Committing to a Unifying Purpose 

Excerpt from Fostering Collaboration Between District and Charter Schools:   
A Toolkit for State and Local Leaders

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**Description:**  
District-charter collaborations that focus on a specific, unifying purpose are more likely to succeed than those that are overly broad. This section describes the nature and importance of committing to a unifying purpose.

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Committing to a Unifying Purpose from Fostering Collaboration Between District and Charter Schools

A Toolkit for State and Local Leaders

## A. Committing to a Unifying Purpose

As noted earlier, district-charter collaborations that focus on a specific, unifying purpose are more likely to succeed than those that are overly broad. Such purposes might include improving student outcomes, improving the quality of programs or services, increasing access to school choice options for students and families, or maximizing the use of resources.

A unifying purpose may emerge when an “initiator” creates aspark that ignites interest, passion, and commitment in the partners to come together for a common good. The initiator could be a community leader in a prominent position of authority, such as the mayor of Boston. The mayor created a spark by chastising leaders from Boston’s charter, traditional, and Catholic school sectors for not adequately addressing the needs of English learners and students with special needs. In DC*,* the executive director and other leaders from the Public Charter School Board were initiators of the common lottery when they recognized the logistical challenge for families who, at the time, had to navigate multiple enrollment systems.

Initiators of collaborative efforts see a need that can be best — or only — solved by working across organizational boundaries. In some cases, the need is prompted by a crisis, such as data that reveal very low achievement for a particular group of students. In other cases, the need may start as a mandate or a policy requirement, such as a requirement to transfer data across sectors in a timely manner. Or the need may represent an opportunity made available through a policy change and/or a new funding source, such as a dissemination grant.

For an initial spark to ignite a collaborative effort, it must communicate a unifying purpose that is compelling enough to elicit the commitment of people’s interests, passions, and talents. Once partners have sufficient interest and commitment to come together across boundaries to pursue a unifying purpose, the work of collaboration to achieve collective results can begin.

Once partners identify a unifying purpose, they should set a goal or goals. Goals operationalize the purpose and ensure that its measurable. Goals should be SMART — *specific*, *measurable*, *achievable*, *results-oriented*, and *timebound*.