

Union-Management Partnerships and US Public School Reform

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Introduction

Motivated by comparisons of US public school student performance against international benchmarks, a debate has raged across the United States for more than a decade regarding the best way to reform and improve public education. In this period, presidents from both political parties - Republican George W. Bush and Democrat Barack Obama - have supported solutions focused on market driven policies – charter schools, vouchers, privatization, or concurrently by top-down bureaucratic mandates for teacher accountability policies that rely heavily on high stakes standardized testing. Most recently

under the Obama administration, the US Department of Education leveraged an investment of \$4.3 billion to implement education reform policies focused on the expansion of charter schools, the adoption of a standards-based Common Core Curriculum, and expansion of the use of high stakes testing in teacher evaluation. This has resulted in changes to laws and regulations in 45 states. These approaches have created friction between teachers unions, administrators, school boards, parents, policymakers, and other stakeholders in public education, and fueled disagreements over how to improve the quality of teaching and learning for children.

Yet, within some schools, school districts, and states, union leaders and school administrators in the United States have found an alternate path to reform, one not rooted in market solutions and narrow test-based teacher accountability policies, but instead centered on building strong relationships that facilitate collaboration among educators and educational improvement for students. This paper explores the impact of these union-management institutional partnerships on teacher collaboration and student performance, as well as collective bargaining practices, and offers strong evidence for an alternative direction in this policy debate on public school reform and the role of union-management relations in educational quality.

Specifically the paper will look at union and management responses to these reforms from the state, school district, school levels focusing in particular at the impact of labor relations, teacher collaboration and social capital on student achievement.

Creating State-level Collaboration: The Massachusetts Education Partnership

The Massachusetts Education Partnership (MEP) is a consortium that brings together key labor and management education stakeholders to use state-of-the-art collaborative processes to advance student achievement and educator success. It is also engaged in ongoing evaluation and research on these subjects.

The MEP was formed in 2012. Its founders were motivated by the recognition that education leaders in Massachusetts had both the desire and the capacity to work together to pursue these objectives, in contrast to the approach taken in states like Wisconsin, where teachers, their unions, and the collective bargaining process were being attacked and blamed for the lack of progress in improving the quality of public services. To explore the potential for taking a more collaborative approach, a white paper was prepared that reviewed evidence on the effects of labor-management collaboration and innovations in other private and public sector settings (Bluestone and Kochan 2011).

Based on survey responses gathered from a cross-section of local school district superintendents, school committee chairs, and the leaders of local school district teachers' unions, the white paper made clear that many leaders felt that the quality of labor-management relations could be improved and that a more collaborative approach to advancing the interests of students and teachers could be developed. Discussion of this report with key education leaders in Massachusetts produced evidence of a shared desire

to pursue methods to increase collaboration, linked to a commitment to improving student outcomes. Out of discussions with school superintendents, school committee presidents, and teacher union representatives came the idea of forming educational partnerships to focus on improving labor-management relations at district and local union levels.

They agreed that the vision and goals for this new effort would be to:

- Promote student achievement and educator success;
- Increase teacher engagement and leadership;
- Improve the effectiveness of bargaining processes and relationships; and
- Advance policies and practices that sustain collaboration.

Today, MEP represents a significant commitment by state and local education leaders representing both management and labor to work together to support education innovation. The MEP Governing Board includes leadership from the 24,000-member American Federation of Teachers – Massachusetts, 110,000-member Massachusetts Teachers Association, 750-member Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, 2,200-member Massachusetts Association of School Committees, and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, along with representatives from four of the Commonwealth's most prominent education research institutions: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Northeastern University, the University of Massachusetts Boston, and the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy.

From the start, the MEP has prioritized engaging and convening labor, management, community, and policy leaders through a variety of means. A website was created (www.masspartnership.org/) to disseminate work accomplished through the MEP's two core initiatives – the District Capacity Project (DCP) and the Interest-Based Bargaining Institute (IBBI). To deepen their practice, the facilitators of both initiatives have created a Community of Practice network that meets periodically to share experiences and deepen their knowledge and skills in working with districts and local unions. The MEP also hosts an annual statewide conference on key reform issues (e.g. extended learning time, school-based innovation, educator evaluation, peer assistance and review, Common Core standards). Each conference has attracted between 200 and 400 participants. In the past two years, the MEP has directly engaged 115 school districts serving roughly 505,000 students, or almost one-third of all school districts and half the students in the state.

School District Collaboration

Through its District Capacity Project (DCP) the MEP works to build the capacity of school districts to drive improvements in student achievement by working on specific high priority project during the term of a labor agreement. The purpose of DCP's work is not to negotiate contracts or engage in bargaining, but instead to help leaders to accomplish mutually desired innovations by changing how they work together. By learning and mastering effective labor-management collaboration and teaming practices, each DCP team – including the superintendent, union president, a school committee

member, teachers and administrators, and sometimes community partners – works with a DCP facilitator to:

- Co-design and implement initiatives to advance student learning and success;
- Increase teacher engagement in leadership of school and district innovation efforts;
- Improve problem solving, decision making and fidelity of implementation;
- Develop skills, structures, and policies that can sustain collaborative practice over time.

Using collaborative teaming and interest-based practices, a DCP team works to identify strategies that address student learning and advance the effectiveness of teachers. They draft an MOU that establishes principles to guide their work; engage in training sessions focused on relationship-building and collaborative planning; and jointly develop a work plan, timeline, and project goals that will lead to concrete improvements in district, school and educator practices, and in student success. DCP facilitators help teams work through difficult issues, maintain focus on specific goals, and assess progress toward goals. The long-term goal of DCP is to advance student achievement and teaching effectiveness by building teaming practices that sustainably increase school and district capacity.

To date, the DCP has worked in seven Massachusetts school districts; DCP teams represent 5,000 educators who serve 68,000 mostly urban students. Many of the Commonwealth's hardest to reach students reside in these districts where, on average, 76 percent of students are from low-income households, 33 percent are receiving special

education services, and 69 percent are from racial or ethnic minorities.

The DCP and IBB are envisioned as closely aligned activities. A significant outcome of both MEP initiatives has been to lead participating teams toward further collaborative activities. For example, success in designing and implementing a DCP-supported project can solidify a sense of trust and shared understanding that leads to the use of interest-based bargaining in future contract negotiations. Similarly, participating in an IBB training and using IBB in one's negotiations can impress upon district teams the value of collaborative work, and lead them to consider using this approach away from the bargaining table. Remarkably, five of the seven DCP districts have participated or plan to participate in IBB training – and all but one attribute that decision to their prior work with DCP. The exception is a district that had completed contract negotiations using IBB when it first learned about DCP in 2012, and then applied to DCP so as to continue this approach in their day-to-day leadership work.

Evidence from the field indicates that the hands-on involvement of effective facilitators markedly improves the focus and impact of labor-management innovation. DCP's facilitators are all well versed in interest-based practices, strategies for effective team building, and collaborative problem solving. These skilled former educators, trainers and systems leaders have developed a Community of Practice to build skills and refine practices. In the past year, DCP facilitators have convened ten communities of practice sessions. Similarly, IBB trainers have a community of practice that has met periodically

to compare experiences, assess the effectiveness of the curriculum, and make adjustments, as appropriate.

Interest-Based Bargaining Training and Facilitation

The Interest-Based Bargaining Institute (IBBI) offers training and technical assistance to school district labor-management bargaining teams engaging in contract negotiations.

This work is designed to move management and labor leaders from a positional, often adversarial bargaining process, to one grounded in a full exploration of the parties' shared and competing interests.

All told, in less than two years of MEP work, roughly 10 percent of all school districts in the Commonwealth have actively participated in IBBI, and fully 15 percent have made inquiries or participated in MEP informational workshops and learning opportunities. An analysis of the effects of IBB on negotiations is provided in the section below reporting the results of the MEP 2014 survey.

In numerous districts, the parties experienced not only an improvement in their communications and relationships, but also in the quality of their outcomes. Among the comments received when the parties were subsequently interviewed by University of Massachusetts, Boston graduate student Luke Kupscznk, were the following:

- “I think what the training did, was it reiterated and strengthened the fact that we were all in this together and we wanted what was best for the kids.”

- “The other [rounds of bargaining] pretty much, we just argued. . . . This time made a lot more sense.”
- “100% of the [union] members who voted were in agreement.”
- “Since the training the superintendent made the comment that we can use this for lots of things—not just bargaining across the table.”
- “So, in very day, I’ve found that even running school committee meetings and even with the superintendent, we started off in a different way, in a conversational mode more.”

In one school district, the teachers’ positive experience with IBB led 3 other bargaining units to adopt IBB for their contract negotiations. The School Superintendent in this district noted that the skills the parties learned through MEP’s IBB training have positively affected the parties’ day-to-day communications and created a more collaborative work environment, with the joint labor-management committee now meeting weekly rather than monthly.

Applying MEP Principles in Boston

When we first created the MEP, a number of education leaders advised us to stay out of Boston because the relationship between the Boston Teachers Union (BTU) and the city and school department were too adversarial to ever buy into a new approach. Case in point: Despite strong community and media pressures for an expanded school day,

negotiators in the last round of bargaining in 2012 were unable to decide on, among other things, how much the teachers should be paid for whatever time might be added.

For the first year we heeded this advice and focused our energies outside of Boston. In December 2012, however, we decided to explore whether the parties in Boston might be ready to take a different approach. Several private, off-the-record meetings were convened with representatives of the Mayor's and the Superintendent's offices and the BTU to see if a different approach to this issue might be worth exploring. After a few meetings a glimmer of hope and good will could be seen.

Shortly after the election of a new mayor in November 2013, with his approval, we went to work in earnest, focusing on the question of whether a new approach to reaching an agreement on expanding the school day, aka "Extended Learning Time" (ELT) might be possible. We reframed the conversations from a narrow debate over how many more minutes per day would be added and how much more teachers would be paid to a joint problem-solving discussion of how ELT could be combined with more opportunities for teacher-led collaborative planning on how to best use additional time, and how an agreement on ELT might be combined with a shared interest in improving use of teacher professional development time. These discussions moved forward quietly with the Mayor's encouragement and knowledge until a framework for a possible agreement emerged in early June.

In the fall of 2014, discussions picked up again, this time with the direct engagement of the mayor. On December 26th the parties announced their historic agreement to add, on a phased-in basis, the equivalent of a month of additional teaching time and additional professional development opportunities to the school calendar for all of Boston's elementary school children. Moreover, the parties agreed to continue the collaborative process by training facilitators to support on-going collaboration in developing and implementing specific approaches to using ELT effectively within each school. More than any case to date, the good faith efforts of the BTU, the Boston School Department, and Mayor Walsh illustrate that when parties who trust each other and work together in a collaborative fashion on tough problems, innovative, perhaps even transformational, agreements can be achieved.

State-wide Survey Results of First Two Years of the MEP

The impact of MEP's efforts was corroborated by the results obtained in a March 2014 statewide survey of district superintendents, school committee leaders, and local union leaders. A more complete report of the survey results can be found at:

<http://www.masspartnership.org>. In brief:

Forty-two percent of the respondents now see collective bargaining as a means for improving school performance, rather than an obstacle to it, compared to 36 percent in 2011. The changes are even more significant among those districts that received IBB training and facilitation. Fifty-eight percent of superintendents using IBB rate collective bargaining as adequate for improving school performance compared to 26 percent using

traditional methods. Seventy-three percent of the parties are now confident that their labor management relationship is sufficient for improving school performance, compared to 40 percent in 2011.

Over 60 percent describe their most recent collective bargaining contract negotiations as somewhat or very collaborative rather than adversarial. And once again, those using IBB, 86 percent rated their negotiations as collaborative, nearly double (46 percent) the proportion of those not using IBB. Further, those not using IBB were more than twice as likely to experience their negotiations as adversarial, and four times more likely to characterize them as very adversarial.

There is also positive carryover of IBB from the formal negotiations process to on-going interactions during the term of agreements. Sixty percent of IBB users indicated their local union and district leaders meet regularly to discuss leadership issues during the term of their agreement compared to only 37 percent of those who did not use IBB.

MEP Conclusions and Future Directions

In summary, the first two years of the MEP saw improvements in labor and district leaders' views of collective bargaining and collaborative labor-management relations as vehicles for improving student performance. There is considerable use of interest-based bargaining in education in Massachusetts. Much, but not all of this has been supported by

MEP training and hands-on facilitation. Those using IBB report their negotiations to be more collaborative, report more ongoing union leader-superintendent engagement during the term of their agreements, and are more likely to view their labor management relationship as well positioned to support improvements in school performance. Between 60 to 70 percent of those engaged in the MEP want to continue participating in one or more MEP activity in the next year. While the MEP has reached a majority of the responding districts/union locals in some way or another, a lot more remains to be done.

We believe the Massachusetts Education Partnership is off to a good start. In its first two years, MEP has strengthened dialogue among state government, district, and union leaders. It has engaged labor, management and/or policy leaders in 115 Massachusetts districts in one or more of its activities. It has disseminated information and research evidence on how collaborative labor management processes are being used across the state and nation. The MEP survey results demonstrate that perceptions of the value of collective bargaining have improved (or criticisms of collective bargaining as an obstacle to school improvement have declined). The use of interest-based bargaining is both quite widespread and successful in improving collaboration in both negotiations and in on-going union leader-superintendent relationships. The MEP's District Capacity Project is providing intensive support for teams addressing high priority education improvement initiatives in seven districts. Both the Interest Based Bargaining Institute and DCP are demonstrating the potential of this type of intensive training and facilitation for improving the culture of teacher-administrator relationships, and enabling labor-management teams to achieve improved outcomes for students and for educators.

Yet there is still significant work to be done. Achieving the Partnership's long-term objectives requires growing beyond its two core initiatives and establishing a platform of services to support local leaders in learning, sharing, and developing improved practice, especially through greater interaction with one another. It will also require more focused efforts to bring our collaborative tools to bear on high priority initiatives such as expanding learning time, improving educator evaluation processes, and implementing elements of the Common Core State Standards. More generally, the tasks for the future include building a sustainable MEP that continues to expand its reach and impact across districts and local unions in Massachusetts, and working in partnership with others to extend these innovations to neighboring New England states and across the nation. By doing so perhaps the core vision and belief of the MEP – that collaborative labor management relations are critical drivers for improving student achievement and school performance – will become the national norm and standard practice in US public education.

Creating Collaboration at the School District Level: The ABC Unified School District and ABC Federation of Teachers

Background

Located approximately 25 miles south-east of Los Angeles, ABC Unified School District (ABCUSD) employs 927 teachers and serves 20,801 ethnically and linguistically diverse students throughout 30 schools, including 14 Title I schools. Twenty-five percent of students are English Language Learners. Approximately 46 percent are on free or

reduced lunch.

Over the past decade ABCUSD's performance on the California's Academic Performance Index, or API, has been consistently at least 7 percent above the state average, and for the past two years has exceeded the API targets set by the state. The district estimates that approximately 85 percent of high school graduates move on to higher education.

Building collaboration

The Partnership between labor and management in the ABCUSD emerged in the aftermath of a tumultuous eight-day strike in 1993 over mounting budget concerns, and the district's plan to slash teachers' health benefits and pay, while increasing class size. The strike was taxing for former union president Laura Rico and also for teachers and administrators in the district. The bitterness that resulted motivated the union to become more involved in school board elections, recruiting and campaigning for candidates open to developing a more positive and collaborative relationship with the teachers' union.

When union-backed candidates won, and finally took a majority on the board, the superintendent changed, as did the climate in ABCUSD starting in 1995. The hiring of Dr. Ron Barnes in 1999 as superintendent marked an important step forward in the

Partnership between the union and administrators. Ron Barnes and Laura Rico recognized that the district's primary goal of educating students and making teachers successful was compromised when union-management relationships were adversarial, and that a more collaborative relationship was the most effective way of improving teaching quality and student performance. In working together to solve substantive problems for students and teachers, they built a relationship grounded in mutual respect and trust (Rubinstein and McCarthy 2011, 2012).

Strategic priorities

Superintendent Ron Barnes was able to align the district, including the board of education and administration, around a set of goals and a strategic plan both for the district and each school. Together with Laura Rico, they developed a "Partnership," both individually in the way they worked together, and institutionally between the district administration and the union. This meant solving problems related to student performance and the teaching environment.

One of the first efforts at collaborative problem solving took place in 1999 at six schools on the southern side of the district, where a much higher percentage of students were on reduced or free lunch. A majority of students at these "South Side Schools" (four elementary, one middle school, and one high school) were English Language Learners and had low proficiency in reading and math. This created new opportunities to

collaborate on recruiting, hiring, compensating, and retaining high quality teachers, as well as to improve curriculum and instructional practices and expand research-based professional development. In support of these efforts the union even increased its membership dues to pay for substitute teachers so South Side faculty could be released to take the professional development training. The program became known as the South Side Schools Reading Collaborative, and teaching improved as did student performance. This experience demonstrated to everyone the benefit of union-management collaboration. All parties agreed that it required a joint problem-solving approach to meet this challenge.

Over time this Partnership approach to improving the district expanded to other schools, and encompassed other issues related to teaching quality and student achievement. For example, the district increased use of AFT's research-based ER&D professional development program. As the Partnership expanded, the union and administration collaborated on textbook adoption; interviewing prospective administrators and teachers; curriculum; a new peer assistance, mentoring, support, and evaluation program known as PASS (Peer Assistance and Support System); new teacher orientation; and processes for data-based decision-making regarding student performance. The union also appointed representatives to the district-wide Insurance Committee, Finance and Audit Committee, Strategic Planning Committee, Legislative/Policy Committee, Closing the Achievement Gap Committee, and Special Education Committee.

In 2005 Dr. Gary Smuts replaced Ron Barnes as superintendent, and the Partnership deepened further. To guide their collaborative efforts, the parties developed the following six principles emphasizing the importance of student achievement, teaching excellence, and mutual support:

1. *All students can succeed and we will not accept any excuse that prevents that from happening at ABC. We will work together to promote student success.*
2. *All needed support will be made available to schools to ensure every student succeeds. We will work together to ensure that happens.*
3. *The top 5 percent of teachers in our profession should teach our students. We will work together to hire, train, and retain these professionals.*
4. *All employees contribute to student success.*
5. *All negotiations support conditions that sustain successful teaching and student learning.*
6. *We won't let each other fail.*

Supportive system infrastructure

Over the past decade, the culture of the ABC Unified School District has become one of shared planning, decision-making, and responsibility. It is built on respect, commitment, and trust at the highest levels of leadership in both the union and administration.

In addition to a collaborative leadership style, the Partnership is also supported by both formal and informal structures. For example, the superintendent and the union president meet on a weekly basis to discuss issues and keep the lines of communication open. Other leaders from the union and management also speak frequently to each other about their joint work.

Leaders from both the administrative cabinet and the union executive board sit together on a District Leadership Team several times a year. This team and other union representatives and building principals attend an annual retreat where they assess progress, build their team, and plan the next steps in their Partnership. This full-day session, called “Partnership with Administration and Labor,” or P.A.L. has occurred every year since 1999, and the union and district split the cost.

While support at the top has been strong and visible, the parties recognized that an effective and lasting Partnership could not be sustained unless it also involved those who were most strongly connected to students—the teachers and principals. At the school level, principals and union building representatives meet weekly on collaborative leadership teams to discuss school issues, solve problems, and engage in site-based decision-making including textbook adoption, school schedules, and the hiring process for each school.

Further, the district received a grant from AFT's Innovation Fund to support the development of 10 ABC school-based teams in Partnership efforts. These schools will take site-level collaboration, joint governance, and decision-making to an even deeper level. Leaders at these schools have received additional training and are working on specific projects to enhance teaching quality and student performance.

In addition to these site-based collaborative governance structures at the school level, union members also serve as department chairs, mentor teachers, and building representatives. Monthly building representative meetings include updates on the partnership and union president's meetings with the superintendent, so the business of the union is integrated with participation in managing the district through the Partnership. This extensive involvement of union members and leaders in the Partnership at the district or school level, or through mentoring and professional development, has created a dense network of teacher-and-administrator, and teacher-and-teacher collaboration that contributes to improved communication, problem solving, teaching quality, and student achievement.

An extraordinary investment in joint learning opportunities for administrators, union leaders and teachers has also helped strengthen the Partnership. This has included training by AFT's Center for School Improvement, (CSI), in meeting skills, problem solving, and decision-making. Teams have also received training from AFT's Union Leadership Institute. In addition, the district and union consistently send joint teams to

AFT's biannual TEACH conferences. Over 400 district teachers—more than 40 percent of the membership—have attended sessions at CSI or TEACH with their principals.

Further, the PAL Retreat itself has served as an opportunity for shared learning and skill development that also builds communication and mutual understanding. Joint training has not only improved the technical, problem-solving, and decision-making skills of both teachers and principals, it has also strengthened their relationships as colleagues.

Sustaining factors

Strong leadership from both the administration and the union has sustained and strengthened the Partnership at the ABC United School District for over a decade. The current superintendent, Dr. Mary Sieu, and the former superintendent, Dr. Gary Smuts, spent most of their careers in the district. Thus, they came to the Partnership with established relationships, a long history in the district, and an understanding and appreciation of the value collaboration brings to the school system. Similarly, Laura Rico also had a long history of leadership within the union. She spent 19 years as a child development head teacher, and just completed her ninth term as the full-time president of the ABC Federation of Teachers. The stability of leadership in both the administration and the union, and their history of working together, were critical factors in building trust and institutionalizing the culture of collaboration, and the systems of shared decision-making that operate daily in the district.

The community has also supported the Partnership, from parent involvement in the South Side Schools Reading Collaborative, to volunteers from local businesses and community members in the schools, to support by the Board of Education.

Since the strike, the union has joined with parents in campaigning for board candidates supportive of increased collaboration by the union with the administration in planning, problem solving, and decision for school improvement. While there is little contract language to memorialize the partnership, the union and board signed off on a mission statement, guiding principles, and guiding behaviors, for the district.

Union-administration collaboration has further been aided by technical assistance and resources from the National AFT through training programs such as ER&D, the Union Leadership Institute, the Center for School Improvement, and TEACH Conferences, as well as through support from the AFT Innovation Fund.

Impact of Partnership and Collaboration on Teaching and Learning

We now look deeper into this partnership to examine the patterns of collaboration that occur within schools between teachers and administrators to see how they affect student performance. We take an organizational and industrial relations perspective, looking at schools as systems and examining school governance, patterns of communication and

collaboration, teacher participation in decision making, and industrial relations. Particular interest is paid to the way teachers work with each other and how union representatives work with principals at the school level.

In summary, we find that:

- **Formal partnerships help improve student performance.** The quality of formal partnerships between teachers unions, administrators, and teachers at the school level is a significant predictor of student performance, as well as performance improvement, after poverty and school type are taken into account.

- **Partnerships lead to more extensive communication between teachers.** Higher-quality, school-level teacher-administrator partnerships predicted more extensive school-level collaboration and communication around: student- performance data; curriculum development, cross-subject integration, or grade- to-grade integration; sharing, advising, or learning about instructional practices; and giving or receiving formal or informal mentoring.

- **More extensive communication improves student performance.** More extensive communications around: student-performance data; curriculum and integration; instructional practice; and mentoring all predicted large and significant gains in student performance or performance improvement.

- **Partnership leads to more frequent and informal communication between union representatives and principals.** Finally, the quality of partnerships predicted different communication patterns between union building representatives and principals, with the

communication in high-partnership schools becoming more frequent and less formal than the communication in low- partnership schools (Rubinstein and McCarthy 2014, 2015).

Employee Participation, Collaboration and Performance

Over the past decade, education researchers have encouraged greater levels of professional collaboration among teachers as a means to improve student achievement (Dufour and Eaker 1998; Dufour, Eaker and Dufour 2008; Goddard, Goddard and Tschannen-Moran 2007; Leana and Pil 2006). However, little is currently known about the institutional antecedents to professional collaboration, particularly in the context of public education. This paper identifies school-level union-management partnerships as potential catalysts for professional collaboration in public schools.

Research across a wide variety of industries has long established that as employees are increasingly included in managerial planning, problem solving, and decision making, performance and productivity increases (Freeman and Rogers 1999; Levine and Tyson 1990; Kaufman 2001; MacDuffie 1995; Appelbaum and Batt 1994; Rubinstein and Kochan 2001; Rubinstein, Bennett and Kochan 1993). This increase in performance and productivity results from: directing more resources toward improvement efforts; cultivating solutions from employees who are closest to the problems; using better information to aid in the decision-making process; increasing effort and motivation; and providing greater support for the implementation of decisions to those involved in

making them. This study extends these ideas to public school reform and investigates whether those schools with stronger partnerships also have higher levels of performance and performance improvement.

Communications theory tells us that the structure and pattern of relationships between organizational members will have an impact on their behavior and decisions. Work systems that are more collaborative break down hierarchies and increase horizontal communication, information and knowledge sharing, and innovation. This results in greater responsiveness and flexibility, particularly in knowledge-intensive work (Trist 1981; Shimada and MacDuffie 1986; MacDuffie and Krafcik 1992). Networks within organizations are increasingly important for coordinating work when information is dispersed and when flexibility, responsiveness, and problem solving are important for improving performance (Rubinstein 2001). This is true across a variety of industries.

Applying this framework to public schools, we project that improved educational quality will result from practitioners analyzing student performance and making adjustments to curriculum and instructional practice to improve learning (Leana and Pil 2006). This, however, is not simply the work of individual teachers working alone but rather the result of teachers interacting with one another and with administrators—the social network within schools. This requires the input, cooperation, and coordination of teachers and administrators across classrooms and departments. In essence, it requires an extensive communications network that fosters educational effectiveness—this is referred to as the

“density” of a communications network. When there is frequent and extensive communication between teachers and with administrators, the network is considered dense. Furthermore, the structure and character of the social network inside a school can be shaped by the relationship between management and the union (Rubinstein 2000; Rubinstein 2001; Rubinstein 2003; Rubinstein and Kochan 2001; Rubinstein and Eaton 2009).

Earlier research has shown that union-management partnerships can lead to fundamental changes in union structure and the structure of union-management communication (Rubinstein 2001; Eaton, Rubinstein and McKersie 2004; Eaton and Rubinstein 2006).

Therefore, schools with stronger union-management partnerships are likely to have more extensive communications networks and exhibit different patterns of collaboration between principals and school union representatives. In schools where union leaders and principals talk frequently and informally about teaching and learning, performance is likely to improve. Schools with strong union-management partnerships should have better student outcomes than schools without good partnerships.

Furthermore, as local unions facilitate communication through their role in partnerships with management, they help create tremendous value in the school by engendering a greater level of employee trust in collaboration than management can create on its own. Teachers are more willing to engage in collaborative structures and processes because they have greater trust in their elected union leaders than they do in management

(Rubinstein and Kochan 2001; Rubinstein 2000; Rubinstein 2001).

Methods

One of the overarching questions that drove this research was whether union-management partnerships influence how educators in a particular school collaborate and communicate and how this affects student performance. Thus, a way was needed to determine the level of partnership in a school. This was accomplished by measuring the quality of union-management partnerships using three questions from a district-wide survey administered in January 2011 that dealt with union-management communications, collaboration among staff, and openness to input from all educators. Schools that had higher partnership-quality measures were schools where there was more union-management communications; where teachers exhibited more collaboration; and where there were greater opportunities for teachers to have voice in decision making.

In a social-network survey conducted in April 2011, we asked teachers and administrators with whom they communicated, and specifically, if those communications were for the following purposes: to discuss student-performance data; to discuss curriculum development and cross-subject integration and articulation; to share, advise, and learn about instructional practices; and to give or receive formal and informal mentoring. The overall response rate to the survey was 69 percent. Those data allowed for a detailed examination of the communications network among educators.

To determine the level of communication and collaboration in a school, we calculated “density,” which is the fraction of existing ties between educators in a school out of the total number of ties possible in the school. To determine a school’s density of communications, we measured the number of educators in a school who were in communication with one another. We also calculated the total number of possible ties between educators in a school based on the total number of educators employed there. Finally, we determined the actual proportion of communications ties that existed in relation to the total number of possible ties. In this study, therefore, the higher the density value, the more educators in a school reported communicating with others in their building.

There was also interest in assessing the structure of school-level union-management partnerships—specifically, how frequently school-building union representatives reported communicating with their principals and whether this communication relationship was primarily formal or informal. To measure the frequency of communication, union representatives were asked to indicate their communication patterns with their principals—specifically, whether their communications with their principals occurred daily, weekly, monthly, or not at all. Representatives were also asked to indicate whether their communications with their principals occurred formally, informally, or both formally and informally.

As mentioned above, we also looked at student achievement to determine if stronger

partnerships were related to higher achievement. We used the California Academic Performance Index, (API) as a composite performance measure that reflects students' achievement in a variety of assessments, including the California Standards Tests (CSTs); the California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA); the California Modified Assessment; and for high school students, the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE). Graduation and dropout rates are also factored into the scores. State officials in California have used API scores as a primary means to monitor and rank the relative performance of schools and school districts, and publicize district- and school-level scores, which they report online (California Department of Education 2014). API scores range from 200 to 1,000. This study examined API performance, or the overall API score a school received for the 2011-12 school year, as well as API performance improvement, which represents the overall change in a school's API score from the 2010-11 school year to the 2011-12 school year. We also took into account variation in communication patterns by school type—elementary, middle, and high school—as well as the level of poverty in each school, by controlling for these differences when we measured the relationship between the strength of union-management partnerships, collaboration, and student achievement.

Results

Partnerships lead to greater student achievement

This investigation of union-management partnerships showed that students achieve more when they attend schools with stronger partnerships. When comparing schools on the

partnership-quality survey scale of one to four, a one-point increase in partnership quality in 2011 corresponded with roughly 25 more points in a school's API score in 2012 after controlling for poverty. Furthermore, partnership quality in 2011 has a positive and statistically significant association with performance improvement from the 2011 to 2012 school year. For instance, a one-point increase in partnership quality in 2011 corresponded to roughly a 15-point increase in student achievement as measured by API scores from 2011 to 2012, after controlling for the previous year's API score and poverty.

(Figure 1 about here)

Furthermore, it was determined that strong partnerships can improve student learning even in schools with many disadvantaged students. On its own, poverty has a negative and statistically significant association with API scores in 2011 and improvement from 2011 to 2012. This shows that school-performance outcomes are impacted by the socioeconomic status of the school community. Since this study controlled for poverty, however, it was also demonstrated that those schools where management and unions have built strong partnerships are more likely to have higher achievement than similar schools with comparable poverty rates but without partnerships.

For purposes of illustration, the graph below tracks partnership quality against performance improvement for the 26 schools in this study. API improvement scores ranged from -18 points to 58 points. The graph shows that as the quality of partnerships increases, so does improvement of student performance. These results are statistically significant.

Figure 1 shows the association between partnership quality and student-achievement gains, controlling for poverty in each school.

We also examined the relationship between partnership quality and density of teachers communication in schools. We found that partnership quality was related to the amount of teacher communication around four topics: student-performance data; curriculum development, cross-subject integration or grade-to-grade integration; sharing, advising, and learning about instructional practices; and giving or receiving formal or informal mentoring. Since the pattern was the same across all four topics, we averaged them together in the bar chart below to illustrate the relationship (see Figure 2). The chart shows that the schools with the highest levels of partnership had, on average, almost twice the communication density—30 percent—than did the schools with the lowest levels of partnership—17 percent. These findings strongly suggest that high-partnership schools are characterized by more widespread collaboration throughout the school as a whole.

(Figure 2 about here)

In examining the relationship between these school communication densities and student achievement using the API student performance measure, it was found that schools with denser communications around these same four topics—student performance, curriculum, instructional practices, and mentoring—had higher API performance scores and greater improvement in scores from the 2010-11 school year to the 2011-12 school year. The differences between schools with higher- and lower-density

communications were statistically significant. For example, using the averages from the chart above (see Figure 2), a school with a communication density measure of 17 percent would have an API performance score 9 points lower than a school with a 30 percent density measure. This shows that increases in the density of school-level communications around these topics improve student performance.

Changes in Employment Relations: Principal and Union Communications

This study also found that there was a relationship between partnership quality and the frequency of communication between union school-building representatives and principals: The higher the partnership quality, the greater the chance that principals and union representatives have frequent communication. In addition, in schools with high partnership quality, these communications are more informal than in schools with low partnership quality.

Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the relationship between the communication frequency and formality of union school-building representatives and principals.

(Figure 3 about here)

As shown in Figure 3, high-partnership schools are characterized by more frequent communications between principals and union school-building representatives—occurring daily and weekly—compared to low-partnership schools, where these

communications are more likely to be less frequent, occurring weekly or monthly.

(Figure 4 about here)

Figure 4 illustrates that the communications between principals and union school-building representatives in high-partnership schools are both formal and informal, while in low-partnership schools, these communications tend to be more formal. From these findings, the study concluded that there is a structural difference in the union-management relations in schools with stronger partnerships compared to the relations in schools with weaker partnerships.

Summary: Union-management Partnerships and Student Performance

The results of this study show that the quality of union-management partnerships between teachers and administrators at the school level has had an important and significant association with educator collaboration and student achievement, as well as greater achievement gains from one year to the next. When partnerships are stronger, school-level collaboration is higher and so is student performance. While poverty remains a key predictor of student achievement, the data suggest that student performance can be improved by institutional union-management partnerships and the increased school-level collaboration that results from them. Nonetheless, the effect of poverty on student achievement cannot be ignored, yet some of the organizational solutions studied here focus attention on what teachers and administrators can uniquely do in high-poverty schools to improve learning.

These findings are important because they direct attention beyond the evaluation of individual teachers to the quality of the institutional relationship between the teachers union, its members, and the administration. This research demonstrates that unions can take a leading role in school reform by partnering with administrators to improve teaching and learning in a dramatic way. The degree to which unions and management help create and maintain these partnerships adds tremendous value to school districts seeking to improve and sustain high levels of student achievement.

Furthermore, the results of this study show that higher-quality union-management partnerships predict greater levels of communication among educators when it comes to the following:

- Evaluating student-performance data
- Developing curriculum, cross-subject integration, and grade-to-grade integration
- Sharing, advising, and learning about instructional practices
- Giving and receiving mentoring

In turn, the density of communication around these areas was a significant predictor of student performance and performance improvement in API scores. These results provide evidence that strong union-management partnerships at the school level help create an environment and structure for denser faculty communication and that this communication improves teaching quality and, therefore, student performance.

In schools with higher-quality union-management partnerships, union leaders at the building level had structurally different patterns of communication with their principals than did building-level union leaders in schools with lower-quality partnerships. This meant that there was more frequent and less formal communication in the high-partnership schools. These data suggest that strong partnerships enhance communication by creating a school climate in which union representatives and principals are more comfortable talking to each other frequently and informally—seeking each other out to talk rather than waiting for formal staff meetings to do so. This kind of communication allows union leaders and principals the ability to plan and work together, and it gives them the opportunity to resolve issues before they become larger problems.

Policy Recommendations and Conclusion

This research suggests that union-management partnerships can significantly improve collaboration in schools and student performance. More studies need to be done to confirm these results—and more schools and more districts, including those without partnership arrangements, need to be examined. While school reform policy initiatives, such as charter schools, and teacher evaluations based on student test scores have received a great deal of support, research to date has not shown that, on average, these approaches improve student performance in a consistent and systematic way. In contrast, the research presented in this report builds a strong case for efforts to expand collaborative partnerships as a vehicle for school reform and improvement that can directly impact student performance. However, it is unlikely that collaborative school

reform can be sustained or institutionalized without widespread support from state and federal policy. If policymakers and educators want to create and support more long-term partnership arrangements in U.S. school districts, we suggest the following initiatives:

- Provide incentives for districts to establish union-management partnerships and collaborative approaches to developing curriculum and instructional practice, teacher evaluation, professional development, mentoring, and peer review. School reform must not be just top down; ways must be found to build upon, support, and cultivate local district innovation as well. Research on union-management partnerships and collaborative reform in the U.S. steel industry in the 1990s, for example, showed that the most effective innovations benefited from policies and contract language that enabled innovation, rather than policies and contract language that were overly prescriptive (Rubinstein 2003). The lesson for public school reform is that innovation around collaborative partnerships should be developed locally around the needs and cultures of local school districts and local unions with support from the state and federal levels.
- Provide grants to districts that are willing to pilot partnerships and innovative collaborative approaches to improving teaching quality and student performance.
- Build dense learning networks of professional educators across districts with extensive experience in partnerships and collaborative approaches to reform, and link them with inexperienced districts that are looking for best-practice models and support.

- Create state-level institutions to offer leadership training and skill development in partnerships and collaborative management. These institutions can build capacity, facilitate organizational change and innovation, and provide multi-stakeholder oversight of school reform innovation and regulation.
- Convene state and regional conferences to highlight best-practice partnerships and collaborative approaches to school improvement and provide technical assistance across districts.
- Support research on collaborative school reform innovation that produces results, and share the findings widely.

We hope this paper encourages more research on the impact of institutional union-management partnerships on teacher collaboration, teaching quality, and student performance and that it contributes in some way to broadening the debate on effective approaches to public school reform. At this moment, it is hard to imagine more important priorities for our global economy and society.

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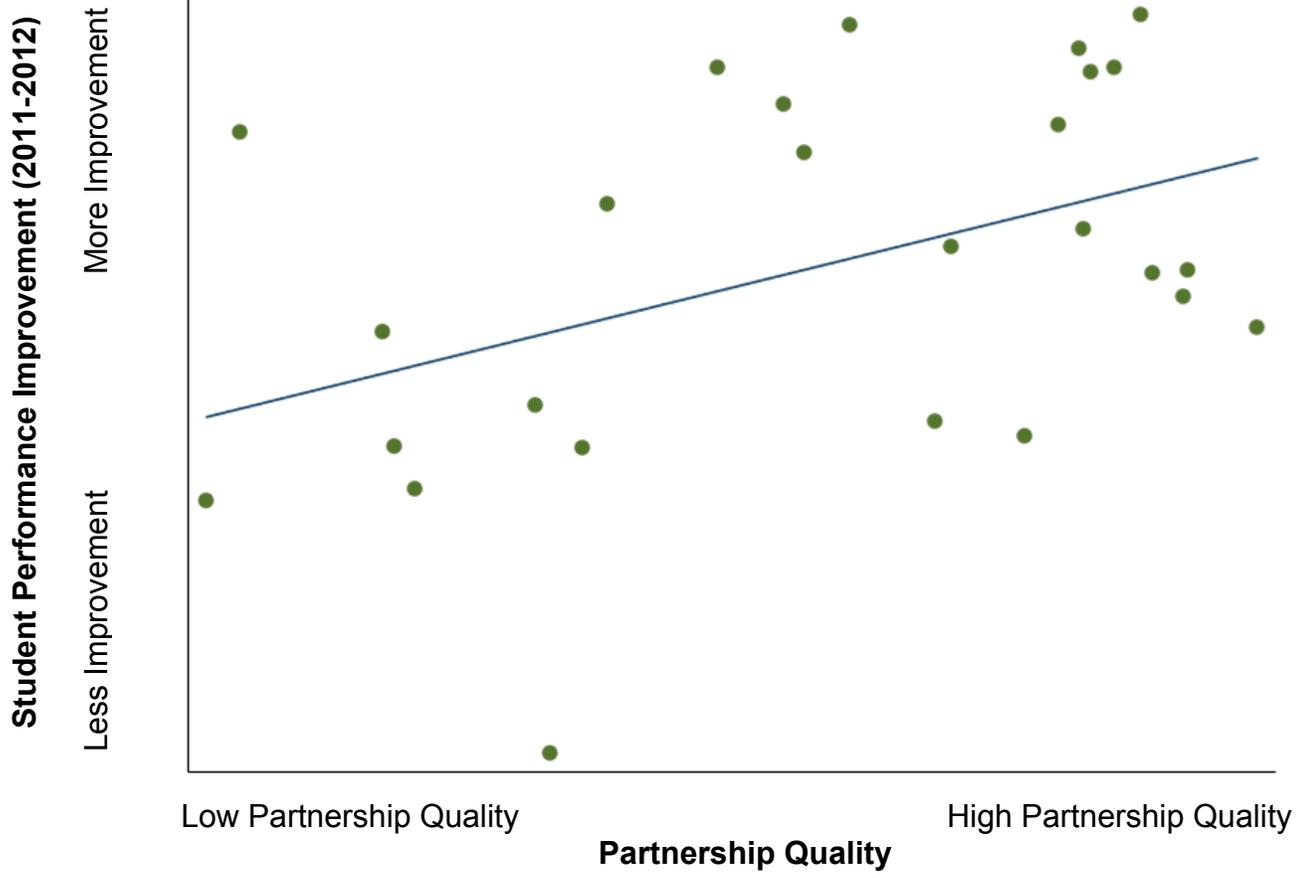


Figure 1

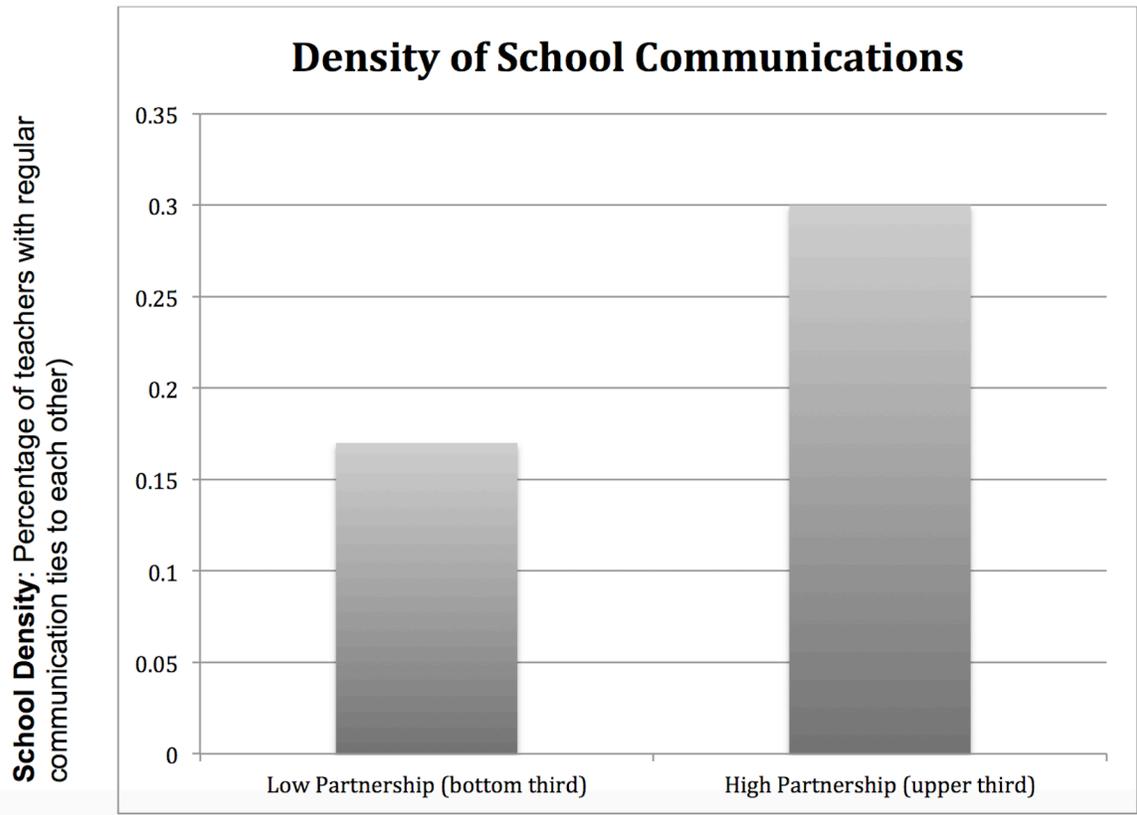
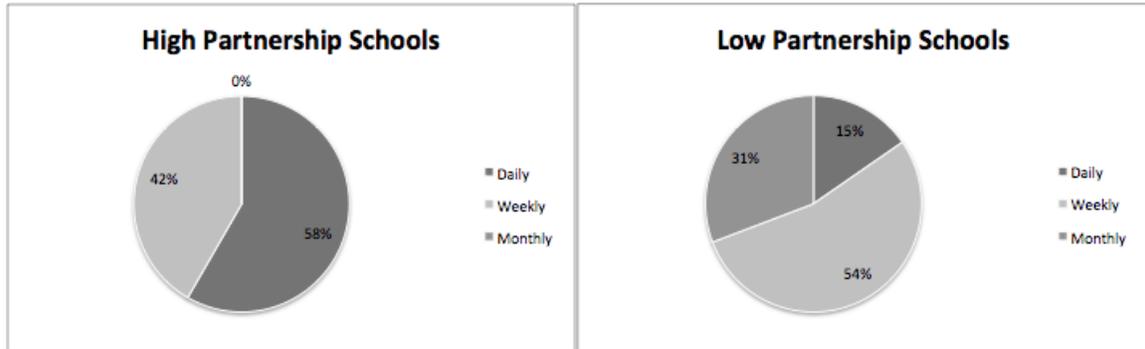


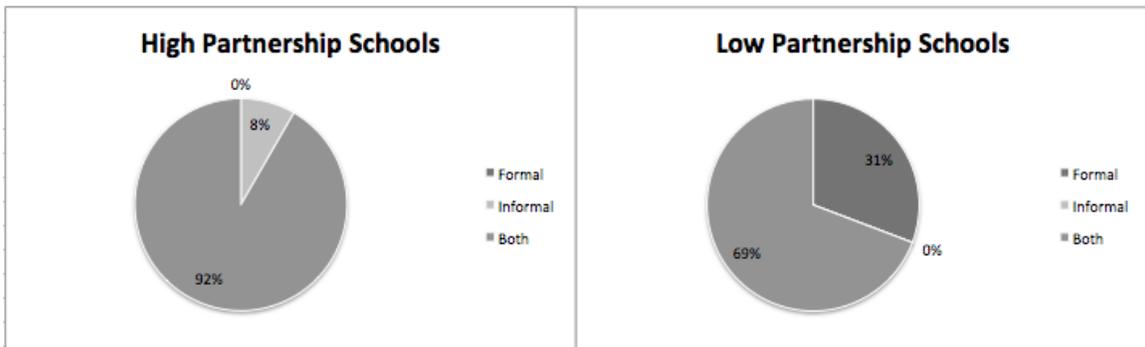
Figure 2

Figure 3: Pie Charts of Principal-Union Representative Communication Frequencies by High and Low Partnership School*



* High Partnership schools fell in the top half for partnership quality; Low Partnership fell in the bottom half

Figure 4: Pie Charts of Principal-Union Representative Communication Frequencies by High and Low Partnership School*



* High Partnership schools fell in the top half for partnership quality; Low Partnership fell in the bottom half

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