

LOCATION:

Haverhill, Massachusetts

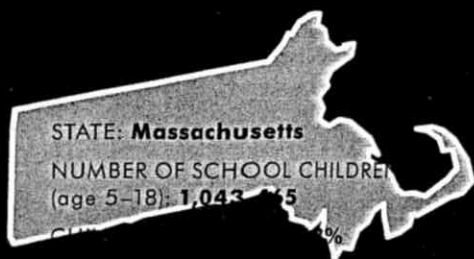
STRAND:

Operations

**CHARTER AND TRADITIONAL
PUBLIC SCHOOLS INVOLVED:**Hill View Montessori Charter
Public School

Haverhill District Schools

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Partnerships in Service of Children: Hill View Montessori Charter Public School and Haverhill Public Schools

SUMMARY

Recognizing that the relationship between district and charter schools is often hostile, Hill View Montessori Charter Public School (HVM) adopted a collaborative philosophy when the school was founded. HVM made an effort to cultivate a strong relationship with Haverhill Public Schools, and it paid off. As a result of the good relationship, the school and district have collaborated in many different areas, and HVM recently was able to lease a disused school building from the district.

MOTIVATION

Like all schools, HVM and Haverhill's collaborations are motivated by a desire to maximize their limited resources. Additionally, instead of viewing district schools as rivals, HVM's founders deliberately incorporated a cooperative attitude into the school's philosophy and program, starting with a few simple yet effective strategies.

[See following page.]

MAKING IT HAPPEN

HVM's founders contacted Haverhill in 2002 as they were drafting the school's charter. The charter school's founders met with school officials to announce their plans to open a charter school within the district and to openly discuss the anticipated impact on the district. Giving Haverhill advance notice and communicating with them from the start helped create an environment more conducive to conversation and collaboration. As HVM's plans progressed, the founders continued to update Haverhill, especially in areas that directly impacted the district. Haverhill reciprocated by inviting the founders to a school committee meeting where Haverhill's superintendent discussed the charter school application.

MAKING AN IMPACT

Open communication has led to repeated collaboration between HVM and Haverhill. The district gained financially from leasing a building to the school. Second, utility rates for the city were much lower than the rates the charter school could obtain on their own, due to the district's purchase of electricity, oil, and gas through a regional collaborative. A district administrator brokered an agreement to maintain the utilities under the city's budget and have HVM reimburse the city directly. A third financial gain resulted from collaboration on transportation. Under the law, the district school system is required to provide transportation for its resident charter students. HVM planned to operate a longer school day and a longer school year than the district schools, necessitating additional busses. The charter school asked parents to transport students for the extra two weeks of school, and they also agreed to begin the school day a bit later than originally planned so students could utilize the existing bus routes. The bus company realized that several drivers had routes that finished early and assigned them to the charter school after their regular route ended. By doing so, HVM's day could still end 45 minutes later than the last dismissal time of the other public schools, and the bus drivers would only have to work an additional half-hour each day to finish the HVM bus routes. The financial obligation was approximately one third the cost without collaboration. Additionally, HVM and Haverhill also share physical education resources (fields) and offer each other slots during professional development training sessions.

MAKING IT LAST

HVM and Haverhill continue to work according to a philosophy of collaboration. Though HVM now has a building of its own and no longer leases from the district, the two organizations continue to collaborate to achieve mutually-beneficial results. For instance, HVM plans to share some of its Montessori materials and curriculum with district teachers. Central to HVM's philosophy of collaboration are the eight "soft skills" that HVM identified at its inception.

EIGHT TIPS FOR BUILDING COLLABORATIVE RELATIONS

1. Lead by example, modeling respect Maintain your professionalism, and demonstrate your respect for others working for the best interests of the community's children. As charter and district leaders, it is critical that you show respect for one another, and keep in mind that both charter and district leaders are trying to do what is best to support your city's public school children. When individuals in leadership roles conduct their relationships with respect, they encourage others to do the same, and they certainly provide a positive model for students.

2. Put yourself in the other person's shoes Consider the impact of key decisions on other public schools. Meet to communicate high-impact issues early. Open lines of communication and consideration of others' perspectives will support collaboration and may allow you to envision plans that increase benefits to the entire public school system.

3. Pursue positive public relations Educate everybody about what you are doing, keeping in mind that there should be no need to criticize someone else's school to validate your own. If you need to stand apart and voice divergent views, do so respectfully. Charter school leaders must market their schools to ensure adequate enrollment in a context of educational options and school choice. Districts, too, need to help the public understand the good things they are doing. Negative communication will only contribute to a contentious environment, and in such an environment, it's students who lose out.

4. Build bridges Make connections with others who support public education, whether that education is district or charter. Think broadly when building bridges and forming networks. Include not only educators, but also other organizations and service providers in the city—such as children's services agencies, historical societies, environmental groups, and civil rights groups. Inform these groups about what you are doing and arrange to collaborate on a project. The individuals in such organizations can convey positive attitudes about charter and district schools, attitudes that can become part of the fabric of your town or city.

5. Demonstrate commitment to public education Understand and support the various public education efforts in your city. Have a positive impact on education outside of your own school by becoming a member of a group supporting another school, such as a charter or district school committee or site council. Be aware of the course of public education in your community by attending or keeping informed about school committee and charter school board meetings. By understanding and showing commitment to larger public education efforts, you will earn the respect of other public educators, build important relationships, and provide support for further collaboration.

6. Consider all public educators as partners Extend invitations to other public educators, and make all parties feel welcome in common endeavors. Keep the focus on win-win activities, such as jointly written grants. Encourage others to attend school events and meetings, and to visit your school. By extending invitations and opportunities to other educators and making them feel comfortable, you provide the foundation for new and productive partnerships.

7. Support problem solving efforts Work together to devise creative solutions. Brainstorm collectively and share expertise in an effort to solve problems. As you think and learn together, pooling resources, the possibilities for benefit expand. Moreover, helping others solve problems builds common commitments and encourages further cooperation. Work together to devise creative solutions.

8. Focus on benefits for children We're all involved in education for the same reason—to benefit the children in our communities. Working together can extend benefits and provide models of productive and respectful relationships.