/ Association	Position	Interview Date
3	Atila Abdulkadiroglu	Duke University, Department of Economics	Professor of Economics	March 6, 2014
3	Danielle Allen	UNC- Chapel Hill, School of Education	PhD candidate	Sept. 27, 2013
2	David Beck	Center for Community Self-Help	Policy and Media Director	Jan. 17, 2014
1	Carol Beck	Supporting Public Schools of Choice (Baltimore, MD)	Director	Feb. 21, 2014
1	Natalie Beyer*	Durham Public Schools Board of Education	Board Member	Sept. 16, 2013 Nov. 13, 2013
3	Drupti Chauhan	NC General Assembly Research Division	Staff Attorney	Oct. 10, 2013
2	Drew Cummings*	Durham County	Assistant County Manager	Nov. 25, 2013 March 18, 2014
3	Shelby Dawkins-Law	UNC- Chapel Hill, School of Education	PhD candidate	Sept. 27, 2013
1	Neil Dorosin	Institute for Innovation in Public School Choice	Founder	March 3, 2014
1	Mike Feinberg	KIPP Public Charter Schools	Co-Founder	March 4, 2014
3	Ted Fiske	(formerly) The New York Times	Education writer	Nov. 19, 2013
2	Meredith Flowe*	Self-Help		Jan. 17, 2014 Feb. 20, 2104
2	Carl Forsyth	Voyager Academy (charter school)	Managing Director	Jan. 31, 2014
2	Minnie Forte-Brown	Durham Public Schools Board of Education	Board Vice-Chair	Nov. 24, 2013
2	Lisa Gordon-Stella	Maureen Joy Charter School	Board Vice-President	Jan. 31, 2014
3	Gita Gulati-Partee	Open Source Leadership Strategies (worked supporting districts through reform and portfolio strategies)	Founder and President	Sept. 23, 2013
2	Susan Haws	Central Park Charter School	Parent	Jan. 22, 2014
1	Sheila Jordan	Alameda County School District	Superintendent	Feb. 19, 2014
3	Julie Kowal	Carolina CAN	Executive Director	Feb. 21, 2014
3	Kara McCraw	NC General Assembly Research Division	Staff Attorney/ Legislative Analyst	Oct. 10, 2013
2	Joel Medley	NC Office of Charter Schools	Director	Feb. 3, 2014
1	Josh Newman	Ed Tech (Served on Alameda, CA district-charter taskforce)	CEO	Feb. 23, 2014

2	Michael Palmer	Self-Help, Carter Charter	Outreach Coordinator	Feb. 20, 2014
3	Patsy Pierce	NC General Assembly Research Division	Legislative Analyst	Oct. 10, 2013
1	Adam Porsch	Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation	Senior Program Officer, College Ready	Feb. 10, 2014
2	Alex Quigley	Maureen Joy Charter	Principal	Jan. 20, 2014
1	Marta Reyes- Newberry	WA State Charter School Association (Served on Alameda, CA district-charter taskforce)	Director	March 5, 2014
2	Steve Schewel	Durham City Council	At Large Council Member	Sept. 30, 2013
1	Tammi Sutton	KIPP Gaston College Preparatory	Executive Director	March 17, 2014
3	Christina Tuttle	Mathematica Policy Research	Senior Researcher	Jan. 22, 2014
3	Sarah Yatsko	Center on Reinventing Public Education	Director	Jan. 24, 2014

*Person interviewed more than once

** Category descriptions:

The people interviewed for this report represent a wide range of perspectives, experiences and expertise. The interviewees represented three categories of perspectives:

- **Category 1:** Local Durham school district leaders, charter school leaders and community stakeholders (*12 interviews*)
- **Category 2:** Academic researchers and other experts on education and district-charter collaboration (*11 interviews*)
- **Category 3:** School district and charter school leaders and education non-profit sector advisers from across the country (all non-local) who have experience creating and implementing collaborative actions between school districts and charter schools (*8 interviews*)

*** This project also drew heavily on multiple conversations with Heidi Carter, the Chair of the DPS Board of Education and Board of Education member Natalie Beyer. Carter served as the client for this project (along with Natalie Beyer); Carter was not included on this list of interviews but her perspective and input is drawn upon throughout the report.

Appendix 2: Interview Protocols

Protocol for Category 1: Local Durham school district leaders, charter school leaders and community stakeholders

1. Have you seen the role of charter schools in Durham/NC change over time?

Follow up: What has brought about these changes?

Follow up: What have been the impacts of these changes?

For school leaders: Do you ever communicate with leaders from the district/charters?

2. What do you think is the role of charter schools in Durham/NC?

Follow up: Why do you think families choose to attend charter schools?

3. What do you think are the motivations of charter school leaders? What are their goals?

Follow up: Are there things that are inhibiting them from reaching their goals?

4. What do you think are the motivations of DPS leaders? What are their goals?

Follow up: Are there things that are inhibiting them from reaching their goals?

5. How would you characterize the relationship between DPS and the local charters?

Follow up: What factors have helped create this dynamic?

6. Can you imagine any ways in which the district and charters might collaborate?

Follow up: Do you think there would be any challenges to forging collaborations?

Follow up: What do you think would help set up collaborations for success?

7. Are there certain methods of collaboration that would be more or less appealing to DPS?

8. Are there certain methods of collaboration that would be more or less appealing to charters?

9. Do you think the district would have any concerns about collaborating with charters?

10. Do you think the charters would have any concerns about collaborating with the district?

11. Do you think collaborations could be effective if they only involved some charters?

Follow up: Which charters do you think would be the most effective partners? Why?

12. Are there any other things you think I should be considering that I haven't asked about? Who else should I talk to (maybe with a different perspective)? Do you have any materials to share?

Protocol for Category 2: Academic researchers and other experts on education and district-charter collaboration

1. How would you characterize the traditional relationship between districts and charters?

Follow up: What factors do you think have contributed to this dynamic?

Follow up: Have you seen this dynamic look different in any districts? Why?

2. Do you think that there are effective ways that a district and charters can collaborate?

Follow up: What do you see as the potential impacts of collaborations?

3. What are some methods of collaboration that a district and charters can pursue?

Follow up: Are there any of these that you think may be more effective than others?

Follow up: What factors help make some of these more or less feasible?

4. Have you seen any positive or negative impacts as a result of collaborations? What are they?

5. What is the incentive for districts to pursue collaborations?

Follow up: Are there certain factors (e.g., political, legal) that make them more/less willing?

6. What is the incentive for charters to pursue collaborations?

Follow up: Are there certain factors (e.g., political, legal) that make them more/less willing?

7. What do you see as the possible areas of concern for districts in collaborating?

8. What do you see as the possible areas of concern for charters in collaborating?

9. What are some of the greatest challenges to forging and implementing collaborations?

10. Are there certain methods of collaboration that are more or less appealing to districts?

11. Are there certain methods of collaboration that are more or less appealing to charters?

12. Are there any other things you think I should be considering that I haven't asked about?

Who else should I talk to (maybe with a different perspective)? Do you have any materials to share?

Protocol for Category 3: School district and charter school leaders and education non-profit sector advisers from across the country (all non-local) who have experience creating and implementing collaborative actions between school districts and charter schools

1. In what ways has your district/school collaborated with area districts/charters?

Follow up: What was your role in those efforts?

Follow up: What was the impetus for pursuing these collaborations?

2. What was/is the framework for collaboration that you have pursued? (e.g., compact)

Follow up: Why did you choose this framework? Did you rely on any research?

Follow up: Why did you not choose other frameworks?

3. Have you seen any positive or negative impacts as a result of these collaborations?

4. What helped make some aspects of the collaborative efforts more successful than others?

5. What were some of the greatest challenges to forging and implementing collaborations?

6. Are there benefits of collaboration for districts? If so, what are they?

7. Are there benefits of collaboration for charters? ? If so, what are they?

8. What do you see as the possible areas of concern for districts in collaborating?

9. What do you see as the possible areas of concern for charters in collaborating?

10. Are there certain methods of collaboration that are more or less appealing to districts?

11. Are there certain methods of collaboration that are more or less appealing to charters?

12. Are there any other things you think I should be considering that I haven't asked about? Who else should I talk to (maybe with a different perspective)? Do you have any materials to share?

Appendix 3: Literature Review

This research includes a combination of peer reviewed academic literature and non-peer reviewed sources such as newspaper articles and reports from think tanks and research organizations. This reflects the available sources of information on the topic of district-charter collaborations. This topic is still largely lacking academic sources so there is a heavy reliance on reports and news articles.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF DISTRICT-CHARTER RELATIONSHIPS

The relationships between school district and charter school leaders have largely been characterized by mistrust and animosity since the inception of charters in the early 1990s (Kirst, 2006). The fundamental purpose of charter schools sets them up to be in direct competition with the school district. One of the central principles of charter schools is that they drive innovation and quality through competition with district schools. In a climate of school choice, districts and charter schools are essentially competing for students and the funding that follows students. Increased choice allows families to “vote with their feet” and choose the school that most appeals to them. School choice advocates contend that this element of competition has the potential to improve the performance of all schools by spurring innovation and driving quality as district and charter schools work to attract students (Arsen & Ni, 2011; Hanushek, Kain, Rivkin, & Branch, 2006). The debate surrounding the effectiveness of charter schools in improving school quality is beyond the scope of this project. However, understanding the dispute among academics, school leaders and other stakeholders around the impact of charter schools frames the dynamic of opposition that is implicit between traditional district and charter schools. This has, unsurprisingly, resulted in historically acrimonious relationships between school districts and charter schools.

The charter school movement has consistently been met with opposition from advocates for traditional public schools (Lake & Gross, 2011; Rofes, 2005). One key concern for local school districts is that charter school expansion decreases enrollment, and thus decreases funding, for traditional schools. As charter presence expands, the financial stress on the district increases (Arsen & Ni, 2011; Rofes, 2005). Dominic Slowey, spokesman for the MA Charter Public School Association, explains that historic tensions have meant that, “you wouldn’t see districts on the whole collaborating with charters, mainly for political reasons. Districts saw charters as a threat, in terms of reallocation of funds and because they’re competing for the same kids” (Finkel, 2011).

Critics of charter schools also argue that charters promote school segregation along many measures because they do not serve a student body that is representative of the district. Some charter

schools disproportionately enroll high-achieving students and under enroll special education students, English-language learners, minority students and low-income students (Frankenberg, E., Siegel-Hawley, G., Wang, 2010; Miron et al., 2010). Helen Ladd, a Sanford School professor and education policy expert, explains, “these disparities are important because research shows they can have negative educational consequences for students” (Sturgis, 2013). Schools that are unbalanced and unrepresentative of the district can have significant impacts on students. A school with a disproportionately high number of African-American, Latino or low-income students is more likely to employ teachers with less teaching experience and degrees from weaker colleges (Clotfelter et al., 2013).

Another concern of many districts and community stakeholders is that unrepresentative charter school enrollment is leading to increased racial segregation in schools. Research conducted at Duke’s Sanford School of Public Policy found that charter schools in North Carolina have increased the racial imbalance in public schools (Clotfelter et al., 2013). Defining racial imbalance to mean that a school enrolls fewer than 20 percent or more than 80 percent nonwhite students, the Sanford researchers found that 79 percent of NC charter school students attend a racially imbalanced school compared to 39 percent of traditional public school students in racially imbalanced schools (Clotfelter et al., 2013). There are myriad reasons that public education advocates, families, and community members may be concerned about charter schools’ role in perpetuating racial imbalance in NC’s schools. For example, much research points to the negative long-term social and professional outcomes that arise when students do not interact with, and learn from, students of different backgrounds (Frankenberg, E., Siegel-Hawley, G., Wang, 2010; Sturgis, 2013).

Another imbalance often seen between the student body makeups of charters compared to traditional schools is the number of students served with special education needs. Special education students are the most expensive to serve and thus, the district experiences additional financial burden when charters neglect this population (Frankenberg, E., Siegel-Hawley, G., Wang, 2010; Miron et al., 2010). As districts experience reductions in their budgets as a result of charter school expansion, they simultaneously experience a student body that is more costly to educate. Though charter schools are under the same legal requirements as traditional schools to serve students with special needs, some charters still underserve this population (Frankenberg, E., Siegel-Hawley, G., Wang, 2010). One reason that charter schools may seek to discourage enrollment from special education students is because the burden of special education students can be much greater for charter schools. They are less likely than the district to be able to share these costs across schools and the way the funds are calculated often

vastly underrepresent the true cost to the charter (Lake & Gross, 2011). This creates strong disincentives for charters to attract and enroll students with special needs. As a result, charter schools typically serve a lower proportion of students with special needs than do their traditional school counterparts (Sarah Carr, 2013).

The strong anti-charter sentiment that exists in many districts can breed further animosity from charters toward the district. Many charter leaders distrust the school district to appropriately allocate funds and some suspect district leaders of “hiding the ball” in order to reduce the funds that flow from the district to charters (Chauhan, D., personal Interview). A Durham public official recounted stories he has heard about charter leaders calling district schools to request school visits in efforts to learn from the traditional schools but their calls are never returned (Cummings, D., personal Interview). This anecdote exemplifies the self-perpetuating cycle that districts and charters can get trapped in where mistrust and hostility breed more mistrust and hostility.

Despite these sources of long-standing animosity, the relationships between school districts and charter schools are not always purely acrimonious. Some district and charter leaders around the nation have sought common ground and been able to foster positive working relationships between the systems (“Best Cooperative Practices, Charter & Traditional Public Schools,” 2010). As charter presence appears to be solidifying and growing nationwide, some district and charter leaders are considering ways in which collaborative actions may help them improve the efficiency of their operations, increase the quality of their services to children and families, and improve relationships between school leaders and other stakeholders (Lake & Gross, 2011).

METHODS OF COLLABORATION FOR DISTRICTS & CHARTERS

While the trend of districts and charters coming to the table to work together is growing, the shift from deep-seeded antagonism and distrust to mutual understanding and collaboration is enormously challenging. District and charter leaders need to acknowledge the historic tensions that will impact attempts at collaboration. First, one of the central tenants of charter schools is that they are autonomous. Research shows that collaborative efforts have a greater chance of success when they seek a balance between charter autonomy and accountability (“Best Cooperative Practices, Charter & Traditional Public Schools,” 2010; Izu, 1999). Second, the historic tensions that exist amongst district and charter leaders have fostered an environment of mistrust. Easing these tensions is one of the goals of many collaborations but it will also be a challenge to overcome. Third, most charter schools have different missions and organizing structures from other charters in the district

and they may not communicate with each other. In Durham there is currently not a formal organizing structure or evidence of consistent communication amongst the charters. Whereas there is central leadership representing a district, it can be challenging to communicate with all charters and to generate consensus amongst them because each charter is its own autonomous entity. It is important to remember that charters have varying goals and decision-making structures and thus not all collaborative efforts will appeal to them equally.

Historically, collaborations between districts and local charters have been centered on the sharing of administrative services (Finkel, 2011). This has usually been seen as a method for maximizing economies of scale, rather than used a method for decreasing hostilities among school and district leaders. For example, districts hold long-standing relationships with area food vendors and thus are able to get better deals for better quality food. This is one point of leverage that districts have been able to use to foster cooperative endeavors with charter schools.

Collaboration focused on relationship building and sharing best practices is relatively new (Finkel, 2011). One early example of collaborative action took place in 2004 in Alameda County, California. In response to intense hostility between the district and charter schools, the district Superintendent called for efforts to bring school leaders, teachers, families and other stakeholders to the table to discuss the potential of partnership. This resulted in a 21-person taskforce that worked for months studying possible collaborative actions and ultimately made a set of recommendations to the district and charter leaders (Rofes, 2005).

There are various methods, and combinations of methods, of collaboration that have been forged by district and charter leaders across the country. Table 1 outlines examples of common methods of collaborations that can be found in districts nationwide.

Table 1: Examples of Collaborative Efforts Between Districts and Charters

Area of Collaboration	Collaboration	Details of Collaboration
Sharing best practices	Advisory Council	District and charter leaders form an advisory council that meets regularly to improve relationships and communication between schools and discuss common challenges and best practices. <i>Example:</i> Hillsborough County, FL has an advisory council comprised of district and charter leaders. They meet monthly to discuss challenges and draw on their expertise to help each other solve complex problems. The council’s mantra is, “to place the best

		interests of children ahead of political agendas or desires for control and autonomy.” **
Training and support	Charter access to district’s service contracts	<p>Charter schools can pay to access services that the district obtains through third-party contracts.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> In DC, charter schools join the DC Special Education Co-operative to receive training and consulting services for teachers. *</p> <p>In Alameda, CA the district increased their revenue from charters by offering pay-for services such as grant applications, background checks, payroll, insurance, custodial and landscaping, and professional development. ***</p>
Financing special education	Risk pools	A charter school can pay into a risk pool and draw out of it when a student with high needs enrolls in the school. *
Financing special education & ELL	Lobbying	<p>A district and charters work together to advocate for legislation changes to the way that the state allocates funds to charters for special education and ELL students.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> A taskforce in Alameda, CA charged with tackling challenges facing the district and charters made a recommendation that the state division of charter schools augment the level of financing to charter schools that serve high-needs students, especially ELL and SPED. ***</p>
Enrollment predictions	Required enrollment notification	<p>Charters agree to notify the district of predicted enrollment by a certain date, in order to help districts plan for the financial and planning ramifications of enrollment changes.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> A taskforce in Alameda, CA charged with tackling challenges facing the district and charters created a requirement for charters to provide an estimate of the next year’s enrollment and ADA ramifications (financial allocations based on the Americans with Disabilities Act) to affected districts by January 31st of each year.***</p>
Data systems	Shared data access and strategy	<p>Districts can grant charters access to data systems. The district and charters work together to share best practices around data use, form new strategies of data use or develop new data-driven tools that can be used across all schools.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> The Arizona Charter School Association collaborated with The Arizona Department of Education to use state data in the development of common measures of school quality, including a value-added measure of student level growth. **</p>

Semi-autonomous networks of schools	Portfolio school districts	In portfolio school districts, the district manages a portfolio of diverse schools that can be provided in different ways, from traditional district operations to charter school operators to nonprofit organization. This model shifts administrative decision making to the school level and retains accountability for outcomes at the central district level. This model utilizes school choice and closure policies to redirect resources from low-performing schools to high-performing schools. ****
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*(Lake & Gross, 2011)

**("Best Cooperative Practices, Charter & Traditional Public Schools," 2010)

*** (Rofes, 2005)

****(Lake & Gross, 2011; Nadelstern, 2012)

These collaborations have been initiated at the district and state level nationwide. However, influences from third-party actors such as The Gates Foundation and the Department of Education's Race to the Top grants have made a push to broaden the scope of charter presence and collaboration with districts.

District-Charter Collaboration Compacts

District-Charter Collaboration Compacts, spearheaded by The Gates Foundation, is the most high profile and widespread effort to foster collaborations between districts and charter schools. The Gates Foundation's District-Charter Collaboration Compact Initiative was launched in 2010 to bring together district and charter leaders seeking a "common ground rather than a battleground" (Nelson, Yatsko, & Lake, 2013). District-charter collaboration compacts are formal public agreements that are crafted and signed by superintendents and charter school leaders to establish commitment to collaboration on myriad issues that affect the school systems (Lake & Gross, 2011). The districts that sign on to these compacts agree to five key principles: (1) district and charter schools have a collective obligation to all students; (2) charter schools need to support the success of district schools and vice versa; (3) students should have access to equitable resources; (4) district schools and public charter schools must be equally accountable for student performance; (5) leaders will expand or replicate high-performing schools(Lake & Gross, 2011). Since its inception three years ago, 16 districts have signed compacts, bolstered by \$100,000 grants to support their efforts (Nelson et al., 2013). The premise behind these grants is that charters will gain greater equity in funding and district support for services such as transportation or professional development (Hess, 2010).

While there was variation across the compacts in their scope and goals, there were several common methods of collaboration that were included in compacts. Table 2, outlines the most common collaborative efforts pursued in compacts and their success to date in gaining traction.

Table 2: What leaders agreed to in Compacts

Topic	Typical Compact Agreement	Number of cities that made agreement	Number of cities that made progress on agreement
High-performing schools	Help the most effective schools expand and replicate; commit to locating new schools in the highest-need areas.	15	11
Resource & facilities access	Ensure equitable distribution of public school resources; ensure access to facilities for public charter schools.	15	6
Economies of scale	Enhance efficiencies through shared services contract.	15	3
Special education	Charter schools commit to ensure transparency regarding student demographics and to recruit and retain comparable percentages of students.	14	5
Instructional practices	Actively share best practices to scale up successful programs and build capacity to serve all students.	14	5
Human capital	Make joint efforts in the recruitment, retention, and development of teachers and school leaders.	13	Not reported
Low-performing schools	Work to close, reconstitute, or by other means immediately address persistently low-performing schools.	13	4
Accountability systems	Commit to a common school accountability framework in which all schools will participate.	10	3
Enrollment systems	Implement a common and coordinate choice enrollment system.	8	4

(Nelson et al., 2013)

Cities have experienced varied success in pursuing different aspects of their compact initiatives. A 2013 analysis of the impact of these collaboration compacts on the participating districts found that all cities made progress in relationship building and focusing conversations on mutual problem solving (Nelson et al., 2013).

Challenges in progress on compact goals arose in several cities for different reasons. One common challenge is transition in leadership. When a district or school leader who is currently working on, or has already signed, a compact is replaced there can be enormous challenges in getting the buy-in and cooperation of the new leader.

INCENTIVES & DISINCENTIVES IN FORGING COLLABORATIONS

There are various incentives and disincentives for both district and charter leaders when considering various methods of collaboration. Both the district and charters could value the lessening of hostilities that exist between them and appreciate opportunities to learn from each other's areas of strength and innovation. At the same time, both players will also have to make concessions and compromises that may be difficult to reconcile.

Recognizing that charters are going to have a lasting presence, district leaders may see collaborations as a way to pursue potential benefits within the reality of charter presence. Districts may be compelled to seek collaborations in order to ease hostile relationships that exist with area charter schools. Districts could also seek collaborations in order to persuade charters to commit to serving more high-need students, such as special-education students. Collaborative efforts could also bring greater transparency and accountability to charter schools. Greater flow of information between the district and charters could help stabilize financial management and operations by helping the district better predict enrollment and funding (Lake & Gross, 2011).

Charter schools may see benefits from easing tensions and opposition posed by the district. In places where some sectors of the community perceive charters as antagonistic to the district or neglectful of high-needs populations, it could be in the best interest of the charter to build goodwill among policymakers by engaging with the district. Additionally, charter viability depends on stable and equitable financing. Through collaborations, charter schools may seek access to public facilities and to public resources for which the school district is a gatekeeper such as bond funds and mill levies (Lake & Gross, 2011). Charters may also be able to work with districts to lobby for legislative changes in how funds are allocated to charters for high-needs students. Collaborations could also be key to making processes such as bulk purchasing, data collection and information systems and resources for special education students and ELL students more efficient (Lake & Gross, 2011).

Because of historic tensions in the community, the prospect of engaging with charters can be a politically daunting task for district leaders. The exercise of forging collaborations with charters requires districts to reimagine traditional practices around things such as operations and resources

(Lake & Gross, 2011). There may be disincentives for the district to invest resources and political capital into promoting collaborative efforts with charters if the charters are seen as unwilling to consider concessions and compromise.

The clearest drawback for charter schools in considering collaborations with districts is that acting within the system, and possibly making concessions of autonomy, run counter to the premise and driving philosophy of charters. One of the central tenants of charter schools is that their autonomy allows them room for innovation by freeing them from the bureaucratic hierarchy of the traditional school district (Lake & Gross, 2011).

CLIMATE FOR SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATIONS

Every school district is unique in its leadership, charter presence, charter regulations and accountability, political climate, and myriad other factors that impact the feasibility of district-charter collaborations. No two districts have the same needs or challenges when considering collaborative efforts with charters. However, we can look to examples around the country of how districts have seized, or created, windows of opportunity in order to pursue opportunities to strengthen all schools by shifting from a perspective of charters as adversaries to one of charters as partners.

The Gates funded District-Charter Collaboration Compacts have emerged in widely varied districts across the nation. While the nature of the compacts varies across the cities, there are some common factors that increase the likelihood of successful partnership. Compact cities tend to have the following traits (Nelson et al., 2013):

- **Mayoral control.** The more control mayors have in appointing school board appears to make a successful compact more likely.
- **Charter schools are their own LEA.** When charter schools act as their own LEA independent from the district the school leaders feel more empowered as equal partners.
- **Non-district charter authorizers.** In 11 of the 16 compact cities, non-district bodies served as the exclusive or additional authorizers. This additionally makes charters feel more empowered as equal partners in collaboration when the district is not the sole authorizer.

TAKEAWAYS FROM PARTNERSHIPS OUTSIDE OF EDUCATION

In considering innovative paths of partnership that could form between school districts and charter schools, it is useful to examine the trends of partnerships that have emerged between actors in other fields of service delivery. The experiences of public-private partnerships (PPPs), defined here as,

“working arrangements based on a mutual commitment between a public sector organization with any organization outside of the public sector” (Bovaird, 2004), reflect some of the same common tensions and challenges that exist between school districts and charter schools. Literature on PPPs discusses how blending service delivery across agencies can meet the diverse needs of clients (Bovaird, 2004). There is room to draw some parallels from this literature to the diverse needs that schools are called on to meet. Though charter schools are not private entities, they do reflect some of the traits of private groups because the regulations and bureaucracies that characterize traditional school districts largely unburden charters. In many ways, public education is a completely unique entity for which there is no other industry that perfectly reflects its drivers and complexity. However, some of the takeaways from PPPs can help us understand drivers of successful collaborations.

The rationale for PPPs very closely mimics the arguments made in the pro-charter movement. The literature on strategic management argues that PPPs can improve an industry in three ways: (1) provide economies of scale in obtaining services or pursuing activities; (2) provide economies of scope in obtaining services or pursuing activities; (3) provide opportunities for mutual learning between agencies (Bovaird, 2004). These rationales for PPPs closely reflect the most common arguments made for charter schools. Table 4 outlines the different forms that PPPs can take, depending on their intent and context, and draws connections to how these partnerships may look in the context of district-charter collaborations.

Table 3: Types of public-private partnerships and their correlation to district-charter collaborations

Type of Partnership*	Definition of partnership*	Example of partnership in district-charter collaboration
Sectoral basis	Partnerships with third sector organizations and/or private business	District and charters form a consortium of third-party contractors that put forth bids to provide school services (e.g., professional development)
Relationship basis	Loose network, collaborative, power-sharing, contractual	District and charter leaders form a professional working group that meets regularly to share challenges and best practices
Economic basis	Supply-side, demand-side or mixed partnerships	District and charters jointly contract services such as janitorial
Policy area	Policy objectives of partnerships	District and charter leaders join forces to lobby for legislative changes in SPED funding allocations.

*(Bovaird, 2004)

The rising use of public-private delivery of city services across the US provides an example of public managers recognizing the benefits this provides related to efficiency, market management and satisfaction of service recipients (the public) (Warner & Hefetz, 2007). Mixed delivery of public services

reflects the dynamic of traditional district-run schools and charter schools providing the same service (education) within a geographic area. Some researchers have found that mixed delivery is an efficient method of service delivery because it promotes competition by using the private sector as a benchmark for the bureaucratic system (Warner & Hefetz, 2007). Mixed delivery minimizes redundancies in order to avoid outcomes that can persist when one entity has monopolistic control over the delivery of service. In theory, this can keep prices of service delivery low and provide failsafe delivery in the event that one of the entities fails (Warner & Hefetz, 2007). Given the limit of academic research on district-charter collaborations, this literature on PPPs enhances our understanding of the potential outcomes of partnerships. These principles of PPPs reinforce justifications for many collaborative partnerships between a school district and charter schools.

GAPS IN THE LITERATURE AND EVIDENCE

There is relatively little academic literature on the topic of collaborations between school districts and charter schools.

At the root of every decision districts and charters make is the consideration of what will have the greatest positive impact on student learning and other student outcomes. There have not been studies done on how collaborations between these groups actually impact student outcomes.

There is also not research, that I could locate, that assesses how district and state structures and regulations affect how districts and charters interact. There is wide variety across states in how districts are organized, schools are held accountable and charters are authorized. These variations have a profound impact on district and charter's incentives and ability to forge collaborations. In interviews that I conduct for this project, I will ask district and charter leaders and stakeholders who have been involved in collaborations how these elements of district structure affected their actions.

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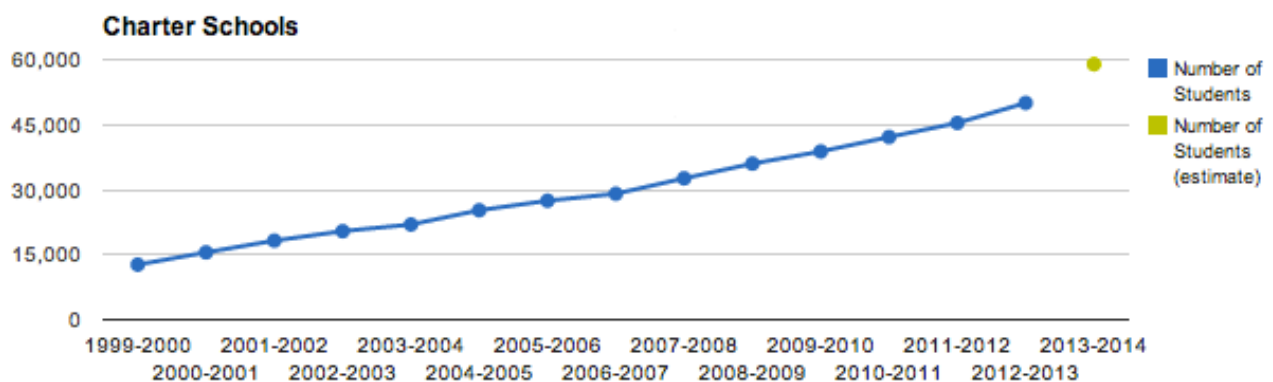
Appendix 4: History of charter schools in North Carolina

Charter schools were first introduced to North Carolina in the 1996 Charter Schools Act, five years after the nation's first charter school legislation was enacted in Minnesota^{30,31}. The North Carolina Charter Schools Act was sponsored by Senator Wib Gulley (D-Democrat) and Representative Steve Wood (R-Guildford); this legislation permitted any person, group or non-profit organization to propose a charter school but it capped the total number of charter schools that could be operating in the state at a time at 100³².

The state's charter school legislation was made possible by new Republican leadership in the state. At the time, the state had its first Republican-led house since the Civil War^{33,34}. The new Republican leadership's education agenda included school vouchers, tax credits and charter schools^{33,34}. In order to appease Democrats and secure the bi-partisan support needed to pass both chambers, the Charter Schools Act placed a cap of 100 charter schools for the state³³. One year after the law passed there were 27 charter schools operating in the state and by 2001 the state had reached its cap of 100 charter schools³².

In 2011, a new Republican-majority legislature with a school-choice agenda removed the charter school cap, ushering in an unprecedented rise in charter school applications and expansion for the state^{21,35}. Statewide, there are currently 127 charter schools serving approximately 50,000 students^{31,35}. The state has experienced a steady increase in the number of students served by charter schools, a trend that is expected to continue in the coming years.

Figure 1: Total Number of North Carolina Students Attending Charter Schools



Source: NAPCS Dashboard - Total Number of Students - North Carolina - 2012-2013.

Though there are many charter school opponents in the state, school choice enjoys a highly sympathetic political atmosphere among the current conservative General Assembly. Extensive waiting lists at charter schools³⁷ also suggest that parent appetite for school choice is high. The lift of the cap on charter schools introduces the reality that North Carolina will experience unprecedented charter school growth in the coming years. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) received more than 170 letters of intent for new charter schools for the 2014-15 school year³⁵. Of those applicants, twenty-six new charter schools have been approved to open in fall of 2014³⁸.

Charter school accountability and closure policies vary by state. Some noteworthy characteristics of North Carolina's charter school laws include: no caps on the number of charters in the state; a variety of public charter schools allowed, the state as the sole charter authorizer, fiscally and legally autonomous schools with independent public charter school boards, and automatic exemptions for charters from many state and district laws and regulations³⁹. In a 2014 report The National Alliance of Charter Schools, an organization that promotes the growth of charter schools, ranked North Carolina's charter laws 19th out of the 43 states that permit charter schools. However, many charter school opponents in North Carolina argue that the state has especially weak charter school accountability and that this allows for low-performing charter schools to persist. Since 1997, 47 charter schools in the state have closed³⁸. However, only one charter school has ever been closed for poor academic performance; every other closure was due to financial problems or governance issues.

Charter Schools in North Carolina enroll students based on a lottery system of students deemed eligible to apply. The charter school is able to define who is eligible to apply and can limit the enrollment by student ability⁴⁰. Thus, charter schools often are not demographically representative of their neighborhood⁴¹. In the 2010-2011 schools year, approximately 55% of students in traditional public schools were economically disadvantaged, compared to approximately 30% economically disadvantaged students being served by charter schools⁴⁰. Additionally, many charter schools dramatically underserve low-income students; one-third of charters in 2010-2011 served less than 10% economically disadvantaged students⁴⁰.

The debate of school choice has reached a fever pitch in the state. The new Republican leadership in North Carolina has ushered in dramatic changes to charter school regulations that will be felt across the state. Now, with the prospect of unprecedented charter school growth on the horizon, issues that have long concerned charter school opponents and skeptics embody a new sense of urgency that is driving a tense debate statewide. There is no evidence that charter school presence in North Carolina will lessen in the coming years. Public education decision makers and advocates in the

state are shifting their focus away from whether or not charter schools will exist and toward a focus on how changes to charter schools laws, accountability and culture can foster high-quality and equitably distributed educational opportunities for North Carolina's students.

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