

REPORT

INTERIM REPORT

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

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In November 2012, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation invested in seven innovative district-charter partnerships with “the potential capacity and commitment to accelerate student college ready rates through deep collaboration and sharing of best practices” (District-Charter Collaboration Grant Request for Proposal). These partnerships brought together traditional public school district with individual charter management organizations (CMOs) and local charter schools (and, in some cases, Catholic schools) in Boston, Massachusetts; Denver, Colorado; Hartford, Connecticut; New Orleans, Louisiana; New York, New York; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Spring Branch, Texas. All seven sites received grants intended to (1) facilitate collaboration on evidence-based solutions aligned with the Foundation’s College Ready strategy; and (2) improve equity of access, resources, and accountability across district and charter schools. The grants ranged in size from approximately \$2 million to \$5 million. The theory of action driving the collaboration grants is that strategic collaboration (detailed below) will advance innovative strategies and practices and promote the transfer and spread of knowledge and effective practices across schools, ultimately increasing school effectiveness citywide. This report is the third of three interim reports that present findings from a three-year study of the implementation of the grants.

The seven grantee sites were chosen from among cities that had previously signed district-charter Compacts in 2010 and 2011. These Compacts are public agreements that represent a shared commitment to improve college readiness for students, signed by district superintendents and charter school leaders and including agreements about specific collaborations. Through the Compacts, district and charter partners committed to replicating high-performing charter and traditional public school models and closing ineffective schools. Compact signees identified specific ways to leverage each sector’s strengths to attain additional shared goals, including facilities sharing, equitable funding for charter schools, and improved access to high-quality seats for special education students. (For additional information on the contents of the Compacts themselves, see Yatsko et al. 2013.)

Grant implementation varied widely across sites. All the grantees proposed forms of collective problem solving and sharing of best practices across sectors through grant activities, which differ by site. The grant activities fall into five broad categories:

1. **School partnerships**, including pairs, triads, and small group cohorts that span different sectors (in Boston and Denver), as well as co-located schools (in Spring Branch)
2. **Leadership training**, including cross-sector aspiring leader residency programs (in Hartford and Philadelphia) and cross-sector training for current and aspiring leaders (in Boston, New York City, and Spring Branch)
3. **Common Core State Standards (CCSS) transitions**, a cross-sector, collective approach to increasing readiness for Common Core implementation, including shared professional development, and collaborative development and sharing of curriculum and assessment materials related to Common Core implementation (in Hartford, New Orleans, New York City, and Philadelphia)

4. **Teacher coaching**, including shared professional development not specific to the Common Core (in Boston), as well as district participation in charter coaching or adoption of charter coaching models (in Hartford, Philadelphia, and Spring Branch)
5. **Community outreach**, in which the New York City Collaborative Council sponsored school study tours for school and central-office staff to share best practices across sectors (in New York only).

This implementation analysis aims to increase understanding of how collaboration and practice sharing can occur across sectors; therefore, it focuses on the collaboration activities proposed by the sites that target specific staff participants, rather than on broader Compact policy changes. This report examines implementation trajectories and related intermediate outcomes through the end of the grant period (December 2015), based on interviews and focus groups with central office administrators, school leaders, and teachers in late 2015. Specifically, findings are based on: (a) semistructured telephone interviews with 4 to 6 purposefully selected central office administrators in the traditional public, charter, and (when relevant) Catholic school sectors in each grantee site; (b) in-person and telephone interviews with 4 to 6 leaders of traditional public and charter schools in each grantee site; and (c) focus groups and telephone interviews with 5 to 13 teachers in traditional public and charter schools in each grantee site. Both school leaders and teachers were randomly selected from the populations of participants in grant activities in each grantee site. Taken together, these data address four sets of research questions:

1. To what extent do schools and staff collaborate across sectors? How have grant activities influenced collaboration among participating staff during the three-year grant period?
2. What contextual factors currently play a role in implementation of the collaboration grant and in cross-sector collaboration more broadly?
3. How do respondents perceive the impacts of the collaboration grant, both for participants and more broadly? To what extent do respondents view collaboration efforts as sustainable?
4. What have we learned from the grant implementation that could inform future collaboration efforts? What aspects of grant implementation were most successful? What are the primary limitations of the grant reported by grantees and what recommendations do respondents have for overcoming these challenges?

Below we address each of these questions.

1. To what extent do schools and staff collaborate across sectors? How have grant activities influenced collaboration among participating staff during the three-year grant period?
 - **Cross-sector relationships at the central office level remain strong in a majority of grantee sites, but those relationships have stalled or deteriorated in two sites.** Central office respondents in most sites continued to view collaboration as substantially increased relative to pre-Compact levels, with those increases largely sustained through the end of the grant period. Administrators in all sectors described respectful and effective working relationships across sectors and pointed to key accomplishments in operations as evidence of strong collaboration. That said, whereas some grantee sites were optimistically poised to

take on substantial collaborative efforts, including common enrollment and expanded co-location, central office respondents in two grantee sites appeared resigned to abandoning most Compact collaborative efforts with the close of the grant period.

- **Cross-sector collaboration remains less widespread among school leaders than central office administrators, but is particularly strong among participants in grant-funded intensive leadership training or principal residency programs. Teacher-level collaboration remains low across the grantee sites, in part because many of the collaborative activities targeted school leaders rather than teachers.** The extent to which school leaders in the seven grant cities are collaborating across sectors continues to vary widely across sites, but school-level collaboration is consistently perceived as less pervasive relative to central office-level collaboration. Among school leaders who reported an increase in collaboration, the change was attributed to principal residency programs or leadership programs that built deeper connections specifically among principals via multiple cohorts and sustained cross-sector networks. Whereas the interviewed principals were typically more active working across sectors, they perceived cross-sector collaboration at the principal level to be much less prevalent across all schools in their cities. Across sites, teachers continued to describe as minimal their opportunities to collaborate across sectors. Grant-funded activities were frequently reported as the only structures designed to bring together teachers from different types of schools, although even those activities were limited in scope and frequency.
- **Collaboration grant activities are credited in part for expanding cross-sector social networks.** On average, two-thirds of responding principals and teachers in each grantee site perceived an increase in the size of their cross-sector networks over the last two years. Principals and teachers were equally likely to report an expanded cross-sector social network, on average. Increase in network size was most often attributed to participation in grant-funded activities. One participant in a principal residency program characterized the depth of the relationships as “a network where I'm definitely going to keep in touch with...and reach out [to] frequently—whether it's a text or a phone call or an email—that will definitely be accessible to me for a lifetime.”
- **Most respondents viewed collaboration as highly beneficial; traditional public school principals were most consistent in their view that collaboration is more beneficial than not.** Despite reporting limited opportunities to interact with school staff in other types of schools, a majority of principal and teacher respondents in each grantee site indicated substantial interest in cross-sector (or cross-network) collaboration. Traditional public and charter school respondents were equally likely to view cross-sector collaboration as more beneficial than not. Perceptions of the value of collaboration varied across subgroups defined both by staff role and by sector, but this variation was not statistically significant. Traditional public school leaders were most consistent in their assessment of the value collaboration: they were nearly unanimous in their view that the benefits of collaboration across sectors outweigh the costs. Given that all respondents in the study sample were participants in grant activities, the generally favorable attitude toward collaboration expressed by respondents likely reflects at least in part a pre-disposition toward cross-sector work that may not be representative across all principals and teachers in the grantee sites.

- **Respondents perceived that practice-sharing across sectors has increased since the start of the grant, with most sharing occurring informally rather than through more systematic structures.** Most often, traditional public school staff respondents reported borrowing or learning about school culture and discipline strategies from the charter sector. In multiple grantee sites, traditional public school respondents also described borrowing resources or approaches related to interim assessments and teacher coaching models. Charter school staff most frequently reported learning from traditional public school staff about content-specific instructional strategies, including guided reading and small group instructional approaches, practices focused on serving English Language Learners and special education students, and technology-based learning tools. Practice sharing was most often reported where strong relationships and high levels of trust had been built across sectors. School partnerships—including co-located schools, existing relationships between former participants in principal residency programs, and intensive coaching offered opportunities for practice sharing across sectors in multiple grantee sites.
2. What contextual factors currently play a role in implementation of the collaboration grant and in cross-sector collaboration more broadly?
- **Across grantee sites, central office administrators and school leaders perceived the current climate for collaboration as neutral, but improved relative to the pre-Compact period. However, teachers still found the current climate difficult for collaboration.** Central office administrators and principals’ perceptions of the influence of the Compact and collaboration grant on the climate for collaboration varied widely within each grantee site. Many factors contributed to the reported changes in climate, but at least one administrator or principal in every grantee site named the collaboration grant as one component driving positive trends. Despite improvements, though, some respondents noted a decline in the climate recently, particularly as the collaboration grants neared the end of their timelines. Meanwhile, at least half of the responding teachers in six of the seven grantee sites found it difficult to work with teachers from the other sector. In most cases, respondents who cited difficulty working with teachers across sectors described logistical challenges that limited cross-sector collaboration, rather than a lack of desire to work with the other sector.
 - **Messaging from teachers’ unions, as well as competition and tension between the sectors, can limit willingness to collaborate. Limited time, different schedules, and a lack of opportunity also deter collaboration, even when it is desired.** The teachers’ union or association and a lack of time were most uniformly identified by respondents in all sectors as barriers to cross-sector collaboration. However, respondents did not cite the teachers’ union as actively stopping collaboration. Issues involving competition for students, space, and finances were frequently mentioned as barriers to collaboration as well.
 - **School leaders, external organizations, district office, and teachers themselves can all play key roles in promoting collaboration. Structural factors such as co-location and Common Core implementation also create opportunities for collaboration.** For both charter and traditional public respondents, school leaders were seen as a key facilitators for collaboration. Both charter and traditional public school respondents also listed co-location as a top facilitator of collaboration. However, nearly as many charter and district

respondents listed co-located schools as a barrier, as they can be a source of tension, particularly when they are created out of convenience rather than thoughtful partnerships.

- **Respondents are relatively open and receptive to receiving practices from the other sector, but negative perceptions still jeopardize collaboration opportunities.** Many respondents from both sectors acknowledged that they are willing to embrace any new approach that is proven effective for students, regardless of its origination. However, in two grantee sites, traditional public respondents stated that even identifying a practice as being from a charter school would result in rejection of the practice by staff—primarily teachers—in traditional public schools due to their negative perceptions of charter schools.
3. How do respondents perceive the impacts of the collaboration grant, both for participants and more broadly? To what extent do respondents view collaboration efforts as sustainable?
- **Compact collaboration activities have not yielded systemic change within the grant period but were perceived to have resulted in small-scale improvements in instructional quality and human capital practices and increased availability of information about the relative effectiveness of individual schools across all sectors.** Respondent perceptions of the impact of the Compact and collaboration grant continued to vary widely and had changed little relative to early in the grant period. Although the three-year grant period was ending, most respondents believed that three years was not sufficient to observe any systemic impacts of the grant. Many respondents also remained skeptical that the length and funding amount of the grant was sufficient to ever effect widespread change. However, a substantial portion of respondents credited the Compact and collaboration activities with a positive impact in three areas. Central office administrators in all sectors remained especially confident that collaboration activities geared toward teachers and teacher development had improved instructional quality and human capital practices in select schools. Specific initiatives in a few grantee sites to increase the capacity of effective charter management organizations to serve special education students and English language learners were also credited with increasing access to high quality seats for those populations, both by increasing the number of charter seats and by improving the quality of existing charter seats. In addition, whereas early in the grant period, fewer than 40 percent of central office respondents perceived Compact and collaboration activities as impacting the transparency of school effectiveness information—or the availability of clear and objective information about the relative effectiveness of individual schools across all sectors—by the end of the grant period, 60 percent of central office respondents had credited the grant with an increase in the transparency of school effectiveness information. In two sites, respondents cited the development of specific platforms for sharing and publishing assessments of school effectiveness. In other sites, respondents noted an increase in schools’ openness to sharing their strengths and weaknesses more broadly.
 - **The increased central office-level and school-level interaction and expanded social networks attributed to the Compact resulted in a greater appreciation of the similar challenges faced by staff in different types of schools.** The most tangible impact of the Compact and collaboration grant for central-office respondents in all sectors was the creation of a structure to cultivate cross-sector relationships and advance conversations about collaboration. The Compact structure was credited with fostering effective working

relationships that led to a range of accomplishments in cross-sector operations alignment; for example, around transportation logistics. Although most respondents across all sites thought collaboration on teaching and learning issues had been less successful relative to cooperation in other areas, respondents in three sites commonly cited an improved leadership pipeline as the key accomplishment of the collaboration grant. Increased collaboration across different types of schools, expanded cross-sector social networks, and the sharing of effective practices across sectors were the most commonly cited impacts of collaboration activities across all respondents, especially school staff. Information sharing and increased interaction across sectors via the grant—particularly among school staff in sites with teacher- or principal-facing activities—were widely credited with an increased understanding and appreciation of similarities across different types of schools.

- **Collaboration appears to have slowly spread outside the formal grant activities in three grantee sites via the “observational effect of collaboration” but has not extended beyond the grant in other sites.** The impacts of the Compact and collaboration activities were not perceived as far-reaching. In every grantee site, many respondents noted that any impacts were limited to individuals who had directly participated in principal- or teacher-facing collaboration activities. Although no large-scale impacts have been realized as yet, collaboration appears to be slowly spreading outside of the Compact activities in three sites. Respondents in each of these three sites described initiatives by state and local entities and foundations and other non-profit organizations to fund cross-sector collaboration not associated with the Compact or collaboration grant—and they believed the Compact to be a catalyst or model for these efforts. Respondent perspectives from these three grantee sites provide some evidence that the most common mechanism by which small-scale collaboration activities can have broader impacts is via the “observational effect of collaboration”—a realization from observing these cross-sector collaboration efforts that “different sectors can work together.”
- **Perceptions of the sustainability of collaboration efforts beyond the end of the grant period were mixed across grantee sites.** Three grantee sites were perceived as well-positioned to sustain collaboration efforts; across each of the three sites, more than half of all central office- and school-level respondents thought that the collaboration initiated via the Compact generally would be sustained. In these three sites, respondents anticipated a continuation both of programs or initiatives implemented under the collaboration grant and of cooperation and shared work across sectors more generally. The perceived potential for enduring cross-sector collaboration in the four other sites was unclear. In three of the sites, at least a third of respondents were highly uncertain about whether cross-sector collaboration would continue. Among those sites, respondents in two sites were uncertain about the future of specific collaboration grant activities but remained optimistic that positive cross-sector relations would continue. In the fourth site, a majority of respondents concurred that cross-sector collaboration would not continue after the end of the grant period.

4. What have we learned from the grant implementation that could inform future collaboration efforts? What aspects of grant implementation were most successful? What are the primary limitations of the grant reported by grantees and what recommendations do respondents have for overcoming these challenges?
- **Cross-sector leadership programs were widely viewed as the most successful collaboration grant activities.** Across all seven grantee sites, cross-sector principal residency and aspiring leader programs were the most consistently praised and highlighted as grant successes by school and central-office respondents from all sectors. These programs stood out from other grant initiatives for their perceived effectiveness in generating meaningful cross-sector professional learning communities and best practice sharing that in turn directly improved human capital in schools. Even in sites where cross-sector collaboration was broadly regarded as falling far short of expectations, school leader programs were an exception. Participants in principal residency or intensive leadership development programs found their experiences invaluable for both personal growth as leaders and for developing a cross-sector peer network accessible for the rest of their careers.
 - **The grant time period and scope were perceived as too limited to yield widespread impacts; lack of clarity around goals also hindered implementation. A handful of respondents across many sites doubted that cooperation alone is a viable mechanism for improving school effectiveness.** Across all sites, the most commonly cited shortcoming of collaboration grant implementation was its limited length and scope. Respondents in both sectors felt that the three-year grant implementation period was not only too short for grant activities to make a substantial difference in building cross-sector coalitions but also too short to generate enough of an impact to attract the interest and funding needed to sustain the initiatives. Many respondents, both in central offices and in schools, also noted that the scope of grant implementation was too small, often involving only a small minority of schools or school staff in each site. Respondents similarly lamented the lack of teacher- or school-facing work in grant activities. With such a limited scope, collaboration grant activities could not even begin to combat tensions and misperceptions across sectors. Across all grantee sites, a handful of respondents in both the charter and traditional public school sectors raised a perceived fundamental flaw in grant implementation: “the ability of us actually to make systemic change through cooperation is not high.” In particular, these respondents—both central office and school staff—doubted that collaboration in any form could broadly improve student achievement. That said, other respondents believed the Compacts’ and collaboration grants’ lack of impact on student achievement thus far was not a fundamental flaw in collaboration but rather a lack of focus on and support for practice sharing around teaching and learning.
 - **Collaboration could be improved through a broader and longer-term perspective, better alignment with specific school and teacher needs, and improved messaging around effective collaboration mechanisms.** School staff respondents in all sectors offered many suggestions for how to improve collaborative activities to maximize the benefits, including:
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- **Expand the scope of collaboration across cities and states to increase the supply of innovative ideas.**
- **Provide more frequent opportunities for collaboration, particularly during the summer months.**
- **Better align collaborative activities, especially school partnerships, across grades and content areas.**
- **Build collaboration around specific students.**
- Central-office and school leader respondents in all sectors also agreed on several lessons learned from collaboration more broadly.
 - **Slow and steady wins the race.** Administrators across sites emphasized that collaboration must be viewed as a long-term investment, an “ongoing slog” that requires a larger input of resources than a single school visit to realize returns.
 - **Focus on transparency.** Although there was little consensus on the optimal balance of competition and collaboration to increase school effectiveness, respondents in all grantee sites and sectors agreed that a substantial level of transparency is essential in effective collaboration efforts. More information about school effectiveness across schools in all sectors could breed a form of “competitive collaboration” whereby “schools could see how they are doing relative to other schools in the city.” The cultivation of “questions and curiosity about what is happening somewhere else” can be particularly helpful “when a school is falling short in one area.”
 - **Double down on success.** Across sites, central office and school staff cited a need to better identify, publicize, and invest in successful forms of collaboration.
 - **Invest in support for implementation.** Respondents across sites repeatedly recommended a heavy investment in support for implementing shared best practices—for example, via coaches or school leader oversight; otherwise, collaboration would have “diminishing returns.”

I. INTRODUCTION

In November 2012, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation invested in seven innovative district-charter partnerships with “the potential capacity and commitment to accelerate student college ready rates through deep collaboration and sharing of best practices” (District-Charter Collaboration Grant Request for Proposal). These partnerships brought together traditional public school districts with individual charter management organizations (CMOs) and local charter schools (and, in some cases, Catholic schools) in Boston, Massachusetts; Denver, Colorado; Hartford, Connecticut; New Orleans, Louisiana; New York, New York; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Spring Branch, Texas. All seven sites received grants intended to (1) facilitate collaboration on evidence-based solutions aligned with the Foundation’s College Ready strategy; and (2) improve equity of access, resources, and accountability across district and charter schools. The grants ranged in size from approximately \$2 million to \$5 million. The theory of action driving the collaboration grants is that strategic collaboration (detailed below) will advance innovative strategies and practices and promote the transfer and spread of knowledge and effective practice across schools, ultimately increasing school effectiveness city-wide.

The seven grantee sites were chosen from among cities that had previously signed district-charter Compacts in 2010 and 2011. These Compacts are public agreements that represent a shared commitment to improve college readiness for students, signed by district superintendents and charter school leaders and including agreements about specific collaborations. Through the Compacts, district and charter partners committed to replicating high-performing charter and traditional public school models and closing ineffective schools. Compact signees identified specific ways to leverage each sector’s strengths to attain additional shared goals, including facilities sharing, equitable funding for charter schools, and improved access to high-quality seats for special education students. (For additional information on the contents of the Compacts themselves, see Yatsko et al. 2013.)

This report is the third of three interim reports that present findings from a three-year study of the implementation of the grants, which ran from December 2012 through December 2015. This implementation analysis aims to improve understanding of how collaboration and practice sharing can occur across sectors; therefore, it focuses on the collaboration activities proposed by the sites that target specific staff participants, rather than on broader Compact policy changes. The first report (McCullough et al. 2015) examined early implementation (from December 2012 through winter 2013–2014) in the seven grantee cities through interviews and focus groups with central office-level administrators, school leaders, and teachers, and observations of collaboration activity in each site. The second report (Richman et al., 2016) presented findings from surveys of teachers and principals sampled from 21 cross-sector collaboration activities across the seven grantee cities in the 2014–2015 school year. This report examines trajectories and intermediate impacts of grant implementation through the end of the grant period (December 2015) based on a second round of interviews and focus groups with central office-level administrators, school leaders, and teachers in late 2015.

A. Background on collaboration grant and study design

Grant implementation varied widely across sites. The Foundation suggested several forms of collaboration that might occur across sectors: (1) the traditional public school district and charter partners jointly tackle specific challenges, working side by side to solve a problem that neither has a clear advantage in addressing alone; (2) high performers—one sector or specific schools within a sector—share expertise with lower-performing peers on raising student achievement; and (3) the traditional public and charter sectors participate in a fair exchange resources or expertise. All the grantees proposed forms of collective problem solving and sharing of best practices across sectors through grant activities, which differ by site. These approaches fall into five broad categories (listed here and illustrated in Table I.1):

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

Table I.1. Overview of current grantee collaboration activities

Activity type	City	Activities
School partnership	Boston	School performance partnerships: District-charter-Catholic school partnerships focusing on specific areas, such as embedding study skills or using arts for teaching students with disabilities
	Denver	Peer-to-peer learning labs: School partnerships and cohort groups within and across sectors, often in the form of teacher and/or leader coaching, focusing on specific areas for improvement such as interpreting and using data
	Hartford	Jumoke Academy at Milner: District partnership with Jumoke/Fuse 180 CMO to manage a district turnaround school (discontinued)
	Spring Branch	School-within-a-school model: YES Prep middle school located within a Spring Branch Integrated School District (SBISD) middle school (Northbrook), KIPP middle school located within another SBISD middle school (Landrum); YES Prep high school located within a SBISD high school (Northbrook) teachers participate in some shared professional development (PD) sessions
Leadership training	Boston	Boston Compact Fellows: Leadership networking and shared development for district, charter, and parochial school leaders, facilitated by Boston College's Lynch Leadership program (discontinued after one year of implementation)
	Hartford	Expand Achievement First (AF) Residencies to include Hartford Public Schools (HPS): Partnership with AF to include up to three slots for HPS principal candidates to participate in year-long AF residency program
	New York	Develop Coro Educational Leadership Collaborative (ELC): Cohort of charter and district teacher leaders participate in year-long shared leadership development administered by Coro
	Philadelphia	Urban School Leadership Residency/Certificate Program: Philadelphia School Partnership and The New Teacher Project partner to implement school leader residency program, with district, charter, and Catholic school residents placed in leadership roles
	Spring Branch	Develop Leadership Competency Model for district, based on KIPP model: During development phase, school-within-a-school leaders and additional Spring Branch Independent School District (SBISD) school leaders participate in KIPP Leadership Summit
Facilitating Common Core State Standards (CCSS) transition	Hartford	Shared CCSS curricula, assessments, and standards-based report cards: HPS piloting standards-based report card based on the Jumoke model, offering math and English/Language Arts PD focusing on Common Core standards, with open invitation to charter partners
	New Orleans	Common Core Lead Fellows: seven CMOs/charters lead Common Core implementation, including assessment item purchasing/analysis and work with the Achievement Network (ANet); use of third-party curricular resources to prepare school-site instructional teams; validation of teacher evaluation rubrics to ensure alignment with CCSS; and joint use of BetterLesson for ongoing sharing of resources
	New York	Common Core coaching: Provides in-depth, inquiry-based curricular and assessment support tied to CCSS for four traditional public schools and four charter schools within the New Visions for Public Schools network

Table I.1 (continued)

Activity type	City	Activities
Facilitating Common Core State Standards (CCSS) transition	Philadelphia	Shared CCSS assessment development and PD: Work with ANet to provide shared PD on Common Core assessments and develop benchmark assessments aligned to CCSS-based curricula
Teacher coaching	Boston	Quality Teaching for English Learners: Shared PD (administered by WestEd) on teaching English language learners, for teachers from district, charter, and parochial schools Black and Latino Boys School best practice sharing: Sharing of best practices in teaching literacy to African American and Latino boys by exemplary elementary schools across sectors; originally implemented as peer-to-peer PD but restructured as broader knowledge sharing of best practices
	Hartford	Implement teacher coaching and evaluation initiative in HPS based on AF model: High-level input from AF; coaching consultant hired from AF to help oversee peer coaching initiatives in several district schools
	New Orleans	Expand Match Charter Public School (Match) teacher training program: Third-party vendor provides intensive teacher coaching and training of teachers as coaches Launch Center for Transformative Teacher Training: CT3 trains teacher leaders to be coaches Incubate local CMO teacher training organizations: CMO residencies at KIPP and Collegiate Academies for 24 early career teachers in 2013–2014
	Philadelphia	Scale up Mastery’s Teacher Effectiveness Institute: Year-long training of instructional coaches via Mastery’s “train-the-trainer” program; placed in select district schools in December 2013
	Spring Branch	Develop teacher training model for district based on YES Prep model: During development phase, noncertified SBISD TFA teachers participate in YES Prep Teaching Excellence program with YES Prep first-year teachers
Community outreach	New York	Facilities Public Education Campaign: NYC Collaborates sponsors school study tours and workshops for district and charter staff; convenes collaborative council of charter and district leaders, as well as a broader public relations facilities sharing campaign on successful co-locations of charter and district schools

The goals for the district-charter collaboration grants were ambitious. The Foundation outlined a theory of action for the grants, whereby the successful implementation of collaborative activities—including sharing of effective school-level instructional practices and sharing of effective teaching practices across sectors—would lead to change in city-wide outcomes, including:

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

- Opening of new schools that use effective teaching and human capital practices
- Closure of ineffective schools.

(See McCullough et al., 2015 for more information on the theory of action.)

In the first interim report, we proposed three mechanisms to help in thinking about how the small and targeted collaboration activities described in Table I.1 might have broader impacts:

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

Our three-year study of grant implementation examines the extent to which any of these pathways might be leading to broader cross-sector collaboration in the grantee sites. In particular, this report addresses four sets of research questions:

1. To what extent do schools and staff collaborate across sectors? How have grant activities influenced collaboration among participating staff during the three-year grant period?
2. What contextual factors have played a role in the implementation of the collaboration grant and in cross-sector collaboration more broadly?
3. How do respondents perceive the impacts of the collaboration grant, both for participants and more broadly? To what extent do respondents view collaboration efforts as sustainable?
4. What have we learned from the grant implementation that could inform future collaboration efforts? What aspects of grant implementation were most successful? What are the primary limitations of the grant or problems of practice reported by grantees and what recommendations do respondents have for overcoming these challenges?

Each section of the report addresses one of the four research questions. The first section examines trends and changes in cross-sector collaboration across different staff types (central-office administrators, school leaders, and teachers) and the role played by the grant in collaboration in all seven grantee sites. The second section describes the general context for

collaboration in each grantee site and how the context has changed during the grant period, as well as the factors that enable or impede collaboration, as perceived by respondents. The third section presents findings on the impacts of the grant observed by respondents and the sustainability of collaboration in each grantee site. Finally, the fourth section describes lessons learned from grant implementation that might inform future collaboration efforts.¹

The first interim report (McCullough et al., 2015) explored the first three research questions approximately halfway through the grant period and found that:

- Cross-sector relationships at the central office level had deepened substantially.
- School leader collaboration had increased but was concentrated among a core group predisposed to cross-sector work. Meanwhile, teacher collaboration across sectors was minimal.
- Across grantee sites, many school leaders and central office staff perceived the climate for collaboration in their grantee site as unfavorable in the years before the Compact began, with some improvement in recent years.
- Limited resources, teachers' unions, and cross-sector tensions—such as misperceptions of the other sector—were the most frequently reported barriers to collaboration across sectors. City, district, and school leaders can promote collaboration, and structural factors such as co-location and Common Core implementation can make collaboration easier or more appealing.
- Compact collaboration activities had yet to effect systemic change, but had resulted in strong working relationships and a greater understanding of different school types.

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

Data collection and methods

To address the research questions, we collected data from multiple sources across each of the seven grantee sites in fall 2015. (Data collection for the first interim report took place in late 2013 for central office administrators and early 2014 for principals and teachers.) In September and October 2015, we conducted one-hour, semi-structured interviews with 38 central office administrators (13 district staff, 19 charter staff, one Catholic staff, and 5 staff from third-party organizations). In 2013, administrator respondents were selected via purposeful sampling in each site to gather perspectives from four to five administrators closely involved with the Compact and from one or two administrators less active in the Compact. The sampling approach was designed to gather a broad range of perspectives. The managers of grant implementation and Gates Foundation program officers provided input during the sample identification process, and the relevant program officer for each site approved the final sample. To the extent possible, the sample included all administrators previously interviewed in late 2013 for the first interim report or individuals who had replaced the previously interviewed administrators in their roles. Twenty-three administrators were interviewed in both rounds of data collections. The managers of grant implementation and Gates Foundation program officers provided input on additional respondents.

In October and November 2015, we conducted 37 one-hour, semi-structured interviews with school leaders (17 traditional public school leaders and 20 charter school leaders) through site visits and telephone calls. We also conducted in-person and telephone focus groups and interviews with 68 teachers (32 traditional public school teachers and 36 charter school teachers). To identify school leaders and teachers for interviews, we collected individual participant lists for all collaboration activities implemented through the Compact or collaboration grant in each site. We set target samples by sector for each activity based on the scope of participation by traditional public and charter school staff and drew corresponding random samples within each collaboration activity-school sector combination. We also randomly selected alternate respondents, who were recruited to participate when the selected participants declined to participate or were unresponsive after repeated contact. Rates of decline were similar across sectors. The sampling approach was identical to the method used for an initial round of interviews and focus groups with school leaders and teachers in February, March, and April 2014.

After data collection, we coded interview and focus group data using Atlas.ti in December 2015 and January 2016. The coding scheme was pilot-tested twice, and all coders were trained and required to code two test interviews satisfactorily before coding additional interviews. In addition, interviews were coded by all coders at several points during the coding process to check inter-rater reliability. After coding, the study team examined the data to identify common themes and categories of collaboration, contextual factors, grant impacts and sustainability, and implementation successes and problems of practice.

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II. TO WHAT EXTENT DO SCHOOLS AND STAFF COLLABORATE ACROSS SECTORS? HOW HAVE GRANT ACTIVITIES INFLUENCED COLLABORATION AMONG PARTICIPATING STAFF?

Key findings

- Cross-sector relationships at the central office level remain strong in a majority of grantee sites, but those relationships have stalled or deteriorated in two sites.
- Cross-sector collaboration remains less widespread among school leaders than central office administrators but is particularly strong among participants in grant-funded intensive leadership training or principal residency programs. Teacher-level collaboration remains low across the grantee sites, in part because many of the collaborative activities targeted school leaders rather than teachers.
- Collaboration grant activities are credited in part for expanding cross-sector social networks.
- Most respondents viewed collaboration as highly beneficial; traditional public school principals were most consistent in their view that collaboration is more beneficial than not.
- Respondents perceived that practice-sharing across sectors has increased since the start of the grant, with most sharing occurring informally rather than through more systematic structures.

A. Cross-sector relationships at the central office level remain strong in a majority of grantee sites, but those relationships have stalled or deteriorated in two sites

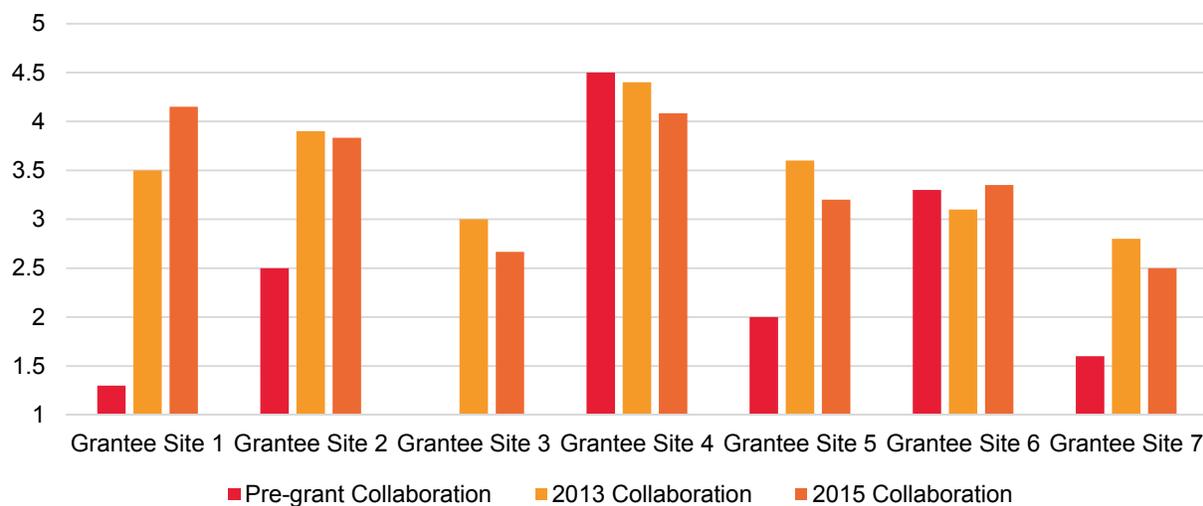
Central office administrators were most likely to describe collaboration at the central office level in 2015 as following an upward trajectory over the past two years. In all but one grantee site, at least half of administrators reported an increase in collaboration relative to two years prior. Reported current collaboration continued to vary notably across sites, however. The average current level of collaboration in each site, as reported by central office staff, ranged from 2.5 to 4.2 on a 1–5 scale of increasing intensity of collaboration (Figure II.1). In one site, traditional public school respondents consistently reported higher perceived levels of central office collaboration relative to charter school respondents; reported levels of collaboration did not vary notably by sector in the other six grantee sites. Despite administrator perceptions of improved central office collaboration, the reported current levels of collaboration in each site remained similar to those reported in 2013, which ranged from 2.8 to 4.4. This finding of a perceived increase in collaboration but unchanged ratings of collaboration across 2013 and 2015 may indicate that central office-level collaboration plateaued in 2013, and respondents were benchmarking their perceptions of the trajectory of collaboration against pre-grant levels of collaboration rather than again mid-grant levels of collaboration.

Central office respondents in most sites continued to view collaboration as substantially increased relative to pre-grant levels, with those increases largely sustained through the end of the grant period. Administrators in all sectors described respectful and effective working relationships across sectors and pointed to key accomplishments in operations as evidence of strong collaboration. That said, many respondents continued to feel that improved working relationships and increased communication had not translated to meaningful shared action around improving the number of effective schools in their cities. One charter administrator

explained, the level of collaboration “really depends on the issue and the cost of the collaboration, so it makes sense to say we’ve done things that are not that hard.” Cooperation around transportation, for example, was perceived as a more feasible accomplishment than aligning school calendars or taking bold steps to increase the number of effective seats in a city by expanding effective charter management organizations. Administrators in some sites also struggled with prioritizing collaboration within the unique goals and missions of their individual organizations: “In practice, I would say that really knowing how to collaborate is a challenge... We come together and we have regular meetings... Weaving in other elements has been a challenge, especially when we can’t see how it fits into our work.”

Whereas some grantee sites were optimistically poised to take on substantial collaborative efforts, including common enrollment or expanded co-location in two grantee sites, central-office respondents in two other grantee sites appeared resigned to abandoning most Compact collaborative efforts with the close of the grant period. Regular Compact meetings were reportedly no longer taking place. Both sites faced particularly contentious district-charter relations throughout the grant period, which may have played a role in the lack of sustained collaboration. Respondents in one of the sites described their frustrations with what they perceived as unilateral decision-making about how to attain Compact goals that resulted in most Compact members feeling “totally disenfranchised” and steamrolled by one sector.

Figure II.1. Average central office collaboration ratings, as perceived by central office administrators prior to the grant, during the grant in 2013, and in 2015



Notes: Based on responses from four to six district and charter central office-level administrators in each site in 2013 and three to six district and charter central office-level administrators in each site in 2015. In one grantee city, a response from a single Catholic school sector administrator is also included in the mean for all time periods. In another grantee city, a response from a single Catholic school sector administrator is also included in means for pre-grant collaboration and 2013 collaboration.

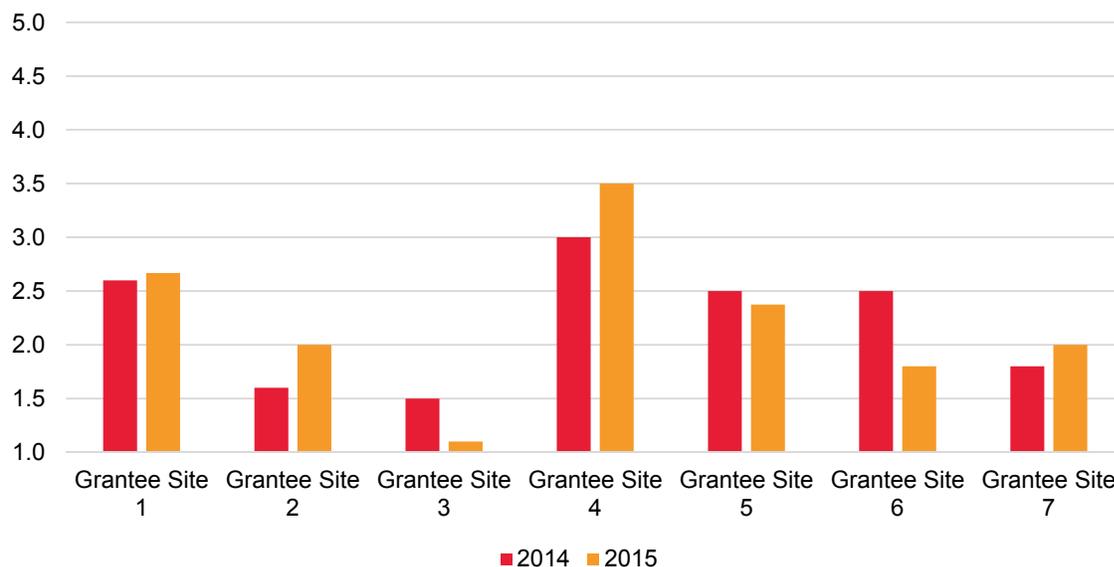
The average pre-grant collaboration rating for Grantee City 3 was a 1.

Each respondent provided a numerical rating of the level of collaboration across sectors at a central office level on a 1 to 5 scale of increasing collaboration. A rating of 1 corresponded to no cooperation, and a rating of 5 corresponded to the highest level of continuous, ongoing collaboration. The 2015 collaboration ratings were given during data collection in 2015. The 2013 and pre-grant collaboration ratings were given during data collection in 2013.

B. Cross-sector collaboration remains less widespread among school leaders than central office administrators but is particularly strong among participants in grant-funded intensive leadership training or principal residency programs

The extent of collaboration across sectors among school leaders in the seven grant cities continues to vary widely across sites, but school-level collaboration is consistently perceived as less pervasive relative to central office-level collaboration. Across most sites, school leader perceptions of collaboration had changed little relative to reported school leader collaboration in 2014; reported levels of collaboration ranged from 1.5 to 3 across sites in 2014 and from 1.1 to 3.5 in 2015 (Figure II.2). School leaders who reported an increase in collaboration attributed the change to principal residency programs or leadership programs that built deeper connections specifically among principals via multiple cohorts and sustained cross-sector networks. One former resident described the change: “Principals are interacting more thanks to the principal residency – they are staying in touch with each other after the residency and also staying in touch with the teachers they worked with.” The resident described the collaboration as “mostly informal” and “one-on-one.”

Figure II.2. Average school leader collaboration ratings, as perceived by school leaders during the grant in 2014 and in 2015



Notes: Respondent means in 2014 are based on responses from 4 to 10 traditional public and charter school leaders in early 2014. In two sites, responses from a Catholic school principal are also included. Respondent means in 2015 are based on responses from 4 to 6 traditional public and charter school leaders.

Each respondent provided a numerical rating of the level of collaboration across sectors at a school leader level on a 1 to 5 scale of increasing collaboration. A rating of 1 corresponded to no cooperation, and a rating of 5 corresponded to the highest level of continuous, ongoing collaboration. In New Orleans, principals were asked about principal collaboration across charter school networks.

Overall, however, most respondents in each site reported medium or low levels (between 2 and 3 on a scale of 1 to 5) of collaboration at the principal level city-wide. Whereas the

interviewed principals were typically more active working across sectors, they perceived cross-sector collaboration at the principal level to be much less prevalent across all schools in their cities. Limited principal collaboration was attributed to a lack of opportunities for frequent, sustained interaction outside of grant principal residency or leader training programs, which were limited in scope relative to the number of school leaders in a city. As one traditional public school principal described, across the entire grantee site, “We don't have a lot of opportunity to really interact with each other. I mean, we have some universal meetings where everybody comes, but largely charters and traditional schools operate separately.” Echoed a charter school leader: “Most schools try to mostly stick to their particular networks so you don't have too many opportunities for charter and traditional schools to actually come together on anything other than meeting at a conference.” Whereas principals generally believed that central office administrators were supportive of collaborative efforts across sectors, structures to promote collaboration were perceived as minimal. Outside of coordination of activities for major weather events or public health strategies, the extent of information sharing, communication, and decision making across sectors was reported by principals as very limited in most sites.

- C. Teacher-level collaboration continues to be limited across the grantee sites, in part because many of the collaborative activities targeted school leaders rather than teachers

Across sites, teachers continued to describe their opportunities to collaborate across sectors as minimal. Grant-funded activities were frequently reported as the only structures designed to bring together teachers from different types of schools, although even those activities were limited in scope and frequency. Moreover, many collaboration grant programs for teachers, including some Common Core development programs and peer-to-peer learning labs, did not bring together teachers across sectors directly. A teacher participating in one such grant activity without direct cross-sector teacher interaction reported knowing of no opportunities in the city “where they have allowed collaboration between the two of us [traditional public schools and charter schools]...it's like a bad blood scenario.” Similarly, despite teaching in a co-location in another grantee site, a traditional public school teacher noted, “for the most part, I've been on my own little island.” Many teachers reported having to seek out opportunities to collaborate themselves or relying on school leaders to alert them to opportunities. Explained one charter school teacher, “Those opportunities are opportunities that either have been created by the administration at my school...and just opportunities that I seek myself. So I think that I have a lot of opportunities, but it's opportunities that I've kind of created, if you search for that.” A traditional public school teacher in another site reported, “I feel like the Compact was really the only [option] unless I have friends who work at charter schools or private schools. Physically, we don't really interact with them, unless it's with the Compact and with this program.” Compact leaders across most sites acknowledged that teacher-facing work was not a focus of collaboration efforts; however, as detailed below, most teachers expressed strong interest in increased opportunities for interaction both within and across sectors. Teachers did not provide ratings of the extent of collaboration, but their feedback on collaboration levels in the last two years varied widely across the grantee sites and was highly correlated with the existence of any teacher-facing collaboration grant activities in their sites.

D. Collaboration grant activities are credited in part for expanding cross-sector social networks

On average, two-thirds of responding principals and teachers in each grantee site perceived an increase in the size of their cross-sector networks over the last two years (Table II.1).² Principals and teachers were equally likely to report an expanded cross-sector social network, on average. Increase in network size was most often attributed to participation in grant-funded activities. One participant in a principal residency program characterized the depth of the relationships as “a network where I'm definitely going to keep in touch with...and reach out [to] frequently—whether it's a text or a phone call or an email—that will definitely be accessible to me for a lifetime.” Occasionally, respondents broadened their cross-sector social networks because they or their colleagues switched sectors with a new position or because they enrolled in graduate school programs. Respondents who reported a decrease in their social network attributed it to changing lifestyles as they are promoted to leadership positions and lost contact with dispersed older large networks such as graduate school or Teach for America cohorts.

In every grantee site, at least one teacher and at least one principal respondent identified collaboration grant activities as the sole reason for expansion of cross-sector social networks; in one grantee site, all school leaders and all but one teacher attributed any expansion of cross-sector social networks to the Compact. Across sites, seven school leaders and nine teachers reported having no cross-sector connections prior to participating in a grant-funded activity. As one charter teacher explained, “when I started teaching, the advice I was given was keep your head down and just do your work and let your work speak for itself [rather than] openly communicate, figure out what others are doing, see if that's something that you can implement in your room...or share what you are doing so that others can implement it...So I think it's growth as a professional that has been facilitated through the [collaboration grant activity].” A traditional public school teacher in another grantee site described her contacts with colleagues across sectors as more meaningful after participation in a Compact leadership program: “It could be anything from a problem of practice to a speaker opportunity, to, ‘Here's my situation. What should I do?’ to, ‘Please come to our school, because our students are having their performance exhibitions, and I would love for you guys to be there.’” School staff who did have pre-existing cross-sector social networks most often developed them via graduate school or participation in alternative certification programs, such as Teach For America or New York City Teaching Fellows.

² These analyses do not include New Orleans respondents; focus on social networks across the district and charter sectors within each site.

Table II.1. Principal and teacher cross-sector social networks

Grantee site	Average number of cross-sector contacts for principals	Average number of cross-sector contacts for teachers	Proportion of principals and teachers reporting an increase
Grantee site 1	12	6	75%
Grantee site 2	4	16	33%
Grantee site 3	3	0	50%
Grantee site 4	9	20	67%
Grantee site 5	5	32	83%
Grantee site 6	6	34	100%
All grantee sites	7	18	68%

Note: Averages based on responses from 4 to 10 school staff respondents in each grantee site. The average for all grantee sites weights each grantee site equally.

E. Most respondents viewed collaboration as highly beneficial; traditional public school principals were most consistent in their view that collaboration is more beneficial than not

Despite reporting limited opportunities to interact with school staff in other types of schools, a majority of principal and teacher respondents in each grantee site indicated substantial interest in cross-sector (or cross-network) collaboration. Traditional public and charter school respondents were equally likely to view cross-sector collaboration as more beneficial than not. Perceptions of the value of collaboration varied across subgroups defined both by staff role and by sector (Table II.2), but this variation was not statistically significant. Traditional public school leaders were most consistent in their assessment of the value of collaboration: they were nearly unanimous in their view that the benefits of collaboration across sectors outweigh the costs. Traditional public school teachers were somewhat less likely than any other respondents to find collaboration beneficial; many traditional public school teachers remained more skeptical about the intentions of the charter school sector and defensive about what they viewed as a generally superior attitude exhibited by charter school staff. However, 75 percent of the 28 traditional public school teacher respondents still considered collaboration more beneficial than not. Given that all respondents in the study sample were participants in grant activities, the generally favorable attitude toward collaboration expressed by respondents likely reflects at least in part a pre-disposition toward cross-sector work that may not be representative across all principals and teachers in the grantee sites.

Across all sites, school staff respondents most often pointed to an increased understanding of the broader educational landscape and exposure to different schoolwide systems and instructional techniques as key benefits of collaborating across different sectors. As one traditional public school principal explained, “I think it's been helpful for me because it expands my leadership levels and gives me other ways to think about the work and how to approach the work. And even if ultimately I don't have the same circumstances or autonomies or resources I think it expands my thinking and I've been able to make some changes around the margins.” A charter school teacher in another site also highlighted the value in seeking different approaches for certain systems: “Sometimes in charter schools, we have a one-track mind and we think that we have the solutions to everything, and since a traditional public school has been around for so

long, they know what works and what doesn't work...So if we were able to just interact more in systems and ideas that work, like reaching out to scholars, communicating with families...I think it would be better." Echoed a charter principal, "Sometimes it's easier to think outside of the box when you are working with individuals who don't have the same or similar structure to the system that you're working in." The opportunity to source "fresh ideas" or a "fresh perspective," particularly after spending a long time working within the same charter network or district, was highly valued.

Table II.2. Most respondents perceived the benefits of collaboration as outweighing the costs

Respondent type	Percentage of respondents categorizing collaboration as more beneficial than not	Percentage of respondents categorizing collaboration as more of a distraction than not
Traditional public school leaders (N = 16)	94	0
Traditional public school teachers (N = 28)	75	11
Charter school leaders (N = 17)	76	6
Charter school teachers (N = 28)	86	0
School staff average across sites	82	5

Note: Rows do not sum to 100 percent because some respondents reported feeling that the benefits and costs of collaboration were approximately equal. Differences in percentages across respondent types are not statistically significant. The average across sites weights each grantee site equally.

School leaders in both sectors repeatedly cited as invaluable the emotional support and camaraderie they found in cross-sector work with other leaders. Principals often described their day-to-day work as "isolating" and viewed as very comforting collaboration with other principals, particularly those that could be a fresh "sounding board." Explained a charter school leader, "Just being with people that are dealing with the same types of things that you're dealing with, it's just really, really helpful. To say oh, okay, we're going through this, too, and do you have any ideas on how we can address this...it's just very, very helpful, as opposed to being in isolation." Another charter school leader repeated a similar sentiment: "from a more social/emotional perspective, it's always comforting – I mean misery loves company – so it's always comforting me here that the same issues that you struggle with in your charter school they struggle with at [the district]." Traditional public school principals shared the same views. One respondent explained, "Sometimes it's helpful to just hear somebody else's story, sometimes it's helpful to just hear what they're going through the same thing. Because sometimes you think one thing and it's kind of an eye-opener to hear what really happens there... [it facilitates] camaraderie; you can make friends that way, meet new people. So, I think there are added benefits [to collaboration]." A handful of teachers also found this type of camaraderie around shared problems of practices to be a potential benefit of collaboration. A charter school teacher noted, "So you get a chance to figure out if some of the challenges that you're dealing with are just isolated within your school, or if this is something that everybody else is dealing with. And you get a chance to put your minds together and come up with pertinent information that could possibly help to aid you in your teaching practices."

- F. Respondents perceived that practice-sharing across sectors has increased since the start of the grant, with most sharing occurring informally rather than through more systematic structures

A key premise in the theory of action behind the collaboration grants is that strategic collaboration activities facilitate the sharing of best practices across sectors. Early in the grant period, respondents who interacted with staff across sectors via collaboration grant activities reported sharing practices, but often did not implement those practices. More recently, staff continued to credit collaboration grant activities with substantial increasing practice sharing across sectors, and respondents reported implementing practices from another sector to varying degrees of success. One traditional public school teacher reported, “[The collaboration grant activity] gave me a lot of opportunities to learn from charter schools, both from the people that I was in the program with, who were from the charter world, and [through] inter-visitation. So, I actually got to go and visit some charter schools, [and share instructional practices].”

Most often, traditional public school staff respondents reported borrowing or learning about school culture and discipline strategies from the charter sector (Table II.3). In multiple grantee sites, traditional public school respondents also described borrowing resources or approaches related to interim assessments and teacher coaching models. Charter respondents at the school leader level were most likely to mention sharing practices or systems related to school culture, while teachers mentioned sharing around instructional techniques and curricular and assessment materials. Respondents in both sectors widely cited as a positive development in particular the spread of interim assessments such as Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) testing and other formative assessments across sectors. A handful of respondents across grantee sites also cited specific instructional strategies—such as questioning techniques—shared by charter school staff.

Charter school staff most frequently reported learning about or borrowing content-specific instructional strategies, including guided reading and small group instructional approaches, from traditional public school staff. Both district-wide and school practices focused on serving English Language Learners and special education students were also widely transferred across sectors. At the classroom level, charter school staff also often looked to traditional public school staff as resources on technology-based learning tools. In a few grantee sites, respondents also reported frequent sharing around specific discipline strategies, including restorative justice (a student-centered approach to discipline often using peer-mediated small groups to discuss grievances, resolve conflicts, and make amends). At a local education agency level, charter management organizations repeatedly mentioned absorbing from district central office staff different strategies for bringing various systems and policies to scale.

Table II.3. Most frequently shared practices or materials, as reported across all respondents

Practices most shared from traditional public sector to charter sector (reported by charter sector respondents)	Practices most shared from charter sector to traditional public sector (reported by traditional public sector respondents)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content-specific instructional strategies • Approaches for serving English Language Learners and special education students • Incorporating technology in the classroom • Discipline strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School culture and behavior systems • Interim assessments • Teacher coaching models • Specific instructional strategies or practices

Practice sharing was most often reported where strong relationships and high levels of trust had been built across sectors. Existing relationships between former participants in principal residency programs led to frequent informal practice sharing, while school partnerships—including co-located schools—and intensive coaching also offered promising contexts for more formal practice sharing across sectors in multiple grantee sites.

Long-term relationships that grew out of principal residency or intensive leadership programs resulted in frequent informal collaboration even after the program ended. The well-established cross-sector social networks built via grant leadership programs in particular reportedly led to the development or sustainment of critical friends groups; at least one leadership program required regular meetings of critical friends groups during the program. One resident described the leadership cohort as “not just long-term educators, but educators with an eye on reform.” Graduates of principal residency programs repeatedly referenced this concept of like-mindedness and shared values, which created a special bond within cohorts, even across sectors. Principal residency programs were also ideal opportunities for practice sharing because they often entailed “change projects,” year-long efforts by each resident to make a change to one aspect of their school. Frequent communication within small critical friends groups designed to share problems of practice both during and after residency allowed participants to replicate successes in their own schools with access to a sounding board of peers experienced with implementing specific approaches or systems and potential problems of practice. For example, in one school leader training program, the cohort no longer meets formally on a regular basis because the program has ended, but leaders from the charter and traditional public school sectors still try to come together periodically to help each other with a variety of problems of practice.

In school partnerships, including co-located schools, both teacher and principal respondents reported sharing practices, but only when frequent and formal opportunities were scheduled for teachers and principals to work together around specific content areas. A small number of teachers reported sharing lesson plans and instructional practices; others reported few opportunities for such sharing or a perceived resistance to sharing of curricular materials by partner schools. In strong partnerships where school leaders are actively engaged, sharing of leadership practices occurred both formally and via observation.

Instructional approaches were frequently shared indirectly through coaching across sectors in multiple grantee sites. Only one site implemented a grant program explicitly designed for coaches from one sector to work directly with educators in a very small number of schools in another sector. However, other sites informally incorporated some cross-sector coaching as one

component of a larger grant program. For example, principal residents often coached teachers in their placement schools. Two other sites incorporated into their grantee programs external coaches who worked with cohorts of both traditional public schools and charter schools and reportedly acted as conduits for sharing effective practices across schools on occasion. Teachers with a long-term coach appreciated the time to build trust, gain deep understanding, and perfect practices under the coach's guidance, which facilitated successful implementation of practices from another sector.

Several collaboration grant activities were reportedly less successful in facilitating practice sharing. Most respondents described school visits as positive experiences that may have been valuable for breaking down misperceptions and stereotypes, but attempted implementation of a practice learned on a school visit often failed because the short visit did not allow time for a full understanding of all necessary conditions for success. Similarly, cross-sector professional development sessions—where participants did not have a chance to buy in to the effectiveness of a practice and/or fully comprehend the practice before attempted implementation in their own school—were not considered conducive to practice sharing.

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

Key findings

- Across grantee sites, central office administrators and school leaders perceived the current climate for collaboration as neutral, but improved relative to the pre-Compact period. However, teachers still found the current climate difficult for collaboration.
- Messaging from teachers' unions, as well as competition and tension between the sectors, can limit willingness to collaborate. Limited time, different schedules, and a lack of opportunity also deter collaboration, even when it is desired.
- School leaders, external organizations, the district office, and teachers themselves can all play key roles in promoting collaboration. Structural factors such as co-location and Common Core implementation also create opportunities for collaboration.
- Respondents were relatively open and receptive to receiving practices from the other sector, but negative perceptions still jeopardize collaboration opportunities.

As noted by central-office and school staff in the first interim report, context can substantially influence the feasibility of collaboration across different school types. This chapter highlights respondents' views of the general climate for collaboration in their cities, barriers and facilitators to collaboration, and perceptions and receptivity across sectors.

A. Across grantee sites, central office administrators and school leaders frequently perceived the current climate for collaboration as neutral, but improved relative to the pre-Compact period

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

Across all seven sites, central office and school leader respondents most often described the current climate for collaboration in their city as neutral—it neither helps nor prevents collaboration (Table III.1).³ This characterization was particularly prevalent among charter respondents. There was more variation across sites for the traditional public respondents: in two sites, traditional public respondents gave the current climate a positive rating on average, while

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

three sites received a negative-neutral average climate rating and one site received a negative rating for the current climate.

Table III.1. Trends in climate for cross-sector collaboration, as reported by central office administrators and principals

	Traditional public respondents			Charter respondents		
	Reported pre-Compact climate for collaboration*	Reported climate in 2013-14*	Reported current climate for collaboration	Reported pre-Compact climate for collaboration*	Reported climate in 2013-14*	Reported current climate for collaboration
Grantee Site 1	Negative	Negative-Neutral	Negative-Neutral	Negative	Neutral	Neutral
Grantee Site 2	Negative	Neutral-Positive	Neutral-Positive	Negative-Neutral	Positive	Neutral-Positive
Grantee Site 3	Negative	Neutral	Negative-Neutral	Negative	Neutral	Neutral
Grantee Site 4	Neutral-Positive	Positive	Positive	Neutral-Positive	Positive	Neutral-Positive
Grantee Site 5	Negative	Positive	Positive	Negative-Neutral	Neutral-Positive	Neutral
Grantee Site 6	Negative	Negative-Neutral	Negative-Neutral	Negative	Negative	Neutral
Grantee Site 7	Negative	Negative-Neutral	Negative	Negative	Negative-Neutral	Negative-Neutral

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

* Climate ratings for the pre-Compact period and 2013-14 were reported in the first interim report and were measured in interviews with central office administrators and school leaders in 2013-14.

Respondents typically reported similar or worse ratings for the current climate relative to the cross-section of respondents interviewed earlier in the grant period. In five of seven grantee cities, traditional public school respondents reported similar climate ratings, on average, while average ratings declined in the other two grantee cities. Average changes in climate ratings were much more varied across sites among charter school respondents: three grantee sites reported similar current climate ratings relative to earlier in the grant period, whereas three grantee sites reported lower climate ratings and one grantee site reported a higher climate rating. Despite the similar or worsening ratings relative to those reported in 2013-14, respondents from both sectors across grantee sites generally described a perception that the climate in their city had improved in the past two years.

Both charter and traditional public respondents in most grantee sites continued to indicate that the climate had improved from the pre-Compact period, even if overall ratings remained

relatively stable and low during the grant period, and barriers to collaboration still exist. As one charter administrator explained, “it’s still challenging, but I would say it’s easier.” A traditional public school principal shared that the climate has become more positive “but it needs to be better.” Other respondents echoed this sentiment, which may help explain why many rated the current climate as neutral.

Perceptions of the role of the Compact and collaboration grant in improving the climate for collaboration varied widely within each grantee site. Many factors contributed to the reported changes in climate, but at least one administrator or principal in every grantee site named the collaboration grant as one of the multiple components having a positive influence. As the collaboration grant activities continued over multiple years, some respondents felt the impact of the grant had grown. One CMO administrator noted, “The word is getting out about the really cool stuff that the grant has funded at the school level, and there is a lot more demand and a lot more awareness of that.” Respondents also noted that the Compact helped lay the groundwork for future collaboration, as it gave a concrete example of how collaboration could work and be successful. A district administrator explained that the Compact has become “the template for everything else that followed...[Compact activities] showed that it could be done.” Another district administrator explained that the Compact activities have opened the door for “purposeful conversations about what we can learn from one another.” In one grantee city, a charter administrator specifically credited staff at the organization implementing the Compact as helping shape the climate because they encourage people to reach out to others across the city, and can connect staff facing similar issues.

Despite improvements, though, some respondents noted a recent decline in the climate, particularly as the collaboration grants neared the end of their timelines. Some respondents suggested that other priorities may now be more of a focal point as the collaboration grants wind down. One administrator noted, “there’s not as much energy around the topic [of collaboration] as we had when the Compact was going strong.” In addition to the end of the grant period, some respondents noted a limited impact of the Compact on the climate. As in the first interim report, respondents noted that existing political and budgetary realities were more influential and could cause fluctuations in the climate over time. In one grantee site, tensions around charter school expansion have created a more heated political climate that could hinder the climate for collaboration. Nevertheless, Compact leaders in the site remained confident that the Compact itself “will allow us to weather the political stuff,” so despite challenges in the broader climate, the desire for collaboration could continue.

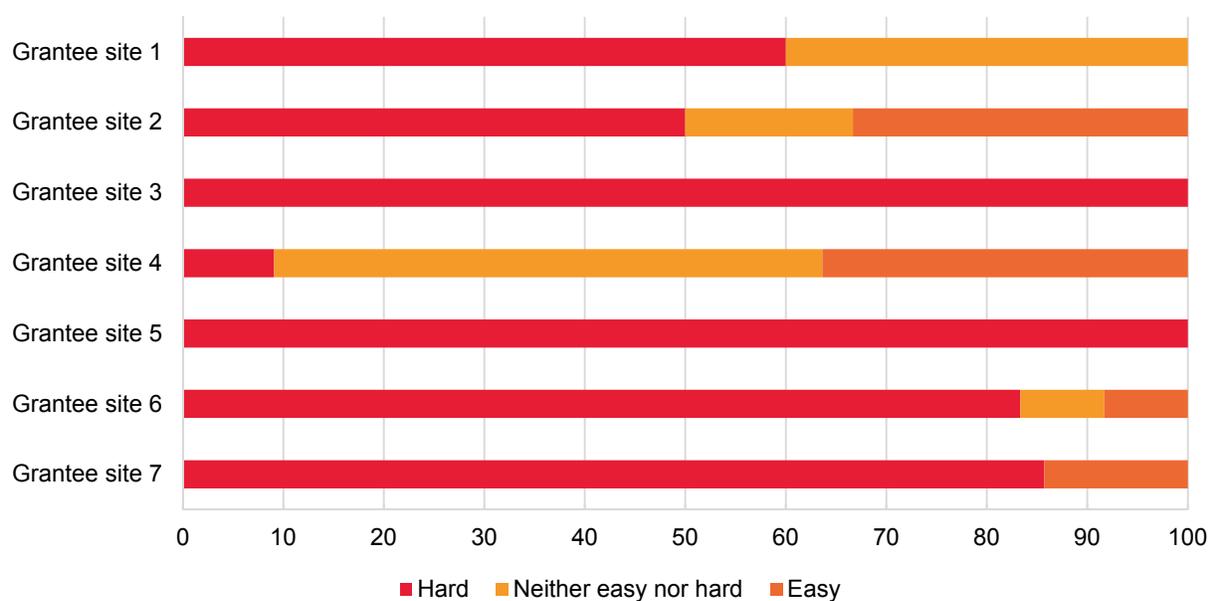
B. Teachers consistently characterize their city climate as challenging for collaboration

At least half of teachers in six of the seven grantee sites find it difficult to work with teachers from the other sector, due largely to a general lack of structured opportunities for collaboration (Figure III.1).⁴ Some teacher respondents noted that tension between the sectors in their grantee site created a negative environment and hindered any desire for teacher cross-sector collaboration. In most cases, though, teachers who indicated that it was hard to work with

⁴ In New Orleans, respondents were asked whether it was easy or hard to collaborate across charter networks and stand-alone charter schools. This analysis includes their comments.

teachers from the other sector described more logistical challenges that limited cross-sector collaboration, rather than a lack of desire to work with the other sector. One charter teacher noted that it is easy to work with traditional public teachers, as long as you know “the right contacts. If you don’t know anybody, then of course it’s hard.” A traditional public teacher noted that there is a climate for collaboration “if you look for it,” but “a lot of teachers become stranded on their own island because they aren’t necessarily seeking [collaboration], or it’s not presented directly to them.” Many teachers agreed that they lack the contacts, opportunities, time, and formal structures to easily work with teachers from the other sector. Multiple respondents noted that cross-sector teacher collaboration was happening only during collaboration grant activities; otherwise, there were no opportunities for teachers to easily work together across sectors. Without someone specifically organizing collaboration activities, teachers do not have the time and resources to set up such activities on their own. The seventh grantee site, in which more teachers felt it is easy to collaborate than those who felt it was hard, has had more structured opportunities for teachers to collaborate, making collaboration simpler and more tenable for teachers.

Figure III.1. Climate for teacher collaboration, as reported by teachers



Note: For each grantee site, climate categories are based on responses from 5 to 12 teachers.

C. Conditions influencing collaboration

Specific factors can influence collaboration across sectors or collaboration among different charter networks and stand-alone charter schools. These factors can include the people in schools and central offices as well as political, fiscal, and structural realities. Such factors can affect the extent to which the sectors have complementary or conflicting interests, ultimately influencing the extent to which collaboration is possible. We categorize factors that play a role in cross-sector collaboration, as reported by central office staff, school leaders, and teacher respondents, into barriers and facilitators in two domains:

1. **Politics and Community.** Political and governance issues, and community leaders and groups influencing collaboration
2. **Structures and Resources.** Fiscal, logistical, and physical considerations related to the feasibility of collaboration

D. Barriers

Messaging from teachers' unions, as well as competition and tension between the sectors, can limit willingness to collaborate. Among people and groups specifically asked about in interviews⁵, the teachers' union or association—which was not a Compact signatory in any site—was most uniformly identified as a barrier to collaboration across sectors, as was also the case in the first interim report (Table III.2). Thirty-nine respondents, including 16 traditional public sector respondents, identified the union as a barrier to collaboration, and only one traditional public respondent described the union as a facilitator. Central office and school staff concurred in their perspective on the role of the union: sixteen central office respondents, fourteen school leaders, and nine teachers described the union as a barrier. Several respondents noted logistical obstacles raised by the union (related to, for example, contractual hours or to compensation for time in shared professional development), and many respondents felt that the union presented anti-charter messages that were not helpful for collaboration. However, respondents did not report that the teachers' union or association had actively stopped collaboration from occurring. The role of the union also varied across the seven grantee sites: the union was not seen as a major barrier in three of the grantee sites, none of which had a strong union presence in general.

Table III.2. Primary barriers to collaboration, as reported by all respondent types across grantee sites

Charter respondent barriers	Traditional public respondent barriers
Politics and community domain	
1. Teachers' union resistance*	1. Cross-sector competition
2. Community resistance to charter schools*	2. Teachers' union resistance*
3. Cross-sector competition	3. Tension between sectors
Structures and resources domain	
1. Limited time	1. Limited time
2. Different calendars/school schedules	2. Lack of opportunity, systems not yet in place
3. Lack of opportunity, systems not yet in place	3. Practices are not compatible across sectors

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

⁵ Specific groups and individuals asked about in central office administrator interviews included the district office and/or partnership organizations, school leaders, teachers, the teachers' union, and the mayor's office/local government. Respondents were also asked whether any other groups or individuals play a role.

Competition between the sectors was seen as a top barrier for both traditional public respondents and charter respondents. Competition could take many forms, but issues around competing for students, space, and finances were frequently mentioned as barriers to collaboration. One traditional public teacher stated, “Every single system that we have pits us against each other in terms of competition.” The teacher explained that particularly in schools that are co-located or geographically close, charter and traditional public schools can feel as if they are “competing for the same group of neighborhood kids” and “perceive themselves to be rivals when in actuality they are struggling with the same stuff.” Therefore, competition for students, even if just perceived, can hinder collaboration. Limited school facility availability was also cited as a potential source of competition over space. In another grantee site, a traditional public school principal stated that charters often send publications and updates highlighting that their test scores were higher than a nearby traditional public school. This principal viewed the charters as “pitting their data against our data” which hinders “a collaborative working together environment.” Instead, the respondent felt that charters believe themselves to be superior to traditional public schools, which “inevitably ends up turning teachers off from wanting to explore” collaboration with charter teachers.

Among traditional public respondents, the third most frequently cited barrier was a kind of cultural tension between different types of schools. Sometimes this tension was filtered through student experiences. One traditional public school teacher relayed personal experiences of students indicating that as they walk home past charter schools, “adults make negative comments to them about the school that they’re going to,” which upsets the traditional public school students. Because of stories like this from her students, the teacher developed a negative opinion of the charter sector more generally. Another traditional public teacher in a different city noted there was “major animosity” between the sectors more broadly, even if the teacher personally was open to working with the charter sector.

The top barriers in most grantee sites mirrored the overall top three barriers, although in one grantee site the second most common barrier cited by both sectors was the mayor. However, in this grantee site, many respondents indicated that the mayor’s role in collaboration was becoming more positive. In other grantee sites, respondents rarely listed the superintendent, district office, mayor, or other political leaders as barriers to collaboration.

Limited time, different schedules, and a lack of opportunity deter collaboration, even when it is desired. Seventy-four respondents cited a lack of time for collaboration, which was more than double any other barrier noted by respondents. Teachers in particular felt limited time was a barrier to collaboration. One charter teacher explained, “It’s really hard to make time to collaborate. If it’s not within your school day, it’s not happening.” The teacher also cited the challenge of preparing for a substitute when leaving the classroom for any reason. Many teachers noted further substitute barriers, including having the limited pool of available, qualified substitute teachers in their area and the financial costs of using substitutes.

Charter respondents frequently cited differing school day schedules and different academic calendars as barriers to collaboration. Many charter schools have longer school days than traditional public schools, which contributes to challenges in scheduling activities after school that are convenient for teachers from both sectors. In addition, because charter schools often follow a different calendar than traditional public schools, scheduled professional development

days for the two sectors may fall on different days for the two sectors, limiting the opportunities for shared professional development time.

E. Facilitators

School leaders, external organizations, the district office, and teachers themselves all play key roles in promoting collaboration. For both charter and traditional public respondents, school leaders were seen as a key facilitators for collaboration (Table III.3). A traditional public teacher stressed the importance of the principal’s role in fostering collaboration, stating that principals help set “the standards and the atmosphere” for collaboration, and “teachers will follow” their lead. A few teachers noted that their principals were often opposed to them leaving school during class time to attend collaboration activities, but more teachers felt their principals encouraged collaboration across sectors.

Table III.3. Primary facilitators of collaboration, as reported by all respondent types across all grantee sites

Charter respondent facilitators	Traditional public respondent facilitators
Politics and community domain	
1. School leader support *	1. School leader support*
2. External organizations (for example, CityYear and Teach For America)*	2. District office support*
3. Teachers*	3. Teachers*
Structures and resources domain[^]	
1. Similar mandates for both sectors, like implementing the Common Core	1. Co-located schools*
2 (tie). Co-located schools*	
2 (tie). Technology	

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

[^]In the structures and resources domain, there was too much variation among traditional public school respondents to identify a second and third facilitator with more than a few respondent citations.

For charter respondents, the second most common facilitator for collaboration was external organizations such as CityYear and Teach For America (TFA). Such organizations help provide additional networks for teachers and principals that can cultivate cross-sector relationships and general knowledge of the other sector. In addition, external organizations often invite educators from both sectors to events, which allows for more cross-sector conversations. One charter teacher explained that in general schools are “focused on the needs of that school” and are not really looking for opportunities to work with other schools or charter networks. However, this teacher noted that organizations like TFA can help forge relationships across sectors and within different charter networks that otherwise would not develop. For traditional public respondents, the second most cited facilitator was the district office, which can provide support and encouragement for collaboration. For both charter and traditional public respondents, the third most common facilitator was teachers themselves. When other teachers around them were open to collaboration, teachers were better able to engage in collaboration activities.

Structural factors such as co-location and Common Core implementation can create opportunities for collaboration. Both charter and traditional public school respondents listed co-location as a top facilitator of collaboration. However, nearly as many charter and district respondents list co-located schools as a barrier, as they can be a source of tension, particularly when they are the result of convenience rather than thoughtful partnerships. Across several grantee sites, respondents shared ideas for how to improve co-located schools (see box).

Recommendations for improving co-locations

Several respondents indicated several useful guidelines for maximizing the collaborative value of co-locations, including: **being more purposeful in selecting schools to co-locate so that they would have similarly aged students** (which could increase opportunities for teachers to collaborate on relevant practices); **requiring that principals at the co-located schools hold monthly campus sharing meetings and complete campus sharing agreements**; and **providing district-level staff to facilitate cross-school conversations**. Other respondents highlighted having older students from one school serve as mentors to younger students at the other school, which helped foster a greater sense of community across schools within the co-located campus. Finally, some school leader respondents suggested that the school leaders at all schools on the co-located campus share their goals with each other. Together, the principals can determine whether any goals are aligned across schools and whether they can measure progress on shared goals together. Ultimately, respondents who saw co-location as a facilitator to collaboration stressed that the school leaders and teachers needed to have a shared investment in all students in the building as well as a long-term commitment to working through problems.

District- or statewide mandates, like the implementation of the Common Core, were also commonly cited as factors that foster collaboration by charter respondents. Because the Common Core is still relatively new, teachers are eagerly seeking resources on how to implement it, regardless of their source. One charter teacher explained, “No one quite had an answer yet” on how to implement the standards, so “everyone was kind of in the same boat” and on “even footing,” making collaboration mutually beneficial.

A few other charter respondents cited technology as a facilitator for collaboration. For example, teachers noted that they can quickly contact other teachers using Google chat, eliminating some barriers of time and geography. In addition, one site had opened an internal intranet site from a charter school to traditional public staff so that the traditional public teachers could access lesson plans and other materials from the charter network. The respondent noted that this action took some considerable work by a technology team at the charter to complete, but it resulted in much easier access between the sectors.

Perceptions and receptivity

Negative perceptions can create a barrier to collaboration across sectors. Each sector battles against perceptions that create cross-sector tensions and negatively influence staff attitudes toward collaboration. When teachers, school leaders, and administrators see the other sector as fundamentally different from their own, cross-sector collaboration may seem unhelpful or unnecessary. Even if respondents themselves did not espouse these negative perceptions, many thought the negative stereotypes of the other sector were still pervasive enough in their grantee site to deter collaboration.

In both sectors, some respondents noted their perception that staff in the other sector are similar to themselves in terms of their goals and aspirations for their students. However, the number of respondents referencing negative perceptions of the other sector far outnumbered these respondents with positive perceptions.

Traditional public school respondents frequently cited several negative perceptions of charter staff, including that charter teachers are young, less experienced and often uncertified; charter teachers work very long hours and are more likely to leave the field after a few years; and charter staff act superior to traditional public school staff and feel they are providing a better education than the traditional public sector could provide. Traditional public respondents also noted perceptions of the student populations served at charter schools, particularly that charter schools serve higher achieving students and fewer English language learners or special education students, and that charter schools expel students with discipline problems.

In turn, charter respondents also noted some negative perceptions of traditional public staff including that traditional public teachers do not work as hard and are less likely to go the extra mile for their students, and that traditional public staff lack autonomy and have more constraints than do charter staff. However, charter respondents' negative perceptions of traditional public staff were listed far less frequently and consistently than were the negative perceptions of charter staff by traditional public staff. This discrepancy perhaps indicates that traditional public staff still harbor more negative perceptions of charter staff than charter staff do of traditional public staff.

Some respondents explained that the Compact activities had minimized negative perceptions. One charter teacher noted that prior to participating in the Compact, teachers had "preconceived notions" about the other sector, but "everybody walked away from this [Compact activity] feeling like everyone was on the same team, working toward the same thing... There are many different ways to skin a cat, and we're all in this work together." A traditional public school teacher similarly relayed the impact of the Compact: "I think there's often a lack of understanding of what's going on in traditional public schools versus charter schools. And so people make assumptions. I made assumptions and because of that I don't think I have felt a need or desire to find or seek out people who work in charter schools. But I just thought that perhaps their issues or qualms are so much more different than mine. And it was only through [the Compact activities] that I was able to come to terms with the fact that we're all serving kids. Let's put politics aside and really think about how we can best design schools toward kids that are working, and supporting them in their growth as young people."

Respondents were relatively open to adopting practices from the other sector. In six of the seven grantee sites,⁶ more respondents said the sectors were receptive to adopting practices from the other sector (and most respondents in the seventh grantee site thought the sectors had mixed levels of receptivity to the other sector's practices). When examined by sector, most charter respondents in five grantee sites said staff would be receptive to adopting practices from the traditional public sector, while respondents were split or thought staff would not be receptive in the other two sites. Most traditional public school respondents in four grantee sites felt staff

⁶ In New Orleans, respondents were asked about their openness to adopting practices from other charter networks and schools. This analysis includes their comments.

would be receptive, while most traditional public school respondents in the other two grantee sites expressed mixed levels of receptivity. In summary, respondents in most grantee sites tended to report relative openness to adopting the other sectors' practices, but this trend was neither consistent nor overwhelming.

A few respondents indicated that the level of receptivity varied widely across schools and even within schools, which was reflected in the variety of answers respondents gave within grantee site and sector. Many respondents from both sectors acknowledged that they are willing to embrace any new approach that is proven effective for students, regardless of where the approach originated. However, in two grantee sites, traditional public respondents stated that identifying a practice as being from a charter school would result in traditional public school staff rejecting it. Some of these respondents are careful not to identify the source of any practices or materials borrowed from the charter sector, to ensure that teachers are willing to implement the practices or materials. Some other traditional public school respondents indicated that although they are potentially open to charter school practices, they would need to ensure that the practice would still be relevant given their different context and potentially different student population. In turn, a few charter respondents indicated that they are not open to using district practices because they do not feel the district is producing anything of value.

The majority of respondents from both sectors expressed at least some interest in working with staff in the other sector in the future. However, many respondents included the caveat that they would be open to working with the other sector only if it would be valuable and relevant for their own practice. For instance, one charter principal noted, "I'm resistant to this whole idea of general collaboration for collaboration's sake. I think we have to be a lot more targeted [in] what we're talking about."

IV. HOW DO RESPONDENTS PERCEIVE THE IMPACTS OF THE COLLABORATION GRANT, BOTH FOR PARTICIPANTS AND MORE BROADLY? TO WHAT EXTENT DO RESPONDENTS VIEW COLLABORATION EFFORTS AS SUSTAINABLE?

Key findings

- Compact collaboration activities have not yielded systemic change within the grant period but were perceived to have resulted in small-scale improvements in instructional quality and human capital practices and increased availability of information about the relative effectiveness of individual schools across all sectors.
- The increased school-level interaction and expanded social networks attributed to the Compact resulted in a greater appreciation of the similar challenges faced by staff in different types of schools.
- Collaboration appears to have slowly spread outside the formal grant activities in three grantee sites via the “observational effect of collaboration” but has not extended beyond the grant in other sites.
- Perceptions of the sustainability of collaboration efforts beyond the end of the grant period were mixed across grantee sites.

A. Compact collaboration activities have not yielded systemic change within the grant period but were perceived to have resulted in small-scale improvements in instructional quality and human capital practices and increased availability of information about the relative effectiveness of individual schools across all sectors

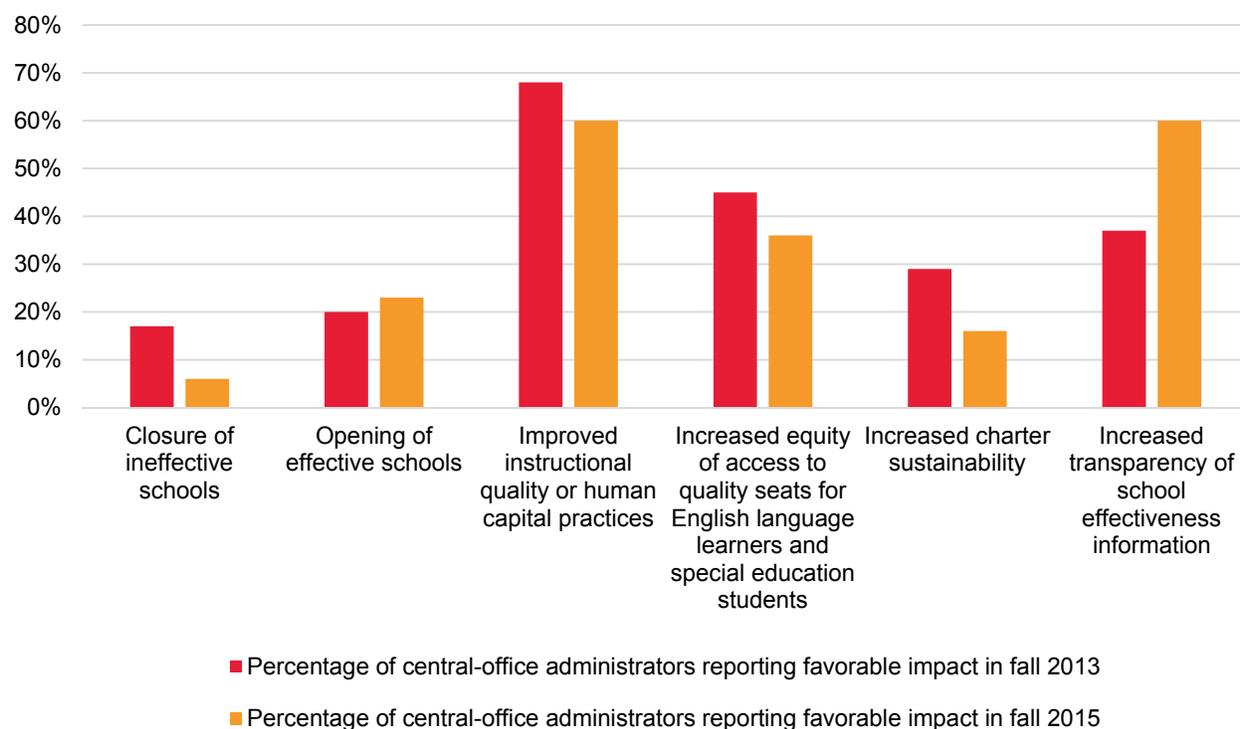
Across most of the intermediate outcomes proposed for the grants via the theory of action⁷, about which central office administrators were questioned, respondent perceptions of the impact of the Compact and collaboration grant on the outcome continued to vary widely and had changed little relative to early in the grant period. Although the three-year grant period was drawing to a close, most respondents believed that three years was still not sufficient to observe any systemic impacts from the grant. Many respondents also remained skeptical that the length and funding amount of the grant was sufficient to ever effect widespread change.

However, of the six specific outcome measures about which central office administrators were asked, a substantial portion of respondents credited the Compact and collaboration activities with a positive impact on three of them (Figure IV.1). Central office administrators in all sectors remained especially confident that collaboration activities geared toward teachers and teacher development had resulted in improved instructional quality and human capital practices in select schools. Many teacher respondents, who were asked more generally about Compact

⁷As noted earlier, these outcomes included improvement in teacher quality and human capital practices in existing schools; greater transparency of school effectiveness information; increase in financial and regulatory sustainability for charters; increase in percentage of special needs and English language learner students attending effective schools; opening of new schools that use effective teaching and human capital practices; and closure of ineffective schools.

impacts, reported an improvement in their own instructional quality as a result of participation in collaboration grant activities as well. Specific initiatives in a few grantee sites related to increasing the capacity of effective charter management organizations to serve special education students and English language learners were also credited with increasing access to high quality seats for those populations. In addition, whereas early in the grant period fewer than 40 percent of central-office respondents perceived Compact and collaboration activities as impacting the transparency of school effectiveness information—for example, via the availability of information on common student outcome measures across which to compare schools—by the end of the grant period, 60 percent of central office respondents had attributed an increase in the transparency of school effectiveness information to the grant. Indeed, in six of seven sites, a majority of respondents believed that the collaboration grant had a favorable impact on that outcome. In at least two sites, respondents cited the development of specific platforms for sharing and publishing assessments of school effectiveness. In other sites, respondents noted an increase in schools’ openness to sharing their strengths and weaknesses more broadly.

Figure IV.1. Few changes in perceived grant impacts on intermediate outcomes throughout the implementation period



Note: Percentages based on between 29 and 37 respondents for each data point in fall 2013 and between 30 and 35 respondents for each data point in fall 2015.

The most tangible impact of the Compact and collaboration grant for central-office respondents in all sectors was the creation of a structure to cultivate cross-sector relationships and to advance conversations about collaboration. One charter respondent explained, “I think it’s just made everyone even more aware of the need for cross-sector collaboration. So even if there isn’t that much of it happening, I think it’s just brought [collaboration] to the forefront and

everyone’s aware of the need for [collaboration].” The Compact structure was credited with developing effective working relationships that led to a range of accomplishments in cross-sector operations alignment, including transportation and bell times, in three grantee sites. Although most respondents across all grantee sites thought collaboration on teaching and learning issues had been less successful relative to cooperation in other areas, respondents in three grantee sites commonly cited an improved leadership pipeline as the key accomplishment of the collaboration grant. Each of the three grantee sites had used grant funds to implement leadership development or principal residency programs. Unfortunately, although one program was poised to continue beyond the end of the grant period, the other two programs have struggled to find funding and were in discontinued or uncertain states at the time of data collection.

Most central-office administrators explicitly credited the collaboration grants with increasing cross-sector collaboration at the central office level. However, a handful of respondents across four grantee sites disagreed. These respondents—all of whom were charter or Catholic school administrators—contended that the grant had not positively impacted central office-level collaboration, either because the Compacts had all but dissolved in their sites or because stand-alone charters or small charter management organizations had been kept out of the decision-making processes. The prioritization of the Compact by all sectors in a grantee site was linked to its long-term impacts. In one grantee site where all administrator respondents viewed the Compact and collaboration grant as a “platform to keep people at the table for tough conversations,” all sectors noted a high likelihood of future impacts on most of the six outcomes described earlier. In contrast, the likelihood of any meaningful impact of the Compact and collaboration grant was perceived as bleak in another site, where administrators noted the failure of Compact stakeholders to “have tough conversations.”

- B. The increased cross-sector school-level interaction and expanded cross-sector social networks attributed to the collaboration activities resulted in a greater appreciation of the similar challenges faced by staff in different types of schools

Increased collaboration across different types of schools, expanded cross-sector social networks, and the sharing of effective practices across sectors were the most commonly cited impacts of collaboration activities across all respondents, especially school staff. Most school staff respondents reporting having little to no opportunity or incentive to interact with staff in different types of schools prior to the opportunities provided by collaboration grant activities. One charter respondent explained, “I think that was the biggest part of [the grant], was some of the specific structures and systems put in place that have helped foster collaboration. I think it's something that people want to do always, but, it's not ever high urgency when you're involved in stuff at the school level. And so, it ends up getting pushed off, but having the structures in place kept them at the top of peoples’ minds.”

The increased interaction and development of relationships across sectors at the school level afforded by Compact activities—particularly school partnerships or cohort and leadership programs—helped combat stereotypes and perceptions across sectors and increase trust. Teacher and school leader respondents viewed the cultivation of these trusting relationships as crucial to a meaningful cross-sector exchange of ideas and solutions to problems of practice. A traditional public school teacher explained, “I think that our level of trust has really increased where we talk

a lot about problems of practice, just laying it out there and saying ‘We’ve got this situation. This is how we’re handling it.’ Or ‘We’re not sure what to do next. You know what can the next steps look like for this situation?’ So I think this whole [school partnership via the collaboration grant] has really instilled and built more trust. I think it goes back to relationships. We have those relationships where we feel more comfortable talking about problems and saying ‘Hey, we need help with this.’”

Cross-sector collaboration activities provided a mechanism for schools to develop networks of contacts and learn about other schools—in any sector—implementing effective or innovative practices in areas of interest. This knowledge was particularly impactful for stand-alone charters or small charter management organizations without all of the internal resources of a large charter network. A charter school leader noted that a collaboration grant school partnership has “also created an opportunity for teachers and schools alike to really learn best practice. So I think one of the biggest benefits for us is that in that kind of silo of the charter world, we have not been trying to kind of invent our own wheel all the time. We have been able to learn from other teachers around instruction and around curriculum and create more of a consistent knowledge of what works.” The collaboration grant was also perceived as increasing the extent to which schools are willing to disseminate best practices and share both their strengths and weaknesses. One district administrator explained that the impact was in “opening up schools” and developing “more of a willingness to be transparent about what you’re doing in your school and [an attitude] that it is not just a black box that you let people in and that you should be generous. A lot of large networks now are all about collaboration and sharing their best practices, and I really see [the collaboration grant] as spurring that on.”

The information sharing and increased interaction across sectors via the grant—particularly among school staff in grantee sites with teacher- or principal-facing activities—were widely credited with an increased understanding and appreciation for similarities across different types of schools. School staff respondents in both sectors repeatedly noted a realization that “students are students” and that teachers face many similar challenges despite potential differences in school autonomy or student characteristics. One traditional public school teacher in a leadership training program explained, “my experience really told me that the demographics of folks and their concerns, and their worries, and their joys are very similar across sectors; and that people have consistent challenges throughout; and that sometimes the structure is organized to support them as an educator, and sometimes the structure is not organized as well as it could be to support them; and that the people involved are by and large interchangeable...from what I've seen we're really all in the same boat and we generally don't realize it.” Many teachers noted that despite challenges in implementing practices shared across sectors, any best practice was a “useful tool” to adapt to their own classrooms and schools.

C. Collaboration appears to have slowly spread outside the formal grant activities in three grantee sites via the “observational effect of collaboration” but has not extended beyond the grant in other sites

The impacts of the collaboration activities were not perceived as far-reaching. In every grantee site, many respondents noted that any impacts—including increased trust, practice sharing, and the breaking down of stereotypes across sectors—were strictly limited to individuals who had directly participated in principal- or teacher-facing collaboration activities. The limited

scope of the collaboration activities and reported lack of spillover effects on cross-sector trust and practice sharing beyond direct participants makes it difficult to imagine how any broader, city-wide impacts might be realized. One charter administrator characterized the collaboration activities as having “definitely created relationships and begun conversations and broken down some walls,” but noted, “I just don’t know that it’s made a large scale impact.”

Although no large-scale impacts appear to have been realized as yet, collaboration does appear to be slowly expanding beyond the grant activities in three grantee sites. Respondents in each site described initiatives by state and local entities and foundations and other non-profit organizations to fund cross-sector collaboration not associated with the Compact or collaboration grant. Moreover, respondents in all three grantee sites believed the Compact to be a catalyst or model for these efforts. Similarly, principals in these sites also cited examples of reaching out informally to staff in other sectors to work together after their experience in collaboration grant activities. One charter teacher leader described “feeling more comfortable reaching out myself and building those relationships by seeing that it’s possible... Three years ago, the thing that was stopping me was not knowing or not feeling like that was something that could happen, but now [I see that] it happens all the time, and lots of other people are looking for that as well.”

Respondent perspectives from these three grantee sites provide some evidence that the most common mechanism by which small-scale collaboration activities can have broader impacts is via the “observational effect of collaboration”—a realization from observing these cross-sector collaboration efforts that “different sectors can work together.” Respondents from both schools and central offices in both sectors repeatedly noted that the collaboration grant had demonstrated that cross-sector work was possible. One district administrator explained, “I think that this collaboration grant was the first in the city... and I think it really showed people that it could be done. That people, that a district school principal and a charter school principal could sit down together... and reach out to other principals in the district and charter schools to engage in that collaborative effort. So I think that it set the stage for that collaboration.” A charter administrator in another grantee site credited the collaboration activities having “made cross-sector collaboration okay.” Cross-sector collaboration was believed to be spreading “broadly across the system I think in subtle ways. Because it provides again a tangible example that a collaboration can happen and it can be impactful... a school seeing themselves doing it is not much of a stretch at all today.” Respondents also noted an awareness that cities and states outside of their own were looking to their experiences to observe whether collaboration is possible: “it’s not just us that’s investing in this work... We’re talking about national players who are looking at the work that we’re doing and paying attention to what it is that we have to do,” described one charter leader. Even in a fourth grantee site where cross-sector collaboration was not perceived to have expanded outside of the primary collaboration grant initiative within the grantee site, the Compact was perceived to have rippling effects in catalyzing collaboration in other cities by demonstrating that cross-sector collaboration could work: “I think one of the best things that the Compact did is prove that collaboration is actually possible... because we probably could have gotten to where we are right now infinitely more quickly, but there were a lot of times where we treaded more gingerly simply because we didn’t have a proof point. If we could point to somewhere else and say, ‘Guys, it’s possible. Let’s move faster,’ then I think we would have gotten to this place more quickly.”

When collaboration has unforeseen negative consequences

Across all seven grantee sites, both school and central office respondents reported some unforeseen negative consequences attributed to cross-sector collaboration. In most grantee sites, these negative repercussions were viewed as only minor obstacles, but in a few sites, they were perceived as substantial deterrents to continued attempts at collaboration.

In two grantee sites, respondents feared that cross-sector collaboration efforts had given rise to concerns in the community, especially among grassroots parent organizations, that the district and charter sectors were colluding to close traditional public schools or allow charter organizations to take over neighborhood schools. As one central office administrator noted “it’s viewed that the district is in bed with charters or the district has ulterior motives to turn the district into a charter network.” Respondents speculated that pushing to undertake major Compact initiatives, such as common enrollment, might have contributed to some of the public backlash. In addition, in both sites, respondents thought that insufficient messaging or a lack of clear communication about the structure and goals of the Compacts and collaboration activities might be to blame. “Suspensions” about ulterior motives were probably the result of “not doing enough getting the word out about what [the Compact] is really doing or even really what it is,” explained one traditional public school principal.

In two other grantee sites, Compact activities were viewed as increasing divisiveness across sectors in unintended ways. In both sites, respondents noted that collaboration across charter and traditional public schools seemed to be heightening awareness of differences in the resources and opportunities available to students in those schools. Teachers in some co-locations, for example, noted that students in one school “feel down about themselves” when a collaborating school is “shiny and polished, and they have lots of things that our kids don’t.” Similarly, collaboration activities were occasionally perceived to exacerbate divides across school types at a school staff level. When collaboration participants “have had less positive experiences, it has actually reinforced some of the negative stereotypes and perceptions” across both sectors, explained one charter school principal. For example, traditional public school leaders in one collaboration grant program felt that practices or ideas they shared were universally rejected by charter school leaders, reinforcing the stereotype that charter school staff view themselves as superior to traditional public school staff.

Unfulfilled expectations for a quick and easy return on investment in collaboration played a role in slowing the momentum of the Compact and collaboration activities in multiple grantee sites. In one site, “superficial, fleeting” attempts at collaboration resulted in a lack of change that led to doubt in the value of collaboration. One district administrator explained, “People don’t see collaboration as an ongoing slog. But you have to put effort into it.” When participants expect to see results after one observation at a highly successful school, but insufficient time and funding is invested in collaboration people can be “turned off by collaboration.” For charter respondents in another site, efforts at collaboration across sectors resulted in “realizing how extraordinarily difficult it is to make changes at the district level,” which had largely discouraged any continued attempts at working together across sectors.

D. Perceptions of the sustainability of collaboration efforts beyond the end of the grant period were mixed across grantee sites.

The prospects for sustaining cross-sector collaboration initiatives varied across the seven grantee sites from very promising to unlikely (Table IV.1). Three grantee sites—which each implemented different types of grant activities—were perceived to be well-positioned to sustain collaboration efforts; across each of the three sites, more than half of all respondents thought that the collaboration initiated via the Compact generally would be sustained. Indeed, in two grantee sites, both central office staff and principal and teacher respondents were unanimous in their expectations for sustained cross-sector collaboration. In all three grantee sites, respondents

anticipated a continuation both of programs or initiatives implemented under the collaboration grant and of cooperation and shared work across sectors more generally.

Table IV.1. Perceptions of the sustainability of collaboration efforts beyond the end of the grant period were mixed across grantee sites

	Percentage of respondents expecting collaboration efforts to continue in grantee site	Percentage of respondents not expecting collaboration efforts to continue in grantee site
Grantee Site 1 (N = 14)	64	7
Grantee Site 2 (N = 14)	14	14
Grantee Site 3 (N = 6)	50	17
Grantee Site 4 (N = 12)	100	0
Grantee Site 5 (N = 6)	100	0
Grantee Site 6 (N = 17)	6	65
Grantee Site 7 (N=6)	33	33

Notes: Rows do not sum to 100 percent because, for each site, some respondents reported being uncertain or not knowing whether collaboration efforts would continue in the site. Respondents include central office administrators, school leaders, and teachers.

In the first grantee site with high expectations for sustained cross-sector collaboration, Compact leadership was confident that even after the grant period, very strong support from the superintendent, the mayor, and a tight-knit charter community would continue the momentum generated via the grant. The foundation of the Compact was perceived as strong, despite some turnover in leadership, and the site was actively seeking philanthropic support for various collaboration efforts initiated under the Compact. A charter principal in the grantee site noted, “I really am deeply appreciative of the Compact and I think that it has sometimes pushed for conversations and sometimes allowed them to kind of spring up organically, and that has definitely made a difference in how schools interact in service of students and families...I'm optimistic and excited that the work is going to continue and eager to see the ways in which it unfolds over the next couple of years.” Administrators emphasized that Compact leadership was conscious of the need to tackle ambitious initiatives that could effect systemic change but to proceed in a measured way so as not to squander political and public support and risk a falling-out across sectors: “And we actually talked about [other cities] that fell apart because of [similar initiatives]...everyone’s concerned; no one wants us to fall apart because of any [one Compact initiative or] project.”

Cross-sector collaboration was similarly entrenched in two other grantee sites, due either to influential third parties that had taken on the role of promoting collaboration or to Compact initiatives that required a long-term commitment. As a charter respondent in one of the grantee sites explained, “I think it's just part of our system now. And I don't take anything away from the resources, because they were tremendous. And they've been a huge help, but I think a lot of these things that I just talked about are part of the system.” Another charter administrator in the site noted that sustained collaboration would eventually have broader impacts: “I think people will continue to collaborate and those structures will stay in place, which will impact the quality that's happening day-to-day in the schools and the new school openings. And I think transparency is definitely here to stay....I think people have liked having an eye into what has going well in other

schools so they can go take some of those ideas.” In the other grantee site, respondents viewed the possibility of the cross-sector partnership not continuing as impossible, despite having some questions about the long-term sustainability of funding for Compact initiatives. “I don’t think you can have a goal like our goal, and not have [collaboration] endure...I think the train left the station,” noted one district administrator. Echoed a charter administrator, “I don’t see an end to the partnership. I think when the grant period ends, the partnership will continue. I don’t think it’s dependent on the grant...I don’t see that we’ll ever break up... the relationship works, and it’s symbiotic.”

The perceived potential for enduring cross-sector collaboration in the four other grantee sites was unclear. In three of the sites, at least a third of respondents were highly uncertain about whether cross-sector collaboration would continue. Respondents in two sites were uncertain about the future of specific collaboration grant activities but remained optimistic that positive cross-sector relations would continue. Administrators expressed concern that the “impactful” work of “getting different school models together and sharing insights and practice and projects” might not continue without funding support. As one administrator explained, “I think collaboration in the broader sense of the term will happen in different areas of our work whether it’s shared facilities, enrollment, things of that nature; I think for sharing of leadership and teaching practice there is a risk that collaboration will take a step back without resources and supports.”

In the third grantee site, one successful cross-sector collaboration grant program was poised to continue on, despite a reported disintegration of the cross-sector partnership more broadly. Reported one Compact leader: “We were actively meeting and now we’re not. We were actively meeting with an agenda to achieve very certain objectives and now we’re not.” Another administrator explained, “We don’t have the machinery in place right now. We don’t have the collective will. We don’t have the communication and we don’t have the machinery in place to really foster that collaboration in an urgent way. And so what is and should be inevitable is likely going to take longer than it should to materialize.”

In the fourth grantee site, a majority of respondents concurred that cross-sector collaboration would not continue after the end of the grant period. In the latter site, the Compact could not generate sufficient interest or funding to continue collaboration activities. “They couldn’t raise money to keep the program going. They couldn’t find funders, or even the district or anybody was committed to keeping the programming going. I haven’t found any other funders who are interested in collaboration...the tide is shifting. I’m not sure for better or worse,” explained one administrator. School staff in the site were particularly dismayed about the cessation of cross-sector collaboration activities due to their universally positive experiences in one particularly valued program. A charter administrator described the future of the Compact as a period of détente as opposed to any active efforts to work together: “So define [the current level of collaboration in the site] as cooperation light. It’s not hostility. It’s not a war or whatever you may hear in the press. It’s just yeah, we have to deal with you, and we don’t think you’re bad. All things considered, we’re here. You’re a bit of a distraction, but since you are here, let’s do some things together.”

V. WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED FROM THE GRANT IMPLEMENTATION THAT COULD INFORM FUTURE COLLABORATION EFFORTS? WHAT ASPECTS OF GRANT IMPLEMENTATION WERE MOST SUCCESSFUL? WHAT ARE THE PRIMARY LIMITATIONS OF THE GRANT REPORTED BY GRANTEEES AND WHAT RECOMMENDATIONS DO RESPONDENTS HAVE FOR OVERCOMING THESE CHALLENGES?

Key findings

- Cross-sector leadership programs were widely viewed as the most successful collaboration grant activities.
- The grant time period and scope were perceived as too limited to yield widespread impacts; lack of clarity around goals also hindered implementation. In addition, a handful of respondents across many sites doubted that cooperation alone is a viable mechanism for improving school effectiveness.
- Respondents indicated that collaboration could be improved through a broader and longer-term perspective, better alignment with specific school and teacher needs, and improved messaging around effective collaboration mechanisms.

A. Cross-sector leadership programs were widely viewed as the most successful collaboration grant activities

Across all seven grantee sites, cross-sector principal residency and aspiring leader programs were the most consistently praised and highlighted as grant successes by school- and central-office-level respondents from all sectors. These programs stood out from other grant initiatives for their perceived effectiveness in generating meaningful cross-sector professional learning communities and best practice sharing that in turn directly improved human capital in schools in implementing sites. Even in sites where cross-sector collaboration was broadly regarded as falling far short of expectations, school leader programs were an exception. As one central office administrator noted, “That is a story that deserves to be shared and celebrated and repeated, and it probably should be shared, celebrated and repeated in the context [in which] we were trying to do stuff and it got shut down. That is something, you know, people talk about the people pipeline, people talk about the leverage you can get from leadership, and that [the collaboration grant school leadership program] was great training, real cross-sector learning, and just brilliantly executed.”

Participants in principal residency or intensive leadership development programs found their experiences invaluable both for their personal growth as leaders and for the development of a cross-sector peer network that could be accessed for the rest of their careers. Nearly all responding participants credited the program with making them more capable as school leaders; one traditional public school principal was among many who stated “To be honest with you, I wouldn't be here [without having completed the program]. I would not be here if I didn't go through that program. I really wouldn't.” Echoed a charter principal: “I love the cohort members. I love the professional development they gave us. I love that it certified me for free. And so I'll be eternally grateful that the program exists, because without it I wouldn't have the life I have now.” All but one responding participant in a collaboration grant leadership program indicated

that in hindsight the respondent would choose to participate again. While the provision of a free route to principal certification via some programs was certainly a benefit, the training in leadership strategies and mindsets was widely cited as an invaluable component of effective programs, along with the development of instructional leadership and teacher coaching skills not readily provided by principal certification programs. One traditional public school principal explained, “I guess the easiest way for me to sum it up is that I got my principal certification through a traditional program before...Had I not done [the collaboration grant leadership training program] I would not have been ready. The focus on instruction, the focus on strategically thinking about things, I would say through all of the different masters and teacher preparation or education preparation programs that I’ve done, [the collaboration grant] was the most impact and most purposeful.” The close-knit cohorts and critical friends groups designed by the collaboration grant leader training programs were likewise acclaimed by participants, who were able to share problems of practice, source solutions from a variety of school types, and apply shared solutions in their own school contexts. One charter principal was among many participants who believed that these leader peer networks, which spanned up to three sectors, were highly valuable and would be sustained: “I was in connection with other principals [via the collaboration grant program]...They say as a principal the job is so lonely, you feel like you’re on an island. So I never felt alone. I always felt supported. I still feel supported. I felt like at any point in time I could reach out and contact someone.” The experience of working across sectors in particular “inspired” participants to “be more open to pulling techniques” from another sector and exposed them to a greater range of effective practices.

Collaboration grant programs were also particularly successful in providing needed resources and support to smaller schools, stand-alone charter schools, and small charter management organizations. Grant programs targeting teacher development or peer-to-peer learning in specific content areas or Common Core implementation were most often cited for their value to these types of schools specifically. Both district and charter teachers who were in positions as the only teacher in a specific grade and subject combination in a school highly valued the opportunity to share curricula, assessments, and instructional practices—either informally or formally—with their counterparts in partner schools. One charter school teacher described the school partnership or peer-to-peer learning cohort as “a really crucial piece of support for me, as far as knowing what I’m doing as a teacher [in a specific subject area], just because I work at such a small school.” Added a traditional public school principal in another site: “too often I feel teachers work in isolation, and even with a department not every school’s very big...if you look at just the primary math teachers, it’s basically six, maybe eight people. It’s not a tremendous number of people, so I always find opportunities where you’re able to connect with people at different schools whether they’re charter or public or parochial to be helpful, just to sort of see what other people are doing and other successes that they’ve had, and maybe challenges as well.” These types of collaboration grant programs also allowed charter school teachers to tap in to district resources of which they had previously been unaware. One such respondent explained, “There are a lot of resources from the district that I wasn’t aware of that I found out about...and I don’t know how I would have found out about them otherwise. I’m not very familiar with the district, so it’s been like a bridge to the district, very helpful.”

Although collaboration grant programs seemed to be particularly valuable for new teachers, both the collaboration grant leadership programs and cross-sector teacher coaching programs successfully attracted and served seasoned teachers. Principal residency and leadership

development participants across three grantee sites noted that their programs seemed to have highly tuned vetting processes or “some secret formula” used during the application processes that produced cohorts of participants with remarkably similar sets of values and complementary strengths. Collaboration programs seemed to either select for or develop a growth mindset. Noted one traditional public school principal: “At the right time where I sort of was ready for a philosophy to be shaped, that’s the program that I was in. And it was with people who were incredibly dedicated to kids and who want to see a change in how we operate schools and I learned so much from just interacting with them, both on academics and at a personal level...But I think it’s not for everybody. I think it works better if you’re a blank slate because you can take in everything.” Another traditional public school teacher explained that she was often questioned about her motivation for participating in a grant program after 26 years of experience in teaching and respondent “Because I’m not perfect. You can always learn new things. That’s how I looked at it. For me, it was learning process because I know some people get stagnant as they become more of a veteran teacher, and I didn’t want that to be me.”

The collaboration grants and Compacts more broadly were also perceived in at least three grantee sites to have successfully mitigated the notion that schools in a city were in a zero-sum competition. This perceived success was particularly pronounced in two grantee sites that have successfully implemented universal enrollment systems. Although competition was not entirely eliminated in these sites, individual schools and charter management organizations noted that they felt less pressured to keep their doors closed to other schools and closely guard effective practices: “It’s super collaborative right now whereas before, I think it was very competitive.” Rather, the districts, schools, and charter organizations felt more solidarity in ensuring the effectiveness of schools city-wide and were more likely to perceive student demographics as more similar than different across schools. Eliminating or minimizing the “disincentive to collaborate” arising from competition for students and resources was regarded as a critical component to success in school partnerships, including co-locations. In a typical city setting, school staff might feel that other schools are “almost like enemies in sense...like we’re working against each other, working at odds.” This sense of enmity could be an issue not only across different sectors but even within a sector; one principal noted a high degree of competition between principals in the district for students that exacerbates disparities in student demographics across schools. In contrast, school-within-a-school models uniquely designed to share accountability for student achievement by having student assessment scores in both schools count toward a single campus accountability rating were perceived to “open up the game for principals to work together and learn from each other” because “success for one is success for both” and “when we both win we all win.” For respondents in these school-within-a-school models, students moving from one school to another is no longer a threat that stokes tensions across schools; rather, it can be better appreciated as an opportunity for students to exercise choice in finding a school that is the best fit.

Evolve or perish: Mid-grant adaptations to better nurture collaboration

Without many successful existing models for cross-sector collaboration, many grantee sites found themselves having to experiment and adapt their collaboration programs partway through the grant implementation as they learned what did or did not work. Across the grantee sites, respondents pointed to three broad types of mid-grant adaptations with varying degrees of success and appreciated the flexibility of implementation afforded by the grant.

Grantee sites implementing school partnerships frequently noted taking steps to make these programs more teacher-directed and focused in response to struggles keeping staff engaged in the school-level partnerships. Midway through the grant period, one grantee site moved from whole-school partnerships toward a more widespread peer-to-peer learning model using multi-school cohorts that focused on specific areas of need and involved participation at the individual teacher level. Most school staff reported a positive response to this program change, although a handful of principals lamented the lack of school-facing interaction under the new model.

Two other grantee sites also made smaller-scale changes to encourage increased teacher direction of shared professional development in school partnerships. Teacher responses to these changes were largely negative because of the elimination of specific structures for sharing, which were commonly viewed as crucial for collaboration. In one site, school partnerships were perceived to have “lost momentum” because without enough structure “things don’t just happen organically.” In another site, respondents in both the district and charter sectors missed the structured opportunities for shared professional development that had previously been built into their schedule early in the grant period but had been discontinued to allow for more informal, organic teacher-to-teacher practice sharing. One traditional public school teacher explained that collaboration had actually decreased since the first year of the grant: “People have grown indifferent about [sharing teaching practices], I don’t think that anybody’s making it easy or hard; it just doesn’t happen, and there’s no urgency from leadership to make it happen.” Added another traditional public school teacher: “When I think about the last three years, like at what moment was the partnership the most successful, I think about the time frame when those events [shared professional development for teachers] were also happening. And they’re not happening any more formally.”

Grantee sites also described scaling back or dropping collaboration grant initiatives that were found to have low demand or to no longer be filling a need in the city. In one site, a cross-sector leadership program was discontinued after one year of implementation, in large part due to the existence of many other cross-sector collaboration opportunities for school leaders via third-party organizations outside of the Compact. In another site, a Compact leader noted that some of the specific structured school staff-facing programming around best practice sharing had been “downgraded” because cross-sector collaboration was either a low priority for schools or “it’s happening organically.”

Grantee sites with principal residency programs in particular strove to make changes mid-implementation to be responsive to participant feedback. For example, traditional public school participants in one program repeatedly cited changes made in successive cohorts to better align the leadership program work with work related to district requirements for their schools in order to minimize burden for participants. In another grantee site, charter administrators and school leaders believed a program for teacher leaders became more effective in ensuring that shared best practices were implemented and spread within schools when targeted appropriately: “The one thing that I think they figured out as the grant went on was around who to target or cater specific structural programs or things to...As the [collaboration grant program for teacher leaders focused on specific content areas] has really targeted the people who in the school are responsible for leading some of these changes, it has become more effective.”

B. The grant time period and scope were perceived as too limited to yield widespread impacts; a lack of clarity around goals also hindered implementation. In addition, a handful of respondents across many sites doubted that cooperation alone is a viable mechanism for improving school effectiveness

Across all grantee sites, the most commonly cited shortcoming of collaboration grant implementation was its limited length and scope. Respondents in both sectors felt that the three-year grant implementation period was not only too short for grant activities to make a substantial difference in building cross-sector coalitions but also too short to generate enough of an impact to attract the interest and funding needed to sustain the initiatives. As one charter administrator explained, “I don’t think it had the time to really develop the network that could have come out of it in terms of collaboration between district and charter schools and teachers that were involved.” Another traditional public school leader noted that the grant period “isn’t nearly enough to see the impact of any program or any type of change that people are trying to make...it just seems to be very early to close off a program that has so much potential, or has really supported the learning of so many different schools in the city.” Many respondents, both in central offices and in schools, also noted that the scope of grant implementation was too small in scale; often involving only a small minority of schools or school staff in each site. Respondents similarly lamented the lack of teacher-facing or school-facing work in grant activities. With such a limited scope, collaboration grant activities could not even begin to combat tensions and misperceptions across sectors. Explained one charter school teacher, “I do believe that there are still so many misconceptions about charter schools out there that no matter what great practice is being shared, it’s going to be taken with a grain of salt because of those bigger ideas that have just not been corrected. Until the union says that charter schools are not schools that do not cream...students and do not do this or that, I don’t really know how much the whole vibe of collaboration in [the city] is going to change.” The limited scope of school staff participation was compounded by a lack of encouragement to participants to share best practices with colleagues: “It didn’t affect the extent to which practices are shared across different school types,” said one traditional public school teacher. “And I mean that. It helped me, but I didn’t then go and share it with anybody.”

Similar to what was reported earlier in the grant period, respondents across sectors and staff levels in all grantee sites found grant implementation lacking in its clarity of purpose and communication around goals. This theme applied both at citywide and at activity-specific levels. At a citywide level, administrators and school staff across grantee sites described confusion around the goals and initiatives implemented under the Compact and collaboration grant and a widespread lack of awareness of the Compacts’ existence. As one charter administrator explained, “There’s still a lot of work to be done because I think while the charter sector is very aware of the Compact, maybe because we’re smaller, the district school level staff and teachers are not very aware of it. And so I think there’s work to be done there to make sure that everyone knows what the Compact is and why the Compact is important.” Failure to get out in front of the messaging could substantially undermine Compact success, as an administrator in another grantee site described. “The one thing that I consider a huge failure is with the public relations. The messaging around it, and that was not for lack of effort...leaders sort of setting out to do the right thing together, but we never really got the narrative right.” Specific collaboration grant activities, most often school partnerships (including co-locations), were also perceived as falling

short in clarity of purpose and goals. One traditional public school teacher in a school partnership noted, “We were just put together in a small group; we didn’t fully understand what we were doing or what the end goal was supposed to be. The struggle came with them just saying ‘We want you to collaborate.’ But collaboration takes so many forms. We didn’t know what the goal was supposed to be, which made it very difficult.” Charter and traditional public school teachers and principals alike in another city noted that the grantee site had failed to provide a clear vision for school partnership. One charter principal was among many charter and traditional public school staff who reported, “Nobody has really explained to me why we want to collaborate, how we’re going to collaborate and what the outputs of the collaboration are going to be.” Echoed a traditional public school teacher, “I don’t feel like [the grantee site] has made it clear how [they expect us] to collaborate, and I don’t think teachers are able to fulfill their vision, because we don’t really know.”

A handful of respondents across three grantee sites believed that a more general lack of transparency plagued the collaboration grants. Administrators in two grantee sites noted that specific grant spending sometimes seemed to be opaque and that “too few people are making the decisions about where the money should be spent in these areas.” School staff in another site expressed concern that the engagement across sectors via the Compact did not involve enough “honesty” about inequities across schools—the “haves and the have-nots”—both within and across sectors for school leaders to be truly invested in collaboration.

Other shortcomings of grant implementation frequently raised by respondents included a lack of resources and structures to implement shared practices and the absence of mechanisms or encouragement to sustain cross-sector relationships forged in grant programs. The reliance of grant implementation on specific individuals was also problematic at two grantee sites in particular, where turnover at the administrative and school staff levels stalled progress. Finally, grant activities were perceived to be leading to some poaching of staff across schools in one grantee site, which respondents believed to be due to a lack of transparency about the expectations of collaboration, especially for teachers.

Across all grantee sites, a handful of respondents in both the charter and traditional public school sectors raised a perceived fundamental flaw in grant implementation: “The ability of us actually to make systemic change through cooperation is not high.” In particular, these respondents—both central office administrators and school staff—doubted that collaboration in any form could broadly improve student achievement. Explained one charter administrator: “There’s plenty of cooperation; folks cooperate, they’re nice to each other. It’s completely ineffective and probably has not impacted student achievement very much... if we’re trying to think about systemic change, I think catalyzing the sort of tension between charters and the competition between charters and district schools that inherently is driving everyone to be better, to serve folks better, is a much better bet.” A charter administrator in another grantee site had a similar perspective: “I currently am still unclear on how the collaboration is actually driving student achievement, specifically seeing where our results have been recently.” A charter principal in the same grantee site concurred: “I’m still unconvinced that ‘collaboration’ is the thing that’s going to help [students succeed].”

Many respondents acknowledged the lack of impact the Compacts and collaboration grants had had on student achievement thus far but believed that the limitation was not a fundamental

flaw in collaboration but rather a lack of focus on and support for practice sharing around teaching and learning. A Compact leader in one grantee site cited the need to come up with “very concrete, tangible opportunities or tools for schools to actually use to do this collaboration work,” explaining that “a lot of time is spent on thinking and brainstorming, and it doesn’t lead to real work being done on the ground.” In another grantee site, a charter administrator noted that supplemental support for school staff is essential to generate significant change in school and classroom practices: “You cannot create change in regular schools by just putting up a charter across the street and expecting somehow practices to change in existing schools. That never works. However, just doing a partnership alone does not change practices either, in either sector...I don’t think we support it enough to reach the outcomes that we want.” Teachers in both sectors agreed that effective practices could not be shared and implemented across sectors until leaders reached a consensus on exactly which instructional practices or curricula should be aligned across sectors and provided support to share and implement these practices.

- C. Respondents indicated that collaboration could be improved through a broader and longer-term perspective, better alignment with specific school and teacher needs, and improved messaging around effective collaboration mechanisms

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

Respondent suggestions for improving collaboration

Expand the scope of collaboration across cities and states. School staff respondents across grantee sites suggested expanding collaboration and practice sharing outside of their cities. Principals in particular felt that they had enough insight about school practices and instructional approaches within their cities and had exhausted the supply of innovative ideas at a local level. “I’d love more of a sense of across the country what’s working,” explained one charter respondent. “So, there’s been a lot of trying things out, but I just know there’s got to be things that are happening that we aren’t aware of that are working better than what we’re doing now.” In one site, school staff found substantial value in a peer-to-peer learning approach that incorporated school visits to observe the implementation of best practices for specific content areas or student populations in other cities and states. In the same vein, central office-level administrators in all sectors also noted the need for access to broad networks of cities trying to implement cross-sector innovation to tap into best practices in collaboration: “More promotion of working together with other cities would have been great,” explained one Compact leader. “I think obviously we’re all different districts and I have had conversations with other cities but that’s been either them seeking me out or me seeking them out.”

Provide more frequent opportunities for collaboration, particularly during the summer months. Just as they did earlier in the grant period, teachers overwhelmingly suggested using the summer for institutes or think tanks. Respondents referenced other positive experiences participating in professional development during the summer; scheduling collaboration opportunities during the summer was considered particularly appealing because teachers “would not have to worry about leaving students.” To mitigate concerns about being out of the classroom during the academic year, teachers suggested innovative uses of technological resources to

facilitate sharing. Respondents recommended sharing video-recorded lessons among collaborating teachers and schools or using virtual dropboxes to share curricular, assessment, and other materials. Many teachers noted that existing virtual networks need to be better leveraged: “BetterLesson network is sort of an inert resource right now.” Respondents suggested that future collaboration should “Look at ways to activate BetterLesson to encourage teachers to utilize those materials or to then improve upon them, and then to build them into their classroom repertoire.” More generally, most teachers expressed a desire for more structured, formal opportunities for collaboration, which they generally did not believe occurs organically.

Better align collaborative activities, especially school partnerships, across grades and content areas. School staff continued to emphasize that collaboration activities could be improved by a more purposeful connecting of schools with similar student populations or similar curricula. As one traditional public school respondent explained, “More thought needs to be invested into identifying specific points of collaboration. Schools don't need to be identical, because they're not going to collaborate across all fronts, but where there is an opportunity to share we have to be very specific about what that is.” Teachers who had participated in collaboration activities that did not include any counterparts in the same content areas and grades found it difficult to transfer any shared effective practices to their own classroom settings.

Focus collaboration around shared investments in specific students, both by involving students directly and by building collaboration around improving outcomes for specific students. School staff suggested that one mechanism for better incentivizing meaningful collaboration is to involve students. Teachers felt that including students could both bridge tensions across sectors and expose students to a broader world view and the ability to “think critically about the world around them.” One teacher respondent lamented, “We don't have events for kids where we're talking about policy, educational policy, which in a very, very real way impacts them on a daily basis, and these conversations are always with our children's voices.” Some respondents also indicated that a deeper shared investment in and accountability for a specific group of students served directly by a common program or funder is the missing ingredient in effective cross-sector collaboration. One traditional public school principal described the difference between a cross-sector collaboration effort outside the Compact that had been perceived as more successful than a collaboration grant activity, in large part because it focused on educating and improving outcomes for a very specific subgroup of students: “We've built a different kind of relationship [in the non-Compact collaboration]. We're trying to build something together. Our kids are part of a program together. The Compact was different. The Compact was just teachers coming together, trying to share practices. But with this, the investment has to be deep...and the kids need to be successful...It's worth our while for kids and for ourselves.”

Central office and school leader respondents in all sectors also agreed on several lessons learned from collaboration more broadly.

Slow and steady wins the race. Administrators across grantee sites emphasized that collaboration must be viewed as a long-term investment, an “ongoing slog” that requires a larger input of resources than a single school visit to realize returns. Said one district administrator: “it's this ongoing dialogue, and it's implemented practices. It's schools thinking about what their theory of change is, or what their problem with practice is, and then having collaboration inform

that problem of practice.” Although it was considered vital to set specific goals or outcomes—for which collaboration is a pathway to meet those outcomes rather than an outcome itself—administrators also found it important not to be too focused on outcomes in the near term, as change would be incremental. At the same time, even with highly successful programs, respondents cautioned against expanding scope too quickly. Expanding too aggressively, particularly in intensive principal residency or school leader training programs, could deplete coaching and other resources and dilute program quality.

Focus on transparency. Although there was little consensus on the optimal balance of competition and collaboration to increase school effectiveness, respondents in all grantee sites and sectors agreed that a substantial level of transparency is essential in effective collaboration efforts. More information about school effectiveness across schools in all sectors—for example, data objectively comparing schools on a range of student outcomes—could breed a form of “competitive collaboration” in which “schools got to see how they were doing relative to other schools in the city,” leading to “questions and curiosity about what was happening somewhere else, particularly when a school was falling short in one area.” One charter teacher described using effectiveness information based on student assessment scores provided by Achievement Network to seek out successful teachers and try to learn from them: “I actually get a chance to see some of these people who are responsible for these scores...and I get a chance to just ask them, ‘How did you do it?’ Or, ‘What worked for you?’ And I get a chance to take some of that information back to my classroom and implement it.” In other grantee sites, many central-office and school staff found that more information was needed to facilitate a connection with effective schools and suggested developing some sort of database of schools to identify resources for specific best practices. One charter principal explained: “I need some way of actually gauging fairly objectively the skill level and the quality of certain schools...I want to seek out the schools that are more excellent than mine, and I want to seek out people who are better at their jobs than I am in order to learn things from them. But there's a dearth of that kind of public information and self-awareness, really.” A traditional public school principal in another site suggested one smaller-scale forum for increasing awareness of what is going on in other schools in a city: “a staff exhibition of best practices...where teachers would exhibit interesting new, innovative things that they're doing, and have a conference, a day in which teachers and staff could all go, and people would vie for exhibiting or presenting.”

Double down on success. Across grantee sites, central office and school staff believed that they needed to better identify, publicize, and invest in forms of collaboration that appear to be successful based on participant feedback and school- and student-level outcomes. Compact leaders in multiple grantee sites found themselves falling short in figuring out how to “keep the credibility, the legitimacy, the validity of the work with respect to residents, parents, taxpayers, the general public.” One traditional public school principal noted a lack of buy-in to “the idea of collaboration as a tool to get those done” as a substantial obstacle for school staff: “It hasn’t been codified as a driver to success so people look at it as just another thing. I think if [collaboration] could be clearly painted as something that will help you achieve your goals, people would be more willing to take the time and make it something that they do.” Participants in one highly acclaimed intensive leadership program attributed the inability of the program to source continued funding in large part to a lack of publicity or legitimacy of collaboration. For future collaboration efforts, one central office administrator suggested, it would be crucial to “take the pressure out of the conversation and...help people understand that in cities where there was

openness, where you changed the tone and then invited the collaboration, great things happened.”

Invest in support for implementation of specific shared goals and practices, especially at the school level. Respondents across grantee sites repeatedly recommended a heavy investment in accountability and support for implementing shared best practices; otherwise, collaboration would have “diminishing returns.” Respondents felt that oversight from Compact leaders related to specific goals or outcomes for collaboration, along with oversight from coaches, school leaders, or peer observers would better facilitate successful school-level implementation of effective practices shared across sectors. “I think there’s a lot of easy language around working together,” said one central-office administrator. “You have to be working towards something, and I think it’s very, very hard generally for two different schools to work together productively and seriously around the core business of schooling...One, there has to be some knowledge worth transmitting. Two, there has to be someone at the other end who can ultimately take that knowledge and say yeah, I’m going to make this my own within my building...It’s no good to have a bunch of teachers talk to another bunch of teachers about mathematics instruction over two days, or even over a semester, if then the principal at the receiving school really isn’t understanding what it is that’s different about that instruction, and then managing and holding people to account for that...And that’s true district to district, charter to charter, whatever. It doesn’t really matter. That’s not the big issue. The big issue is transmission between institutions. It’s very difficult to do.” Respondents in both sectors agreed that grantee sites needed to have a more specific and productive conversation about their visions for which school and classroom practices, if any, should be aligned across schools to guarantee the best outcomes for students and focus on support for implementing those practices. As one charter teacher asked, “if we’re trying to cultivate a place where success is happening, who is going to openly make the decision of which method is, not the correct, but the highest leverage method? Or, in order to work together, what are the must-have alignment pieces that schools need to employ?”

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