



# District-Charter PARTNERSHIPS

Collaboration to Advance Teaching  
and Learning in New York City  
**Year 1 Evaluation Results (2016-17)**

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## MESSAGE FROM THE DISTRICT-CHARTER PARTNERSHIPS LEADERSHIP TEAM

Through their Equity and Excellence agenda, Mayor Bill de Blasio and Chancellor Carmen Fariña committed to deepening the NYC Department of Education's partnerships with charter schools. Chancellor Fariña declared that all of New York City's schools were ours: "our schools, our students, our success." Historically, charter schools reserved only a small space in the department's knowledge base. With the Equity and Excellence directive, we decided that in order to truly seek equity for all NYC public school students, the DOE would need to get familiar with charter schools and rally around the children within them. We began with a basic premise: we wanted all schools to showcase their strengths and be vulnerable with their challenges and to access the answers not only in the room, but within the entire building, down the block, and throughout the neighborhood. Previously, charter and district schools did not know one another intimately. Today, two years after the announcement of the Equity and Excellence agenda, we've created school-to-school, district-wide, and system-wide programming, and 130 schools in all five boroughs have collaborated through the development of cross-sector relationships and understanding, mutual observation, and the exchange of feedback and materials.

Verone is a seasoned educator and April is a mid-career education systems administrator, both having had the privilege of working in district and charter settings for a number of years. We share a mission

of being relentless proponents of high quality education for all, rooted in the fundamental belief that each child has the opportunity to maximize their personal potential; the label of the system that lends itself to this goal, whether district or charter, is irrelevant to our mission. We believe that the largest school district in the United States holds a treasure trove of expertise. We also believe that innovation in New York's charter sector can inspire, motivate, and help to move the mark. At the same time, we understand that there are challenges in both sectors, many of which are overlapping. However, too often divisions between the district and charter sectors have prevented the sharing of strong practices and working together to address common challenges. The District-Charter Partnerships initiative is addressing this issue by providing systematically designed opportunities for both sectors to refocus on serving children, families, educators, and communities.

The District-Charter Partnerships initiative is led by the Office of School Design and Charter Partnerships and works with program partner offices across the NYC Department of Education, as well as external charter sector partners, to create meaningful opportunities for cross-sector collaboration to support the goal of sustained progress and the overall advancement of all students in New York City. This report documents our learnings from the first year of implementation of the District-Charter Partnerships initiative. We hope you learn from our experiences.

Sincerely,  
The District-Charter Partnerships Leadership Team



Verone Kennedy  
Executive Director  
Office of Charter School  
Authorization and Accountability



April Gariepy  
Senior Director  
District-Charter Partnerships

# DISTRICT-CHARTER PARTNERSHIPS: An Equity and Excellence Initiative



## ORIGINS

**ON SEPTEMBER 16TH, 2015,** New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio made a speech highlighting policy goals aimed at creating equity and excellence for all students in New York City schools. A central element of the Equity and Excellence agenda involved the promotion of expanded and meaningful collaboration between district and charter schools aimed at improving teaching and learning for all New York City students. De Blasio announced that:

*"Today, we take the next step to deepen our work with charters. We will take our successful model of 'spreading what works' to partner district and charter schools, based on common practices and areas of strength—and the City will provide the resources these schools need to learn best from one another."*

With this call to action, the administration indicated that it valued collaboration, rather than competition, across district and charter lines. Specifically, it emphasized that by working together to build relationships and share best practices, public school educators across the city can improve practices for all children. Following the Mayor's announcement, the Office of School Design and Charter Partnerships (OSDCP) at the New York City Department of Education (DOE) developed and executed a plan for district-charter collaboration, which they called the District-Charter Partnerships (DCP) initiative.

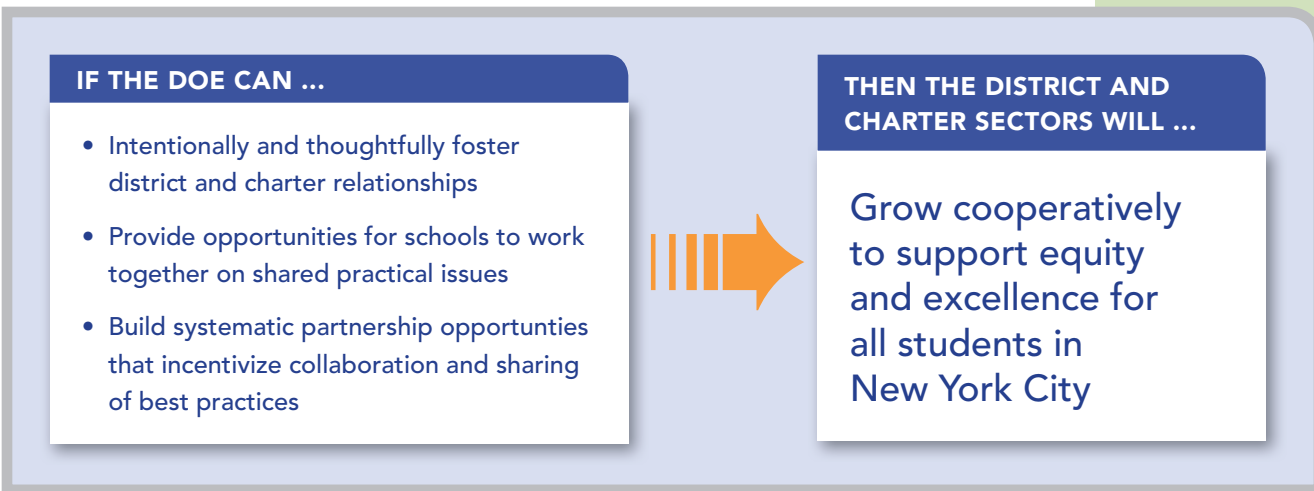
This document describes the results of a mixed-method study of DCP conducted during the 2016-17 school year, which was the first full year of DCP implementation. Drawing on surveys, interviews, and program observations, it highlights promising practices for structuring and fostering deep and meaningful cross-sector collaboration, as well as the challenges and early outcomes of these efforts. It concludes by highlighting structures developed to achieve sustainability of DCP, so that both sectors continue to work in partnership to ensure that there is equity and excellence for all New York City students.

## DCP OVERVIEW

### DCP Goal

The overarching goal of DCP is to support meaningful collaboration between the district and charter sector – at the school, district, and system level – in order to increase educator capacity and student learning in all New York City public schools.

### DCP Theory of Action



### Implementation Strategies

DCP employs multiple strategies to achieve its goals, including:

- **Engaging stakeholders at multiple levels** – DCP supports partnerships at the school, district, and system level in an effort to build both grassroots and DOE leadership support to shift dialogue and perceptions and expand collaboration across district and charter schools.
- **Harnessing DOE expertise** – DCP partnered with offices across the DOE to manage the various DCP initiatives in order to capitalize and expand on existing expertise.
- **Building relationships within geographical bounds** – DCP is also working to intentionally bridge relationships between district and charter schools within geographical bounds by engaging and supporting superintendents, Community Education Councils, and co-located staff.
- **Incorporating multiple, diverse charter participants** – DCP is engaging in structured partnerships with New York City's independent charter schools as well as schools and leadership from charter management organizations (CMOs).

### Program Components

DCP is a multi-level initiative, housed within OSDCP, with partnerships at the school, district, and system level, incorporating four different DOE offices and one large charter management organization. These partnerships impact over 130 schools in all five boroughs of the city.

*DCP Programs*

LEVEL	PROGRAM	DESCRIPTION	# OF SCHOOLS	OFFICE/GROUP
<b>School-to-School</b>	District-Charter Collaborative	Quads of schools (2 district, 2 charter) engage in structured collaboration around a Learning Focus Area	27	Office of Interschool Collaborative Learning
	Campus District-Charter Partnerships	District and charter schools on the same campus collaborate to share practices and engage in joint projects	11	Office of Campus Governance
<b>District-Wide</b>	Superintendent District-Charter Partnerships	Superintendents implement district-wide initiatives that support teaching and learning in district and charter schools	All schools in Districts 1, 13, and 16	Superintendent Offices/OSDCP
<b>System-Wide</b>	District-Charter Special Education Partnership	DOE provides targeted support to charter schools in delivering services to students with disabilities	All charter schools	Office of Special Education/OSDCP
	NYC DOE-Uncommon Impact Partnership	DOE and Uncommon Schools collaborate to provide professional learning opportunities for district teachers and leaders	49 (in Districts 16, 18, 19, 21, and 23)	Uncommon Schools/OSDCP

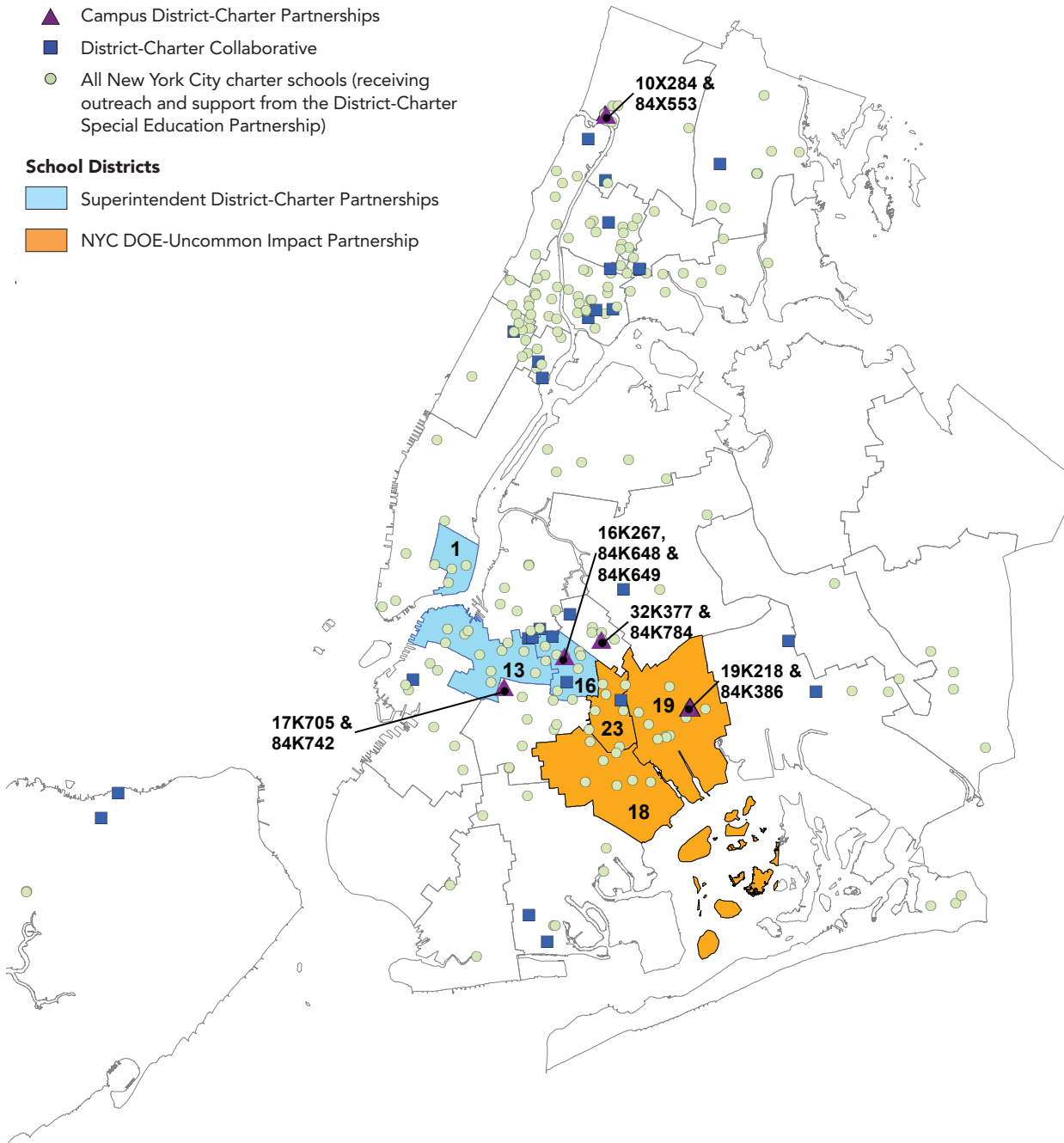
# DISTRICT-CHARTER PARTNERSHIPS

## Schools & Buildings

- ▲ Campus District-Charter Partnerships
- District-Charter Collaborative
- All New York City charter schools (receiving outreach and support from the District-Charter Special Education Partnership)

## School Districts

- Superintendent District-Charter Partnerships
- NYC DOE-Uncommon Impact Partnership



## RESEARCH PROCESS

The Research and Policy Support Group (RPSG) conducted a comprehensive mixed-methods evaluation to understand the implementation and early outcomes of DCP during the 2016-17 school year. Specific research questions included:



### IMPLEMENTATION

- *How is collaboration structured and fostered?*
- *What elements are key to successful district-charter collaboration?*
- *What are the key challenges?*



### EARLY OUTCOMES

- *Does the DCP initiative build a culture of cross-sector collaboration?*
- *Does the DCP initiative facilitate the cross-sector transfer of promising practices?*

In order to answer these research questions, researchers conducted observations of DCP activities, including cross-sector collaboration meetings and intervisitations; administered surveys to program participants; and conducted interviews and focus groups with program participants and DOE staff. Data from multiple sources were analyzed in order to determine themes at the school, district, and system levels.

## REPORT ROADMAP

This report will address research questions about implementation and early outcomes of DCP for school-to-school, district-wide, and system-wide partnerships.

### FIRST,

it will describe **SCHOOL-TO-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS** with a spotlight on practices and activities in Campus District-Charter Partnerships and the District-Charter Collaborative.

### THEN,

it will discuss **DISTRICT-WIDE PARTNERSHIPS** with a deep dive into District 16.

### NEXT,

the report will highlight **SYSTEM-WIDE PARTNERSHIPS**, with an emphasis on collaboration between the DOE and Uncommon Schools and DOE's efforts to support charter schools around special education.

### LASTLY,

the report will discuss structures developed at the school, district, and system levels to support **SUSTAINABILITY** of district-charter partnerships.

## RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Methods included:

- **Interviews and focus groups** with approximately 50 DCP participants across programs
- **Observations** of approximately 60 collaboration activities
- **Surveys** of approximately 175 educators involved in school-to-school level partnerships



## SCHOOL-TO-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS



**ONE OF THE CRITICAL COMPONENTS** of the DCP initiative is school-to-school partnerships, which include efforts to deliberately pair district and charter schools in service of improving teaching and learning. Two school-to-school partnership programs were developed through DCP: the District-Charter Collaborative (DCC), led by the DOE's Office of Interschool Collaborative Learning, and Campus District-Charter Partnerships (Campus DCP), led by the DOE's Office of Campus Governance. School-to-school district-charter partnerships build on current efforts at the DOE that encourage structured collaboration between schools, including the Learning Partners Program.

School-to-school partnerships are also explicit efforts to build investment in district-charter collaboration among schools and educators. By bringing educators together to break down misconceptions and bias and promote understanding and positive collaboration, these partnerships are intended to foster a school-level commitment to cross-sector collaboration.



## How is collaboration structured and fostered?

### DISTRICT-CHARTER COLLABORATIVE (DCC)

DCC built professional learning communities (PLCs) with district and charter schools aimed at improving practice in a specific Learning Focus Area, including restorative practices, instructional practices for English Language Learners, and innovative math practices. Most PLCs included four schools (or quads) composed of two district and two charter schools. Schools in DCC engaged in the following activities:

- ▣▣▣▣ **Interschool collaboration:** Interschool collaboration occurred primarily at monthly interschool visits. With the help of a facilitator from the DOE, each school hosted a visit for the other members of the PLC, where visitors had the opportunity to observe classrooms, offer feedback for improvement, engage in relationship-building activities, and dialogue around challenges faced.
- ▣▣▣▣ **School Team Inquiry Meetings:** DCC school teams also met individually on a bi-weekly basis with their facilitator to work through an inquiry process on a school-specific problem of practice linked to their PLC's Learning Focus Area.
- ▣▣▣▣ **Professional Development (PD):** School teams were paired with an external PD provider, who offered resources, coaching, and other supports based on their Learning Focus Area as well as their school-specific problem of practice.

### CAMPUS DISTRICT-CHARTER PARTNERSHIPS (CAMPUS DCP)

Campus DCP paired district and charter schools on the same campus to collaborate within three broad areas: improving instruction, student engagement, and parent involvement. Participants were asked to develop goals to address these areas based on the data, needs, and culture of each campus. Campus teams had the opportunity to partner with a community-based organization to reach these goals.

As part of the initiative, campus teams engaged in the following activities:

- ▣▣▣▣ **Campus Team Meetings:** Campus team members collaborated at monthly team meetings with the help of a DOE facilitator. During these meetings, they brainstormed ideas for improving instruction, student engagement, and parent involvement; determined goals; and developed plans for implementing partnership activities.
- ▣▣▣▣ **Inter-Meeting Collaboration:** Between campus team meetings, campus team members met to continue planning or to implement collaborative activities, such as staff intervisitations, consultancy protocols, or family events.
- ▣▣▣▣ **Principal Meetings:** Campus principals and the facilitator met monthly to make decisions on campus goals and budgets and to review the progress of the work.
- ▣▣▣▣ **Share Fairs:** Select representatives from campus teams came together in the fall to share action plans and in the spring to share accomplishments.



## What are the key elements of successful district-charter collaboration at the school level?

Regardless of the program, there were similar elements of strong school-to-school district-charter collaboration, including:

ELEMENT	DESCRIPTION
Shared Strategic Vision and Goals for Collective Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Co-articulation of clear, realistic partnership vision and goals</li><li>• Alignment between the collective aims and those of the individual schools</li><li>• Shared responsibility and accountability for achieving goals</li></ul>
Experiential Learning that Builds Capacity and Improves Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Structured learning opportunities that allow educators to see practice in action</li><li>• Experiences that reduce barriers and isolation between district and charter schools by providing opportunities for problem sharing, support, and joint learning</li></ul>
Development of a Connected Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Norming and trust building activities aimed at (a) recognizing shared cross-sector values, practices, and challenges and acknowledging and accepting differences, and (b) developing a respectful environment where participants can sensitively express debate, take risks, and share with others without fear of rejection</li><li>• Emphasis on the equal status of participants within and across school teams, so that all participants feel valued and take ownership regardless of their school role or sector</li></ul>
Structures to Support Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Structured, dedicated, and compensated time and space set aside that limits disruption to school routines</li><li>• Clear and consistent structures and protocols for facilitation, problem-solving, and collaboration</li><li>• Skilled facilitation from DOE staff that supports collaboration through resource-sharing, relationship-building, targeted support, and promotion of school-level ownership of the work</li></ul>

## ELEMENT IN ACTION: Experiential Capacity-Building Opportunities

**MS 267, Bedford-Stuyvesant Collegiate Uncommon Middle School, and La Cima Elementary Charter School** share a campus in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. Through early discussions where schools shared information about their instructional strategies, the principals of MS 267 and La Cima learned that Uncommon's principal employed an effective protocol for analyzing student data with teachers and using it to drive instructional improvement. Looking to improve their practice in this area, they decided

to observe Uncommon's principal using this protocol with one of his teachers as well as the reteach lesson that occurred directly after. Following this observation, MS 267 and La Cima tried out the practices in their own schools and received feedback from Uncommon's principal. Participants shared that the opportunity to see the protocol in use in real-time and to receive immediate feedback around their own implementation of the protocol deeply supported their learning.

## ELEMENT IN ACTION: Development of a Connected Community

The aim of the District-Charter Collaborative is to bring together district and charter schools in an effort to share and learn best practices to support student learning. In order to build a strong culture of instructional practice-sharing, DOE facilitators engaged professional learning communities in an activity titled "Peeling the Onion," an exercise to help unearth layers of assumptions and misconceptions that they may have about the other sector. As part of this activity, the group was first asked to generate a list of assumptions they hold or that they know other people hold about district and charter schools. In the second part of the activity, participants had the opportunity to ask cross-sector schools (or the facilitator) clarifying questions about these assumptions.

Through this activity, participants had the opportunity to expand their understanding of cross-sector schools'

experiences and begin to recognize shared challenges. The activity also underscored the need to overcome existing biases, so that district and charter schools could advance their common interest in improving student learning. In end-of-year interviews and focus groups, participants noted the importance of this conversation in building the foundation for successful collaboration by clearing up misconceptions, deepening cross-sector knowledge, and creating an environment of openness among quad members. As one participant said, "You have a lot of misconceptions about the differences between districts and charters. [The Peeling the Onion activity] opened our eyes ... and gave us insights into how their schools work. [We learned] that there were a lot of similarities, especially in the challenges that we are faced with."



## What are the challenges of district-charter collaboration at the school level?

There are several challenges to district-charter collaboration at the school level, including:

- **Transferring practices between district and charter schools** when they have different levels of autonomy around instructional and operational practices, and sometimes different levels of resources for staff, facilities, and other activities. School-to-school partnerships are working to address this challenge by encouraging schools to focus on specific practices that are transferable, regardless of school resources and flexibility, such as station learning in math classes or restorative circles.
- **Ensuring that charter and district schools are well-matched in their experience, willingness to collaborate, and instructional expertise**, so that there is reciprocal learning rather than one-way learning. School-to-school partnerships are addressing this challenge by engaging in a careful analysis of school data, curriculum, and instruction and matching schools that can enhance each other's practices.
- **Shifting mindsets and breaking down misconceptions that exist across sectors** so that the two can effectively collaborate to enhance teacher practice and student learning. Activities such as the "Peeling the Onion" exercise, cross-school discussions about equity, and structured icebreakers are helping educators across sectors learn how their schools and students are similar and how they have a joint responsibility to enhance system-wide student learning.
- **Ensuring that the same individuals are always at the table** to keep the work moving forward and to build and deepen relationships over time. Consistent attendance is particularly difficult when educators have multiple, competing school priorities. School-to-school partnerships are setting clear expectations about participant commitment and encouraging only those that can take on the program's responsibilities to get involved.



## Are school-to-school partnerships building a culture of cross-sector collaboration?

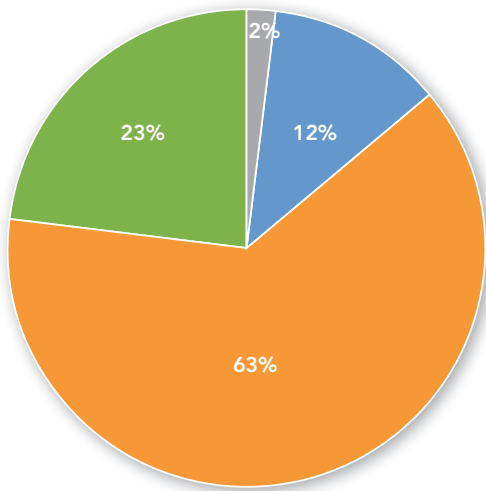
Results from the 2016-17 evaluation indicate that school-to-school partnerships are fostering collaboration between district and charter schools where it hadn't existed before. For example, prior to participating in DCC, over 70% of survey respondents reported no or very little collaboration with cross-sector schools. After participating, more than 85% of survey respondents reported engaging in collaboration with cross-sector schools (n=88).

School-to-school partnerships are also building working relationships between district and charter staff, characterized by commitment, transparency, and reciprocal learning and sharing. These relationships have strengthened as participants have built a deeper understanding of one another, particularly around instructional practices, culture, governance, and accountability, and as they have learned that "district and charters have similar issues, problems, and strengths and we can learn from one another."



Some participants indicated that there is room to deepen cross-sector relationships in Year 2 of the program, particularly around holding each other accountable for improvement and sharing more vulnerabilities and struggles with instruction. In addition, survey results indicated that there is an opportunity for greater communication between district and charter schools outside of required collaboration meetings. For example, in the DCC program, about half of respondents (53%) indicated that they don't communicate with other schools in their quad outside of interschool visits, and another 25% have only communicated once outside of interschool visits (n=88).

### BUILDING A DISTRICT-CHARTER COMMUNITY



85% of survey respondents participating in school-to-school partnerships agreed or strongly agreed that they have a community of cross-sector colleagues outside their school that they can collaborate with (n=175).

- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

#### PARTICIPANTS IN SCHOOL-TO-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS SHARED THAT THEY WERE BEGINNING TO BUILD STRONG DISTRICT-CHARTER RELATIONSHIPS.

*"The culture of this partnership was one of togetherness. We are at a point ... [where] there's nothing we couldn't ask each other. This partnership provided us a safe space to empower the children of [our community]."*

– District principal

*"[We are] a community of learners [who have] a sense of desire to help each other and learn from one another. [There is] mutual respect and no judgment."*

– Charter school teacher



### To what extent are school-to-school partnerships facilitating the transfer of promising practices?

School-to-school partnerships have resulted in the transfer of multiple practices across district and charter lines, including curriculum, lesson plans, and assessments as well as protocols for supervision, feedback, and professional development. Participants also shared strategies in the areas of math instruction, English Language Learner (ELL) instruction, and restorative practices. According to one participant, "The other schools were very willing to share what they had and, right away, we were able to implement ... one school's resources with our ELLs." At the end of the year, over 70% of survey respondents from school-to-school partnerships reported learning instructional strategies from cross-sector schools (n=175). Notably, 100% of DCC math respondents (n=17) reported that they learned instructional strategies from cross-sector schools.

# DISTRICT-WIDE PARTNERSHIPS

**ANOTHER KEY INITIATIVE** in DCP is district-level partnerships, which involve superintendents advancing cross-sector collaboration across community school districts (CSDs). DCP recognizes that superintendents – who act as thought and strategy leaders for their districts – are key partners in promoting the value of district-charter collaboration and can build and support a critical mass of schools who are engaging in this work. To this end, the program offered funding to three superintendents to implement initiatives that benefited both district and charter schools in their communities.



## *How is collaboration structured and fostered?*

Each CSD structured and fostered collaboration somewhat differently. In all three CSDs, charter schools were invited to participate in district-wide events, such as art festivals, open houses, and test prep academies. In two of the three CSDs, charter schools were invited to participate in monthly district leadership meetings. These meetings had previously existed but were only attended by district school leaders. In one CSD, district and charter leaders were paired in professional learning communities, where they shared instructional and operational practices with one another in areas like family engagement.



## *What are the key elements of successful district-charter collaboration at the district level?*

Based on interviews with superintendents and school leaders, a number of essential elements of district-charter collaboration at the CSD level have emerged. They include:

- **Having a superintendent who sees the value of and promotes collaboration across sectors** to advance student learning. The superintendent should set the tone for partnership in the district by encouraging educators to work from a spirit of collaboration and teamwork rather than one of division and separation.
- **Opening lines of communication** between district and charter leaders by creating a neutral, non-threatening space for dialogue.
- **Acknowledging divisions that have historically existed within districts**, so that partners can move forward to support *all* students.
- **Recognizing and creating opportunities that allow both the district and charter sector to grow and improve their practice.** These opportunities for collective growth will help motivate and energize district and charter schools to engage in the partnership.



## ELEMENTS IN ACTION: District 16

### **Having a superintendent who sees the value of and promotes collaboration across sectors**

When Rahesha Amon took the reins as superintendent of District 16 in January 2016, she came to her role with a clear vision and desire for district-charter collaboration. She wanted to address what she called “the elephant in the room:” the large and growing number of charters in the district that existed in almost a completely different sphere from the district. According to Superintendent Amon, district and charter schools had little interaction outside of discussions around colocation. She wanted to get all leaders – district and charter – to collaborate in service of the children of District 16.

### **Opening lines of communication between district and charter leaders**

Superintendent Amon invited both district and charter leaders to the first of many district-wide leadership meetings last spring. This initial meeting, which took place at a neutral office building, was focused on getting to know one another and beginning to form working relationships. During the meeting, district and charter leaders shared their stories, including both successes and challenges.

### **Recognizing and creating opportunities that allow both the district and charter sector to grow and improve their practice**

After this first meeting, Superintendent Amon and her staff invited district and charter leaders to collaborate with one another around one common identified area of need—whether it be family and community engagement, social-emotional learning, progressive education with an emphasis on project based learning, or building a community garden. Schools could choose to join a group if they had strong practices to share in

that area and/or if they wanted to learn new practices in that area. The plan was for professional learning communities (PLCs) in each of these areas to continue to meet outside the district leadership meetings under the direction of a facilitator from the superintendent’s office.

One PLC – composed of two district and two charter schools – came together on a near monthly basis to collaborate around enhancing family and community engagement in their schools. In their meetings, school leaders shared strategies they had implemented around family and community engagement and offered suggestions to one another on how to improve their current practices. Participants also invited each other to attend parent and community engagement events at each other’s schools. According to participants, the greatest success of the initiative is that it created transparency and trust among the involved schools; participants became more open and honest about the successes and challenges they faced and the work flowed organically from the relationships they formed with one another.

Another integral feature of Superintendent Amon’s district-charter collaboration agenda was the creation of a district-wide school open house, known as the Bed-Stuy Beautiful Crawl. With the support of a project manager, District 16 hosted two crawls during the 2016-17 school year during which both district and charter schools opened their doors to prospective families and students and showcased their offerings (e.g. science labs, fencing clubs, coding classes). While the first crawl had 9 participating schools, the number grew to 15 schools for the second crawl. Between the two events, it is estimated that at least one thousand people attended.





## What are the key challenges?

There are several challenges to district-level collaboration:

- **Generating buy-in from school staff**, particularly charter schools who are not required to participate in superintendent-driven initiatives. Superintendents are addressing this challenge by emphasizing the benefits of district-charter collaboration for improving practice and learning for all children. They are also allowing collaboration efforts to emerge organically rather than through a mandate.
- **Building superintendent commitment to district-charter collaboration**, when they already have multiple responsibilities around supporting district schools. The DCP team is helping superintendents understand that cross-sector collaboration can support district-wide improvement efforts by leveraging opportunities for reciprocal learning across the district and charter sectors.



## Do district-level initiatives build a culture of cross-sector collaboration?

Participating CSD superintendents, district schools, and charter schools reported that they are beginning to form cross-sector working relationships and that there is a desire to enhance these relationships. According to one superintendent, “There’s this untapped potential, learning together, developing each other’s practice, sharing resources ... [we’ve] only just scratched the surface.” Their desire to expand collaboration is driven by their belief that both the district and charter sectors are working in service of children in the same communities.



## Do district-level initiatives facilitate the transfer of promising practices?

In some cases, district-level initiatives helped to provide district services and resources to charter schools and students. For example, District 1 provided charter schools with the opportunity to enroll their students in the district’s Regents preparation courses. In other cases, DCP served as a platform for the transfer of promising practices between sectors, particularly in the CSDs that chose to implement intervisitations and form professional learning communities.



**Bed-Stuy Beautiful**

**DARE TO BE BOLD**

# SYSTEM-WIDE PARTNERSHIPS

**THE THIRD INTEGRAL PART** of DCP is the system-level initiatives, which involve structured partnerships between NYC Department of Education (DOE) staff and the charter sector. These partnerships incentivize collaboration and sharing of best practices on a wider scale and address systemic needs across sectors. There were two DCP system-wide initiatives in the 2016-17 school year: (a) the NYC DOE-Uncommon Impact Partnership, a joint initiative between the DOE and Uncommon Schools, a charter network, to support district teacher and leader development and (b) the District-Charter Special Education Partnership, an initiative that brings together the DOE and charter sector to improve special education administration and service delivery for students with disabilities in charter schools.

## *NYC DOE-Uncommon Impact Partnership*

Initiated in the 2014-15 school year, the goal of the NYC DOE-Uncommon Impact Partnership is to foster collaboration between Uncommon and the DOE in order to support the sharing of strong instructional strategies across sectors.



### *How is collaboration structured and fostered?*

This year, the DOE and Uncommon built a strategic partnership that leveraged Uncommon's strengths to address DOE and district-specific needs, particularly in the areas of new teacher and leadership development. In order to support this partnership, DOE and Uncommon staff communicated regularly in person and via email to develop strategy for the initiative and organize recruitment, logistics, and messaging for partnership events. The partners also communicated with superintendents to make sure initiatives addressed the needs of their district's educators.

Partnership events included a three-session professional development (PD) series for new teachers hosted by Uncommon. Attended by 172 district teachers in five Brooklyn CSDs (16, 18, 19, and 23), the series focused on foundational techniques to support classroom engagement, including cold-calling and checking for understanding. Uncommon facilitators modeled strategies, shared videos of teachers using strategies, and provided opportunities for participants to practice strategies. Uncommon also provided leadership development to 14 district principals and principal supervisors in 3 CSDs (18, 19, and 23) through the Relay Graduate School of Education's National Principals and Principal Supervisors Academy. In this fellowship, participants learned about instructional and cultural leadership through a 2-week summer intensive course, 4 intersessions during the school year, and ongoing targeted feedback.





## What are the key elements of successful collaboration between the DOE and a CMO?

Researchers determined a number of essential elements for collaboration between the DOE and a charter management organization (CMO) through observations of planning and PD sessions and interviews with Uncommon and DOE staff and participating educators. These included:

- **Ensuring that there are designated point people on the DOE and CMO sides to advance collaboration work**, who are in key places of authority and who trust one another. Also, ideally one or more of these individuals have worked in both the district and charter sectors, have a deep understanding of both sectors, and can serve as a liaison between the two.
- **Collaboratively developing a vision, goals, and strategy for the partnership that address partners' needs and strategic priorities**, so that both have a clear investment and desire to be involved in the work. Also, engaging superintendents to ensure that the work meets educator needs, and so that they see the value of the work and promote it to educators.
- **Clearly distributing roles and responsibilities among DOE and charter partners in a way that capitalizes on each partner's strengths**. For example, a CMO may coordinate content and facilitation for a training session and the DOE may support the work by advancing recruitment and messaging to superintendents and schools.
- **Acknowledging operational challenges to collaboration and working to overcome these challenges** so that the sectors can learn from each other. For example, DOE and CMO leaders may have to address cross-sector differences around teacher professional development and vendor payment requirements.
- **Establishing and maintaining transparency around program impact data and using that data to collaboratively improve the program**.



## Did the initiative build a culture of cross-sector collaboration?

Based on feedback from the program team, the DOE-Uncommon Impact Partnership has begun to build collaborative relationships between DOE and Uncommon leadership. According to the Senior Director of District-Charter Partnerships at the DOE, "We've developed strong connections with the staff at Uncommon ... they are super willing and able and also flexible, which is important to the success of the work." The initiative has also begun to foster working relationships between Uncommon and district superintendents. According to the Uncommon Senior Director of External Impact, "With DCP, we are building partnerships with districts where we have schools and where we are a part of the community. It makes the work powerful and sustainable." Uncommon and DOE staff indicated that their relationship is built around the belief that they have a shared responsibility for all the city's kids: "If we have best practices to share in service of our kids, it's our responsibility to share that, because we are accountable to and care about all kids." Over the next year, researchers will continue to examine how the program is building a culture of cross-sector collaboration.

UNCOMMON PD AND RELAY ACADEMY PARTICIPANTS NOTED THAT THEY SAW THE VALUE IN CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION FOR IMPROVING LEARNING IN ALL SCHOOLS.

*"We can pull ideas from Uncommon. It's all about great teaching and putting our students first."*

– District teacher

*"[We can] learn from ... and grow from ... each other. We're all in the same boat. [There is] power in unity."*

– District teacher

*"The district benefit was that we got to see best practices at the charter school. [We] can take practices away and begin to modify in our schools. [We also] have things at the district that charters can benefit from like restorative practices and the parent [engagement] piece."*

– District coach

### *Did the initiative facilitate the transfer of promising practices?*

Teachers in the Uncommon PD series reported learning a number of helpful instructional strategies such as non-verbal cues, tracking the speaker, cold calling, and targeted questioning. Participants noted that they had already begun to implement practices from the trainings and that the practices they learned helped to increase student engagement in their classrooms. Some participants also shared that they had turn-keyed PD learnings to staff at their respective schools using training materials provided by Uncommon.

Principals who participated in the Relay Academy reported learning a number of practices to support their teachers and schools, including the different levers to advance instruction in their buildings: data analysis, interim assessment, monitoring instruction, unpacking standards, and delivering targeted, actionable feedback. Participants said that the practices and strategies they learned at the Relay Academy have changed the way that they approach their work. One principal supervisor said that she uses the levers to prioritize her calendar to advance student learning. Another principal said that he now conferences with teachers differently, having become more specific, clear, and targeted in his feedback using the “see it, name it, do it” protocol he learned at the Academy.

### *District-Charter Special Education Partnership*

The District-Charter Special Education Partnership emerged from a series of conversations over the last few years between DOE personnel that surfaced specific and immediate needs around special education supports for a growing population of charter schools. The goal of this initiative is to bring together personnel in the DOE’s Special Education Office (SEO) and OSDCP to better assist charter schools across the city in delivering special education services to students with disabilities.



### *How is collaboration structured and fostered?*

This year, the NYC DOE, in partnership with their field offices – the Committees on Special Education (CSEs) – provided charter schools with monthly PDs around key compliance areas (e.g. testing accommodations and transition services) based on an analysis of system-wide charter data. They also provided targeted troubleshooting to charter partners based on their self-identified needs, through meetings with charter school leadership and visits to classrooms in their buildings.

In order to support this work, the DOE hired three additional personnel: a Charter Supervisor of Psychologists, who provides targeted support to CSEs and charter schools around serving students with disabilities; a Director of CSE Charter Compliance, who develops and streamlines systems and processes to monitor charter data and identify future and trending needs for support; and a Special Education Operations Manager, who supports the billing process for charter schools around special education. With additional personnel, the DOE was also able to hold weekly check-ins with CSEs to provide guidance and troubleshooting, as well as professional development aligned to citywide CSE needs.





## What elements are key to successful district-charter collaboration?

Through interviews with Special Education Partnership staff, researchers determined a number of essential elements for collaboration between the DOE and charter schools around special education. These included:

- **Ensuring that there are sufficient DOE personnel** to support the growing charter sector around serving special education students.
- **Ensuring that the DOE systematically collects and uses data** to provide targeted support to CSEs and charter schools.
- **Establishing strong relationships between DOE staff, CSEs, and charter schools** characterized by trust and transparency through mechanisms such as school visits and PD sessions.
- **Building communication channels across DOE offices** to coordinate and align services and messaging to charter schools around special education.



## Did the initiative build a culture of cross-sector collaboration?

DOE staff indicated that, as a result of the Special Education Partnership's Year 1 work, charter staff are more frequently reaching out to the DOE and CSEs for support. According to the DOE's Supervisor of Psychologists, "DOE's PD with charter schools opened up communication with charter staff. After these PDs, charter staff invited [us] to tours at their schools." The Director of CSE Charter Compliance expanded on why these visits are critical: "Visits are important for developing relationships...often, they talk about services they are providing and how they are teaching special education students, and we can offer feedback on the spot." Special Education Partnership staff indicated that they would like to continue to grow these relationships over the next few years through more regular communication between DOE and charter school partners. The Special Education Partnership's work has also served as a catalyst for the Special Education Office to hire more personnel to support collaboration, including a Senior Director for Special Education Services for Charter Schools and a Senior Advisor on Special Education Policy for Charter Schools.



## Did the initiative facilitate the transfer of promising practices?

The monthly DOE professional development sessions provided charter schools with knowledge about billing practices, testing accommodations, and transition services, among other topics. After attending these sessions, participants reported greater comfort implementing these practices in their schools. One participant shared that their training session "was a great, comprehensive review of [special education] processes. I used to think I would be very overwhelmed in my new role. But now I am confident to begin this school year." Training sessions also helped charter partners plan for how they would support special education students during the upcoming school year. According to one participant, "I know what my next steps and workflow focus will be given the information presented."



*"The training was a great, comprehensive review of [special education] processes. I used to think I would be very overwhelmed in my new role. But now I am confident to begin this school year."*

*– Charter teacher*

# THE PATH FORWARD: STRUCTURES FOR SUSTAINABILITY

**IT IS DCP'S GOAL** to sustain district-charter collaboration in the long term. In service of this goal, they are putting in place structures that promote deep partnerships across a wide spectrum of educators, schools, and districts and that shift ownership of the initiative from DOE leadership to schools and educators.

## School-to-School Partnerships

In order to build participant ownership over the initiative, DCC employs a **gradual release model**. In the first year of the program, facilitators provide extensive support around planning interschool visits and supporting school teams in their inquiry work. During the second year, facilitators have a lighter touch and many of their responsibilities are transferred to School Team Coordinators, who participate in a full-day summer training to understand their role. DCC's goal is that when schools exit the program after Year 2, they will have the structures and systems in place to maintain district-charter collaboration and the knowledge to apply the inquiry process to other problems of practice in their schools.

In order to expand district-charter collaboration beyond the campus team to the entire campus community, Campus DCP is encouraging campus teams to plan **activities that engage a large portion of the school staff**, such as campus social mixers, campus community celebrations, and cross-school department meetings and intervisitations. Through these activities, Campus DCP hopes that campuses will build norms and structures around collaboration that will exist after the initiative ends.

## District-wide Partnerships

District 16 is promoting sustainability by **engaging in all levels of DCP work**: school-to-school partnerships, district-level partnerships, and system-level partnerships. In this way, the district is building a deep commitment to district-charter collaboration among educators, school leaders, and staff in the superintendent's office. The goal is that district-charter collaboration will become embedded into the culture of the district, so that it is sustained regardless of administration and leadership changes.

## System-wide Partnerships

At the system-level, the DOE is trying to **deepen and spread partnerships with charter partners**, by expanding partnerships to an increasing number of independent and CMO-aligned charter schools. For example, next year, they will collaborate with KIPP through College to provide college planning support to district students.

DCP is also promoting sustainability of district-charter collaboration by **engaging multiple divisions and offices across the DOE in partnership work**. By expanding the reach of district-charter collaboration efforts, DCP is distributing leadership and ownership over the initiative and beginning to embed district-charter collaboration norms into the DOE's culture. It is DCP's goal that the DOE will see charter support, in addition to district support, as part of their role, since both sectors are serving children in the city's communities.

## SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability of an initiative like DCP involves three key components:

**Depth:** Ensuring that change goes beyond surface structures to alter participants' beliefs, norms of social interaction, and/or pedagogical principles.

**Spread:** Increasing the number of districts, schools and classrooms in which reform principles and norms are deeply embedded.

**Shift in Reform Ownership:** Shifting authority for the initiative from the district to schools and teachers who have the capacity to sustain, spread, and deepen the reform after funding ends.

\*Adapted from Coburn, C.E. (2003). Rethinking scale: Moving beyond numbers to deep and lasting change. *Educational Researcher*, 32(6), pp. 3-12.



