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A colorful illustration of a group of diverse people, including adults and children, walking away from the viewer on a winding path that leads through rolling green hills. The path is dark and contrasts with the vibrant green grass. Several trees are scattered across the landscape, and the sky is a clear, bright blue. The overall mood is hopeful and suggests a journey or a path forward.

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Pushing Forward Together

RANDI WEINGARTEN, President, American Federation of Teachers

I HAVE SEEN LABOR-MANAGEMENT relations at their best and at their worst. In fact, I've been party to both. In my early days as president of the United Federation of Teachers in New York City, I worked closely with the then-chancellor of the city's public schools to launch one of the most successful reform initiatives in the country, the Chancellor's District. This group of several dozen struggling schools implemented many research-based strategies to raise achievement: class size reductions, a longer school day for tutoring and small-group remediation, a common curriculum aligned with high standards, common teacher planning time, and a school site labor-management collaborative governance structure. Students in these schools made rapid gains, far outpacing citywide gains in reading and math.

They continued to excel until a new chancellor took the reins of New York City schools and dismantled the Chancellor's District. His unilateral approach and an agenda that lacked evidence of effectiveness disintegrated the trust and common purpose that had fostered progress in city schools. Sadly, the relationship between the chancellor and the teachers' union often was described using terms of warfare—enemies, battles, casualties, and the like. I was drawn into the conflict and was forced to become every bit the combatant the chancellor was.

Those pitched battles might have made great headlines, but they drew time and attention away from moving the New York City school system toward the goal of helping all children.

This shift from the union and the district as allies to antagonists permeated nearly all matters affecting public education in New York. Progress in city schools stalled and even reversed.

Research, not just my own experience, makes it clear that students and educators benefit greatly from effective partnerships between teachers' unions and school districts, and they pay a heavy price when

those relationships are poor. Yet collaboration is more the exception than the norm.

Unfortunately, without partners on both sides of the labor-management equation willing to put students at the forefront of their concerns, significant progress will be impeded, if not impossible.

Frankly, collaborating is harder than confrontation. Many people are more comfortable with the us-versus-them posture. Consultation takes time. Considering the point of view on the other side of the negotiating table can require moving out of one's comfort zone. And while some see compromise as capitulation, what it does is



Randi Weingarten addresses business and labor leaders at the Association for a Better New York in New York City.

BRUCE GILBERT

enable the seeding of trust and good will, not the ceding of authority and responsibility. It's not easy, but it is effective.

Collaboration fosters the conditions for transformative change. It creates trust and buy-in. It allows for innovation and risk-taking. It focuses key parties on common goals. It harnesses the expertise and perspective of crucial players. It's a key characteristic in virtually every successful school and school district I have observed. It's what has moved reform forward in Lowell, Massachusetts; New Haven, Connecticut; Union City, New Jersey; and elsewhere.

Creating a positive labor-management climate has become an AFT priority. The AFT has sponsored numerous conferences that either require or encourage parties to attend in labor-management teams. The AFT Innovation Fund provides resources and

expert assistance to several school improvement efforts with collaboration at their core. We are fighting for the Common Core State Standards to be implemented with, and not imposed on, teachers, and for the needs of teachers and students to be first and foremost in the transition, not for the standards to be an obeisance to testing and data.

The AFT recently awarded our Prize for Solution-Driven Unionism to unions that, while breaking ground in very different ways, are working with their management partners.

We're never going to eliminate conflict or differing points of view in education or any

Collaboration creates trust and buy-in, and focuses key parties on common goals.

other important enterprise. And I don't expect every superintendent and teachers' union president to declare, "We will not let each other fail," as they have in one district leading the way in labor-management collaboration. But even the most adversarial labor-management counterparts can agree on at least one thing: that district-union discord feeds into the criticism that public education is dysfunctional. If we can't repair our working relationships, how will we ever earn the necessary credibility, and the confidence of our communities, for them to invest in and maintain high-quality, equitable public schools?

The work to reclaim the promise of public education starts with creating collaborative, safe, and welcoming environments for teaching and learning. In this issue, we are delighted to highlight the examples of schools and districts that demonstrate that when adults engage, together, in the hard work of solving problems, rather than winning arguments, our children and our communities benefit.



OUR MISSION

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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Production Coordinator

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The AFT's longtime director of organizing and field services tells the story of the union's evolving support for labor-management collaboration.

Supporting Labor-Management Collaboration

Far too often, news coverage of public education today focuses on its seemingly insurmountable problems. Sensational accounts of conflict and mistrust dominate headlines. Stories seem to be published daily in which outsiders seeking to completely overhaul public schools are glorified, while teachers and administrators are wrongly accused of protecting the status quo. And if an article fails to label teachers and administrators as obstacles to education reform, it is likely to portray them as

Jersey, and the other in Meriden, Connecticut—that are models of collaboration. This issue also examines the history of the AFT's path toward supporting strong labor-management relationships.

That path has been long and hard. Working together does not always come naturally to adults who have long seen themselves on opposite sides of the fence when it comes to education priorities. AFT President Randi Weingarten has often acknowledged the difficulty of educators and administrators setting aside differences and finding

dous benefits to student achievement and teacher development, while the firsthand stories of labor-management collaboration in school districts will resonate with those wanting to do similar work.

Sustaining union-management partnerships is not easy, but nothing worth doing ever is. Such work requires that educators and administrators communicate with each other, trust each other, and respect each other as the professionals they are. “Those who are serious about improving schools recognize that conflict is a destruc-

A focus on strengthening labor-management partnerships must be part of any serious school-improvement effort.

two sides pitted against each other, unable to work together by virtue of the starkly different positions and interests they hold.

These articles usually leave out the simple fact that teachers and administrators want the same thing: a high-quality education for all children. Rarely do they highlight those teachers and administrators who *are* working together to improve student achievement. Rarely do they highlight their quiet successes: the steady gains their students make, the effective professional development programs they provide to all staff, and the culture of collaboration that filters down into individual schools and allows them to thrive.

This special issue of *American Educator* does highlight this work—the work of labor-management collaboration. It features articles on the mounting research showing that partnerships between administrators, teachers, and unions strengthen schools, and it provides an in-depth look at two school districts—one in Union City, New

Jersey, and the other in Meriden, Connecticut—that are models of collaboration. This issue also examines the history of the AFT's path toward supporting strong labor-management relationships. “When I first became a union leader, I was quick to identify the enemy, fire up members, and wage war for what I believed to be right. Eventually, I learned that if you set out looking for a fight, you’ll find one—but you probably won’t find a solution.”

The articles in this issue of *American Educator* offer solutions, although we certainly do not contend that collaboration is an appropriate path in every context and situation. Working together, after all, cannot be forced. If conditions are not right, if either side is unwilling to participate, then trying to engage an obstinate partner makes little sense. As the saying goes, it takes two to tango. Our hope is that the research on collaboration will show teachers and administrators that their efforts to forge lasting partnerships can result in tremen-

ous benefits to student achievement and teacher development, while the firsthand stories of labor-management collaboration in school districts will resonate with those wanting to do similar work. “Those who are serious about improving schools recognize that conflict is a destruc-

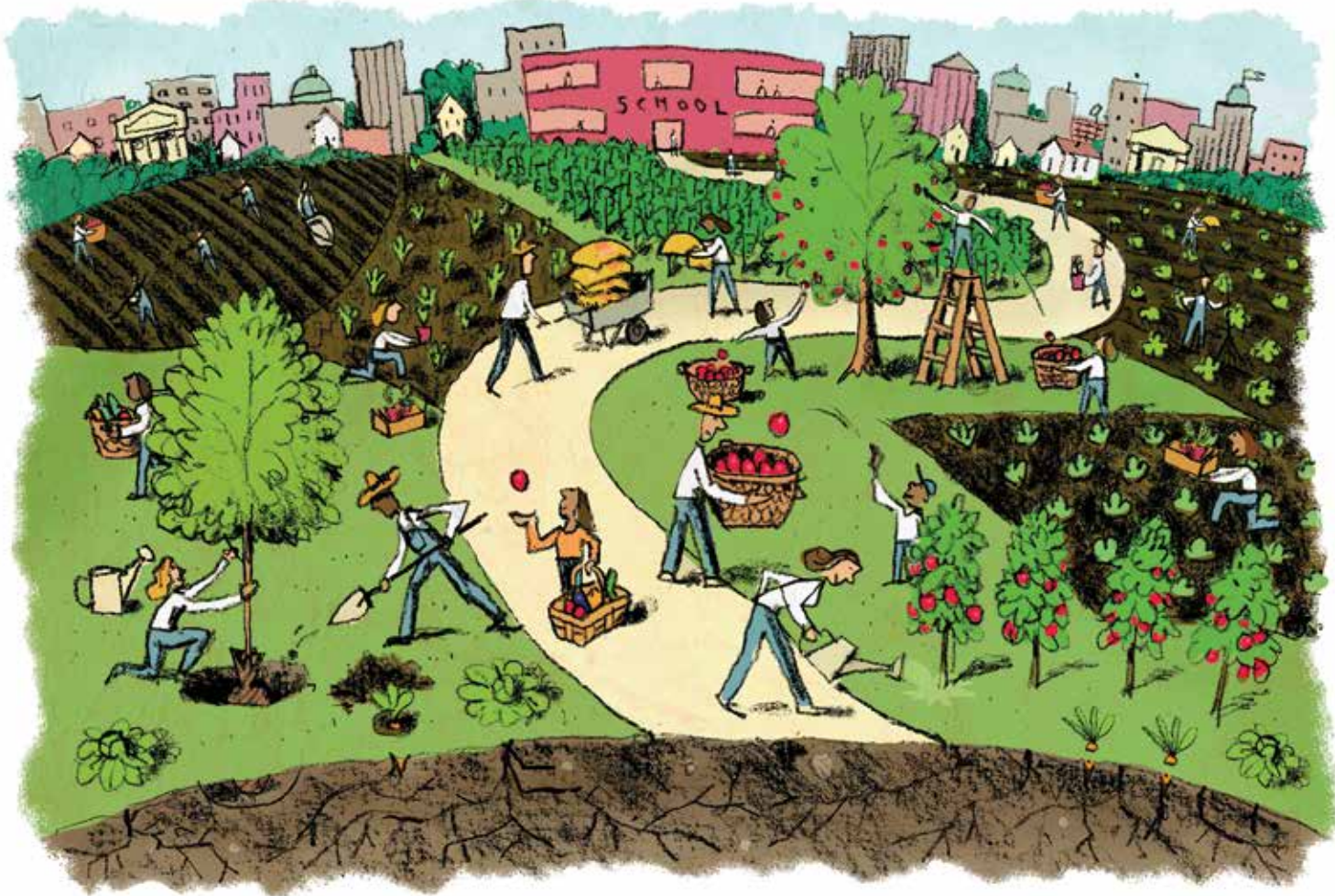
So what is the formula? Besides an engaging curriculum, small class sizes, support for teachers, and wraparound services to meet children’s emotional, social, and health needs, a focus on strengthening labor-management partnerships must be part of any serious school-improvement effort. Such an effort requires time. Relationships between union and district leaders can take months and even years to build; no great partnership happens overnight. For those who wish to engage in this rewarding work, the following pages serve as a guide for how not to go it alone.

—EDITORS



Cultivating Collaboration

The Science behind Thriving Labor-Management Relationships



BY GREG ANRIG

In recent years, rigorous studies have shown that effective public schools are built on strong collaborative relationships between administrators and teachers. Those findings have helped to accelerate a movement in some districts across the United States focused on constructing such partnerships in public schools. Both the promising research and the percolating innovations aimed at nurturing collaboration have largely been neglected by the mainstream media, which remains preoccupied with the “education wars” between teachers’ unions and their detractors. But the mediocre results arising from policies that have

*Greg Anrig is the vice president of policy and programs at the Century Foundation, where he directs projects on public policy as well as the foundation's fellows. He is the author of *Beyond the Education Wars: Evidence That Collaboration Builds Effective Schools* (2013) and *The Conservatives Have No Clothes: Why Right-Wing Ideas Keep Failing* (2007). Previously, he was a staff writer and Washington correspondent for Money magazine.*

dominated national reform efforts like No Child Left Behind—efforts that rely heavily on punitive responses to unsatisfactory student outcomes—only bolster the case against coercive incentives enforced by rigid top-down hierarchies.

Even the U.S. Department of Education, which has often supported the ideas and echoed the rhetoric of those highly critical of teachers’ unions, has begun to embrace labor-management collaboration. For example, in February 2011, the department sponsored a national conference in Denver, “Advancing Student Achievement through Labor-Management Collaboration,” which brought together 150 district teams of superintendents, union leaders, and school board presidents to share promising practices (see the box on page 6). Then, in May 2012, the department organized another national conference in Cincinnati, “Collaborating to Transform the Teaching Profession,” which added state teams to the participant mix, including chief state school officers, state union leaders, and state school board members. For the Cincinnati conference, the department published a white paper on labor-management collaboration that made this argument:¹

While real differences must be acknowledged and agreement among all stakeholders is neither a practical, nor a desirable, end goal in itself, the U.S. Department of Education believes that in the long run, the most promising path to transforming American education is student-centered labor-management collaboration. ... The most dramatic improvements will be made when those responsible for implementing reforms not only endorse them, but also work together to formulate, implement, and continuously improve them. In short, the Department proposes that tough-minded collaboration—that is collaboration built around the success of students and not the needs of adults—will lead to more effective practices and a more sustainable path to elevating education than the ups and downs of adversarial relationships that have long characterized labor-management relations.

The two largest national teachers' unions—the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association—have embarked on major initiatives to promote greater collaboration, supported in some cases by large foundations. While it is still true that attacks on teachers' unions show little sign of abating, the growing recognition that labor-management collaboration is an essential condition for improving student achievement is nonetheless helping to shift the pendulum toward more cooperative efforts. Skeptics will no doubt perceive that reversal as another fad plaguing American education. After one reform strategy doesn't pan out, the pattern often has been to try the opposite approach without much basis for believing that it will be effective either.

This issue of *American Educator* is dedicated to addressing such concerns, exploring in depth why collaboration between teachers' unions and administrators has the potential to significantly improve student achievement and strengthen the nation's school systems. It synthesizes research findings; highlights districts and schools that have intensively pursued collaboration; and provides strategies to guide teachers, administrators, and public officials interested in cooperation. It also explains *why* collaboration is critical to raising student performance, drawing from research in other institutional settings as well.

A few caveats at the outset. First, while labor-management collaboration is a necessary condition for sustained improvement in school performance, it is not sufficient. The strong relations must extend beyond the bargaining table to a persistent, team-oriented focus on enabling teachers to work more effectively with students. Other, interrelated factors also are crucial, including close ties with parents and community groups, and attentiveness to assessment results to identify areas where students and teachers need more support. Second, while collaboration can promote a self-sustaining culture that outlives the tenure of any individual superintendent, principal, or teachers' union representative, it's also the case that disruptive personnel changes and political forces can torpedo progress built on collaboration. Third, because collaboration usually requires upending deeply entrenched cultural habits, it is inherently arduous and requires years of effort on the part of all parties. Collaboration is not a "silver bullet" that will eliminate whatever ails a school; rather, it is a shared mindset and an agreed-upon collection of processes that over time enables everyone connected to a school to effectively work together in educating children.

Labels often inadequately communicate the complex and varying real-world relationships that words are intended to encapsulate. Shorthand terminology like "collaboration" or "professional learning communities" can be easily misinterpreted to mean little more than civil communication among administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders in schools. Many administrators may believe they are behaving collaboratively with teachers when their actual relationships bear little resemblance to those found in highly effective schools. To shed light on what collaboration actually entails, let's unpack the relevant research.

What Makes Successful Schools Tick?

For several decades, educational researchers have attempted to identify successful public schools, particularly in low-income settings, and then determine the characteristics that enabled those schools to thrive. Much of that work began with the effective schools movement, which was launched in the late 1970s under the leadership of the late Ronald R. Edmonds; after his death in 1983, that work moved to the National Center for Effective Schools Research and Development in Okemos, Michigan. Unfortunately, much of that early work suffered from data shortcomings and mostly failed to uncover actionable conclusions beyond vague generalizations. In recent years, however, studies using more advanced statistical methods and drawing from much more reliable testing and demographic data have produced more rigorous findings. As a result, researchers have uncovered valuable insights about what makes schools successful.

There is growing recognition that labor-management collaboration is an essential condition for improving student achievement.

The most rigorous of these studies was conducted by the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research, which was led by Anthony S. Bryk, now the president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Published in 2010, *Organizing Schools for Improvement* was based on demographic and testing data from 1990 through 2005 from more than 400 Chicago elementary schools, as well as extensive surveys of stakeholders in those schools.² Using advanced statistical methods, the consortium identified, with a high degree of reliability, the organizational traits and processes that can predict whether a school is likely to show above-average improvement in student outcomes.

The consortium's central finding was that the most effective schools, based on test score improvement over time after taking into account demographic factors, had developed an unusually

high degree of “relational trust” among their stakeholders. It identified five key organizational features to advancing student achievement:

1. A coherent instructional guidance system, in which the curriculum, study materials, and assessments are coordinated within and across grades with meaningful teacher involvement;
2. An effective system to improve professional capacity, including making teachers’ classroom work public for examination by colleagues and external consultants, and to enable ongoing support and guidance for teachers;
3. Strong parent-community-school ties, with an integrated support network for students;
4. A student-centered learning climate that identifies and responds to difficulties any child may be experiencing; and

5. Leadership focused on cultivating teachers, parents, and community members so that they become invested in sharing overall responsibility for the school’s improvement.

The consortium determined that those five features tended to reinforce each other, and that a significant weakness in any one undermined progress in terms of student performance. Schools with strong rankings on most of those traits were 10 times more likely to improve than schools weak in the majority of those capacities.

Mounting Interest in Labor-Management Collaboration

Several notable conferences have been held recently on labor-management collaboration, engaging teams of management and union leaders. In 2010, the AFT, along with scholars from university labor-management programs, organized the first National Conference on Collaborative School Reform (see the article on page 22). District teams of union leaders and administrators from 35 districts across the country came to learn about collaborative models of school improvement under way in Toledo, Ohio; St. Francis, Minnesota; and Norfolk, Virginia, among other AFT locals, and to discuss how labor-management collaboration might help their own districts.

In 2011 and 2012, with support from the Ford Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the GE Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education sponsored two conferences focused on labor-management collaboration. More than 150 state and local school district teams, composed of the superintendent, the local union president, and the board of education president, participated in the first conference, held in Denver, which focused on the core principles of labor-management collaboration. Around 100 district teams and 15 state teams participated in the second conference, in Cincinnati, whose theme was transforming the teaching profession.

Seven national organizations—the AFT, the National Education Association, the American Association of School Administrators, the National School Boards Association, the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, the Council of the Great City

Schools, and the Council of Chief State School Officers—cosponsored these conferences and signed onto a joint statement in support of labor-management collaboration, available at <http://1.usa.gov/1Ba8dS>.

What makes these conferences noteworthy is not only the prominent organizations that sponsored them, but also the requirement that, in order to attend, each team had to make an explicit commitment to work together to advance student learning. These meetings also provided important opportunities for sharing what the real details of collaboration look like, by highlighting the partnerships under way in a handful of districts and states.

Recognition of the importance of labor-management collaboration is growing. School districts and their labor counterparts across the country are working to create structures in collective bargaining agreements that not only support collaboration but use collaboration as a vehicle for change. Notably, in 2010, a landmark new contract was ratified in the Baltimore City Public Schools to radically change how teachers are evaluated and compensated. Moving away from the traditional salary schedule, the contract called for the development of a career pathways system to be designed by teachers and management. This system was



phased in over time and is monitored by a Joint Oversight Committee and a Joint Governing Panel of representatives from the Baltimore Teachers Union and the Baltimore City Public Schools. The effectiveness of the career pathways system will be evaluated after a few years of implementation. When facing a similar opportunity, the union president and the superintendent in Cleveland reached out to the Baltimore team and national staff at the AFT for technical assistance prior to entering into contract negotiations. Similarly, the New Haven Public Schools in Connecticut, with leadership from AFT President Randi Weingarten, became one of the first locals to adopt a model of teacher development and support that is targeted at overall district achievement. Successful union-management partnerships also exist in the ABC Unified School District in California,* the Hillsborough County Public Schools in Florida, and the Plattsburgh City School District in New York.

—EDITORS

*For more on the ABC Unified School District, see “From Picket Line to Partnership,” in the Spring 2009 issue of *American Educator*, available at [www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/spring2009/dubin\(2\).pdf](http://www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/spring2009/dubin(2).pdf).

The Chicago researchers concluded that the leadership of principals is central in initiating and sustaining the organizational changes needed to improve student learning. They found that two key ideas are essential to effective leadership: One is that a strategic focus on improving teaching and learning is necessary. The second is that improvement must be grounded in continuing efforts to build trust across the school community. The authors wrote:

Quite simply, the technical activities of school improvement rest on a social base. Effectively constructing change in teaching and learning makes demands on the social resources of a school community. In the absence of these resources, individual reform initiatives are less likely to be engaged deeply, build on one another over time, and culminate in significant improvements in a school's capacity to educate all its children. So building *relational trust* remains a central concern for leadership.

The consortium's research is especially valuable because it focused on an unusually large and natural experiment launched when the city of Chicago delegated significant authority and resources to local school councils. The data accumulated over time enabled the consortium to capture the ways in which school personnel worked together and how those relationships affected students' progress. That provided researchers with a rare opportunity to examine organizational change as it played out across many different school and community conditions. Its results are not from a small, possibly atypical sample of schools that volunteered to participate in a structured experiment, but rather from a whole system of schools attempting to improve under local control. That combination—the diversity of the school community under study and the willingness of the schools to change without externally imposed incentives—added considerably to the overall generalizability of the consortium's findings.

"It Is All About the Strength of the Team"

The same five pillars that the Chicago consortium identified as keys to progress consistently emerge in other studies as well. For example, the National Center for Educational Achievement (NCEA), a division of the company that produces the ACT college-admissions exam, sent teams of researchers to 26 public schools with a high proportion of low-income students in five states where students made significant gains on math and science tests over a three-year period.³ The common practices they found in those schools included:

- A high degree of engagement between administrators and teachers in developing and selecting instructional materials, assessments, and pedagogical approaches;
- Embedded time in the workweek for teacher collaboration to improve instruction;
- An openness among teachers to being observed and advised;
- Close monitoring by administrators and teachers of testing data to identify areas where students and teachers needed additional support; and
- Personnel who dedicate time to extensive outreach to parents and coordination with community groups and social service providers.

The NCEA's report includes numerous quotes from administrators and teachers, capturing distinctive aspects of their school's culture that they believe contribute to its success. A teacher at Shelby Middle School in Shelby, Michigan, said, "What makes Shelby Middle School good and unique is really the collegial teamwork. We allow time for colleagues to communicate, to work

The Consortium on Chicago School Research found that the most effective schools had developed an unusually high degree of "relational trust" among their stakeholders.



with and learn from each other." A school leader at Hill Classical Middle School in Long Beach, California, observed, "The teachers here talk together and do things together a lot. Teacher collaboration is part of the reason we are as successful as we are. If they didn't do it, I don't think we would have our success." A math teacher at the Linden School in Malden, Massachusetts, noted, "We always feel that we can ask each other for help or feedback about a particular instructional issue, or share examples of instructional practices that did or did not work well." And a teacher at the Coolidge Elementary School in Flint, Michigan, explained, "We cling together pretty tightly as professionals. If a teacher is weak in a particular area, other teachers will step in and work with them so that they master those essential skills. It is all about the strength of the team."

A similar study, *Beyond Islands of Excellence*, published by the Learning First Alliance, which focused on five high-performing

school districts with a significant portion of students from low-income families, reached many of the same conclusions. Particularly noteworthy was its finding that district leaders in the five systems studied determined that no single group would be expected to tackle instructional improvement alone. Instead, they redistributed leadership roles. Over time, the districts extended leadership from traditional positions, such as superintendents and principals, to include others: assistant principals, teacher leaders, central office staff, union leaders, and school board members.⁴

It is telling that such collaborative practices also characterize unusually strong schools in other countries. In 2010, the consulting firm McKinsey and Company published *How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better*, a report that analyzed 20 school systems that experienced significant, sustained, and widespread gains in student outcomes within coun-

descriptions of the practices that those schools have pursued.

DuFour describes his work as a “systems approach to school improvement,” which represents the antithesis of a culture based on individual isolation and independence. Concentrating on interdependent relationships, connections, and interactions, the focus is on creating powerful systems that promote the continuous improvement of the entire organization. Teachers are organized into grade-level, course-specific, or interdisciplinary collaborative teams in which educators work interdependently to achieve common goals for which members are mutually accountable. A process is put in place to ensure teams clarify the essential learning for each course, grade level, and unit of instruction; to establish consistent pacing; to create frequent common assessments to monitor student learning; and to agree on the criteria they will use to judge the quality of student work. Each team then

The pursuit of collaboration is inherently difficult because it entails upending top-down hierarchies that have characterized U.S. public schools for more than a century.



tries as diverse as Armenia, Chile, England, Ghana, Poland, and South Korea. Although the social and political context in which those schools function obviously varied, one common thread was a strong reliance on teamwork and close attentiveness to testing data.⁵ Michael Fullan, a Canadian educational researcher who has authored a host of books on school and organizational change and who composed the introduction to the McKinsey report, writes: “The power of collective capacity is that it enables ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things—for two reasons. One is that knowledge about effective practice becomes more widely available and accessible on a daily basis. The second reason is more powerful still—working together generates commitment.”⁶

The collaboratively driven practices identified by this research is reflected in the work of Richard DuFour, the former superintendent of the Lincolnshire, Illinois, public schools who is now the president of a firm that helps mostly suburban schools and districts develop professional learning communities. DuFour and his colleagues maintain a website (www.allthingsplc.info) that includes a list of about 150 schools across the United States and Canada that have followed their prescriptions, and features data about the schools’ test score performance that is uniformly impressive. The website also provides detailed

uses the evidence of student learning to identify individual students who need additional time and support, to discover problematic areas of the curriculum that require the attention of the team, and to help each member become aware of his or her instructional strengths and weaknesses.⁷

What makes the pursuit of collaborative practices so inherently difficult, as DuFour suggests, is that it entails upending traditional top-down hierarchies with teachers isolated in their own classrooms, a situation that has characterized U.S. public schools for more than a century. A 2009 survey by MetLife found that public school teachers spend an average of only 2.7 hours per week in structured collaboration with other teachers and school leaders, with just 24 percent of teachers spending more than 3 hours per week collaborating.⁸ Less than one-third of teachers reported observing each other in the classroom and providing feedback. That said, 90 percent of teachers agreed that other teachers contribute to their success in the classroom, including 51 percent who strongly agreed. Sixty-seven percent of teachers and 78 percent of principals responded that greater collaboration among teachers and school leaders would have a major impact in improving student achievement.

So what does the challenging path to greater collaboration look like?

Building a Collaborative Culture

Peacemaking and cultural change usually begin with courageous leadership, often involving constructive support from outsiders, including local foundations, community groups, and colleges, as well as consultants with a track record of helping public schools succeed. In the absence of federal or state policies geared toward promoting union-district cooperation—and amid the presence of many policies that promote conflict and mistrust—past instances of bridge building have occurred haphazardly. Harvard University professor Susan Moore Johnson has observed that such transformations have evolved independent of state, region, or policy climate, with the variation among collaborative partners wide and idiosyncratic.⁹ In many cases, as Rutgers University researchers Saul A. Rubinstein and John E. McCarthy have documented¹⁰ (see the article on page 22), sustained collaboration emerged only after relationships reached rock bottom, such as a strike, near-strike, or state takeover of a school district. Those crises eventually forced superintendents, school board members, and teachers' union representatives to recognize that conflict perpetuated a downward spiral, and that working together was the only way to reverse course.

In Springfield, Massachusetts, for example, a state takeover of the school system following the city's bankruptcy in 2004 became the catalyst for private meetings, facilitated by an independent think tank, between the superintendent and teachers' union president to heal wounds.¹¹ That led to the creation of a joint labor-management team, which conducted surveys of administrators and teachers about how to improve the city's schools. A long, extremely arduous, and often contentious process ensued, but over time trust began to build between administrators and teachers, who were given much greater voice in decision making. Outside community groups played a more active role in supporting the collaborative school revitalization effort, and better communication with parents was established. Union President Timothy Collins, who led Springfield's teachers throughout the entire period, said: "We are trying to create a culture that connects parents to schools. Our framework is about strengthening the ability of kids; it is about the community, parents, teachers, and kids." Student test scores have improved modestly since 2008, and the jury is out about whether the gains will continue, but no one in Springfield contends they took the wrong path. (Another strong example is that of Cincinnati; see the sidebar on page 10.)

In some cases, a particular initiative can transform school culture and spark collaboration. One example of a program that focused on building stronger cooperative relationships between administrators and teachers, as well as among teachers, is an effort in Iowa. The Authentic Intellectual Work (AIW) project began in September 2007 and entailed creating school administrator and teacher teams to follow a research-based framework focused on intellectual challenges that teachers present to students, rather than teaching techniques. The AIW approach, developed by University of Wisconsin–Madison professor Fred M. Newmann and his associates, establishes criteria for teaching that aims to maximize expectations of intellectual challenge and rigor for all students, elevate student interest in academic work, support teachers to enable them to provide an in-depth under-



The AFT has a long history of training and technical assistance for labor-management teams from school districts committed to collaborative school improvement.

standing rather than superficial coverage of material, and offer a common conception of student work that promotes a professional community among teachers of different grade levels and subjects.¹²

Schools applied voluntarily to the project and sent teams of teachers and administrators to institutes introducing them to AIW criteria and standards. During the school year, they also participated in regular on-site team meetings to critique and improve teachers' assignments, assessments, and lessons, with periodic on-site coaching provided by external advisers trained in AIW. Participants also attended midyear institutes where teams from different schools continue their professional development through subject-area workshops. The Iowa Department of Education provided financial resources (on average, just under \$5,500 per school in the program's fifth year). The program grew rapidly, expanding from nine high schools and 76 teachers in its first year to 106 K–12 schools and about 3,500 teachers by the spring of 2012.

A report for the Iowa Department of Education found that students in AIW schools across grade levels and subjects (reading, mathematics, science, and social studies) scored higher on the state's standardized test of basic skills and educational development than students in comparable non-AIW schools, and they

had higher percentages of students scoring above the state's standard for proficiency.¹³ Concern that those results may be skewed due to selection bias—more motivated teachers and administrators opting into the program could explain the favorable results—was minimized by an analysis showing similar test score trajectories in the AIW and comparison schools before the program started. Focus groups and case studies conducted as part of the state's evaluation of the program found that administrators felt they were giving teachers more relevant feedback because both administrators and teachers were part of the learning team. And by providing the framework for regular communication among teachers, those interviewed said their instruction was improving through collaboration with their colleagues. In addition, sharing the perspectives of teachers in different disciplines and grade levels also helped enrich curriculum and instruction, the report found.

Both of the major teachers' unions have initiatives to promote

labor-management collaboration, supported in part by private foundations. The AFT has a long history of training and technical assistance for labor-management teams from school districts committed to collaborative school improvement. And since 2011, the AFT has convened teams of administrators and teachers from districts pursuing collaborative approaches for joint learning experiences on best practices in teacher evaluation and Common Core implementation. The most recent of these conferences, held in September 2013 in Houston, titled "Connecting the Dots 2.0: Collaboratively Moving from a Sorting System to a Learning System," attracted administrator-teacher teams from about 25 districts across the country. In 2009, the American Federation of Teachers launched the AFT Innovation Fund, which cultivates and invests in school reform ideas proposed by local and state affiliates of the AFT through an annual competitive-grant process. Many of the 30 grants awarded to date have supported collaborative undertakings in local school districts,

Community Building in Cincinnati

One of the largest U.S. urban school districts to experience substantial and sustained improvements in student outcomes is Cincinnati, Ohio, now recognized as a national model of collaboration between administrators and teachers, along with parents and community groups. Although there were plenty of bumps along the way, including three superintendent changes and the contested election of a new teachers' union head between 2002 and 2009, the district has experienced a much greater degree of teamwork than the norm over an extended period.

In 1985, Cincinnati was the second district in the country to adopt Peer Assistance and Review,* a program that enlists master teachers to serve as mentors for novice teachers as well as struggling veteran teachers. The district also has experimented with a variety of team-based instructional approaches and innovative teacher compensation systems embedded in collective bargaining agreements dating back to the 1980s, driven initially, to a large extent, by longtime Cincinnati Federation of Teachers President Tom Mooney, who died in 2006. The city's pioneering Community Learning Centers,[†] which provide students with access

to a wide array of health services, after-school programs, tutoring, and other social supports on school grounds, are so highly regarded that they attracted some of New York City's recent mayoral candidates to visit and study how they might be emulated.¹

Although there is no way to tease out the degree to which any particular program is most responsible for Cincinnati's impressive results, the common thread among all the city's distinctive initiatives has been a culture that strives to overcome the barriers between teachers, administrators, parents, and service providers that prevail in many urban districts.

Critically, collaborative practices are embedded in the district's collective bargaining agreement. Cincinnati's most recent three-year collective bargaining agreement, which took effect on January 1, 2011, builds on previous contracts with a multitude of provisions ensuring that teachers have a strong voice in decision-making processes. Those structures range from districtwide committees that focus on budgets, employee benefits, school performance oversight, peer review, and disciplinary issues, to school-based teams. Each school is governed by a local decision-making committee comprising three



teachers, three parents, and three community members along with the principal. The contract also requires the creation of instructional leadership teams, which include elected leaders of teacher groups who work together on a daily basis, as well as parents, leaders of community service providers, and the principal.

Even the contract negotiation process in Cincinnati is built on collaborative strategies to solve common problems. This process follows Harvard's Principled Negotiation guidelines, which were established in part based on approaches originally undertaken in Cincinnati. Cincinnati Federation of Teachers President Julie Sellers cautions that "it's hard work to

*For more on peer review, see "Taking the Lead," in the Fall 2008 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/fall2008/goldstein.pdf.

[†]For more on the Cincinnati Public Schools, see "From the Ground Up," in the Summer 2009 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/summer2009/fromgroundup.pdf.

such as expanded learning time for students as well as teachers; a communications campaign for parents, businesses, and local institutions about the Common Core State Standards; and the development of new teacher evaluation and development systems. In addition to the AFT itself, supporters of the Innovation Fund are the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Helmsley Charitable Trust; past funders include the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, and the Pew Charitable Trusts.

The National Education Association Foundation also supports efforts promoting collaborative union-district teams. In May of 2012, the Gates Foundation provided a \$550,000 grant to the NEA Foundation to build on existing efforts to develop school-based collaboration focused on enhancing professional development. Ten school districts and unions were selected to receive support through a competitive process that included

evaluations of the extent to which labor and management had demonstrated a willingness to cooperate with each other. The new grant will also fund the development of case studies illustrating successful union-district collaborative practices, identify lessons learned, and provide operational strategies to help other communities emulate those initiatives.¹⁴

The U.S. Department of Education has also recently placed a priority in its grant-making programs on encouraging states and districts to work together with teachers and their unions to improve schools and raise achievement. The department's Teacher Incentive Fund, School Improvement Grants, Investing in Innovation Fund, and Race to the Top Fund all include a focus on transforming the teaching profession through labor-management cooperation. In February 2012, the department launched a program called RESPECT (Recognizing Educational Success, Professional Excellence, and Collaborative Teaching), aimed at directly interacting with teachers across the country to develop

be collaborative, and it's not always an easy process. It takes both sides making a commitment and concessions for it to work, and it must be built on formal structures that are recognized in contracts to be sustainable."

Another important element of Cincinnati's success has been close collaboration with community service providers, to reach those areas of a student's life that often affect academic performance but that schools generally cannot control. About a decade ago, Darlene Kamine (formerly a district consultant, now the director) led the development of Cincinnati's Community Learning Centers to bring together local social service providers on school sites to help support children and their families. During the school day, after school, on weekends, and over the summer, Community Learning Centers offer students services such as medical, dental, and vision care; tutoring and mentoring support; and sports and arts programs. Sellers says, "The teachers are thankful that the services are in the building because they know that the students' needs will be met, making them feel more secure and leading to better behavior."

In addition, beginning in 2007, more than 300 leaders of local organizations in the greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky area agreed to participate in a coordinated effort called Strive. Participating organizations are grouped into 15 different Student Success Networks by type of activity, such as early childhood educa-

tion or tutoring. Representatives of each of the 15 networks meet with coaches and facilitators for two hours every two weeks, developing shared performance indicators, discussing their progress, and learning from and supporting each other. An article in the

administrators and the teachers' union. It is no accident that Cincinnati Public Schools Superintendent Mary Ronan and the city's teachers respect each other. Ronan spent her entire career in Cincinnati, beginning as a middle school math and science

Central to Cincinnati's success has been what stakeholders there recognize as a strong degree of trust between school administrators and the teachers' union.

Stanford Social Innovation Review highlighted Strive as a model worth emulating, with its centralized infrastructure, dedicated staff, structured processes, and close relationships with school personnel and parents.²

Affirmed by student test results, improved parent involvement, stronger teacher-administrator relationships, and wraparound services provided by the community schools—which are now planned for every school in the district—Cincinnati's example clearly deserves much greater attention from struggling districts. Central to Cincinnati's success has been what stakeholders there recognize as a strong degree of trust between school

teacher in 1976. Later she became an elementary school principal and climbed the administrative ladder while forming strong relationships along the way. Julie Sellers, the Cincinnati federation president, says, "[Ronan] probably knows more teachers than any superintendent. I think it has been beneficial for her to get buy-in. Teachers feel comfortable talking to her."³

—G.A.

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ideas for transforming how teachers are recruited, credentialed, supported, compensated, promoted, and retained within the profession. Because this burst of activity has only been under way for a few short years, there is every reason to believe that it has the potential to snowball into a much broader movement—especially if participating districts experience improved student outcomes.

Collaboration in the Common Core Era

The growing body of research demonstrating connections between collaborative relationships in schools and improved student outcomes is consistent with studies in other institutional settings showing that higher levels of internal communication, teamwork, and responsiveness to data are associated with better results. Many companies have found, and research has con-

ducers, once wrote, “We will never transform the prevailing system of management without transforming our prevailing system of education. They are the same system.” Just as corporations could become more productive through enhanced teamwork that facilitated greater communication and problem solving, Deming and others argued, schools that promoted deeper relationships among teachers and administrators could better manage the many challenges connected to educating students.

The sociologist James Coleman, famous for his seminal work documenting the strong relationships between socioeconomic status and test score results, also researched the importance of “social capital” to the success of schools and other institutions. In 1988, Coleman wrote: “A group within which there is extensive trustworthiness and extensive trust is able to accomplish much more than a comparable group without that trustworthiness and trust.”¹⁶ More recently, Carrie Leana, a professor of organizations and management at the University of Pittsburgh who has conducted numerous studies analyzing the connection between school personnel relationships and student outcomes, wrote in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*: “When the relationships among teachers in a school are characterized by high trust and frequent interaction—that is, when social capital is strong—student achievement scores improve.”¹⁷

Nonetheless, the vast majority of public schools have not even attempted to transform their organizational culture toward greater collaboration. Both Republican and Democratic elected officials continue to fixate on incentives, driven mainly by the logic of economic theory, which they believe will induce school administrators, teachers, and students to perform better. For example, the decades-long (and still ongoing) movement to strengthen standards and penalize failure to achieve specified benchmarks was a central element of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and many state reforms that preceded it. The presumption underlying the standards-based approach was that threats associated with failure to attain specified goals would push everyone involved in school systems to perform better. The Common Core State Standards, which President Obama has backed enthusiastically and which a vast majority of states and the District of Columbia have agreed to adopt, could be the latest unsuccessful example if connected to a poorly conceived, primarily punitive accountability approach.

Content standards are essential in clarifying for the entire educational community the knowledge and skills that all students are expected to attain in school. But standards alone, with or without incentives, are not enough to enable school systems to help students achieve those goals. What’s missing are strategies that empower district officials, school administrators, teachers, and parents to work together to help increasing numbers of students meet those standards. Because the standards movement has evolved without any accompanying strategies that improve the way school systems work, it has induced relatively little progress on student achievement. A 2012 report by the Brookings Institution examined state-level changes on National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test scores from 2003 to 2009, controlling for the demographic characteristics of each state, in relation to the quality of state standards as rated by the Fordham Foundation—a strong proponent of standards.¹⁸

Studies in other settings show that higher levels of communication, teamwork, and responsiveness to data are associated with better results.



firmed, that they become more efficient and improve the quality of their work when they replace assembly lines with innovations like self-managed “quality circles,” flattened hierarchies, team-based problem solving, and other high-performance work practices.¹⁵ The late management expert W. Edwards Deming, who helped revolutionize U.S. manufacturing beginning in the 1980s by explaining successful Japanese innovations to domestic pro-

The Brookings study found there was no meaningful relationship between the quality of state standards as measured by the Fordham index and changes in NAEP scores. Nor did the rigor of performance levels states used to determine “proficiency,” as required by NCLB, relate to achievement on NAEP. The Brook-

Better student outcomes will emerge from concerted efforts to build school cultures on trust.



ings report also found that, within states, NAEP scores varied widely regardless of the standards employed, suggesting that setting benchmarks has failed to level out performance across districts within a state as advocates had claimed they would. The study noted, “Every state, including [top-ranked] Massachusetts and [bottom-ranked] Mississippi, has a mini-Massachusetts and Mississippi contrast within its own borders.”

In explaining why the standards movement has failed to have much of an impact on test score results, the Brookings report emphasized the enormous variation in the thousands of U.S. school districts and tens of thousands of schools. It is precisely because the U.S. system of public education is so decentralized and variable that team-based approaches to transforming the organizational culture within schools, in addition to establishing a common curriculum,* hold greater promise for addressing the

kinds of challenges Brookings identifies. In successful U.S. schools and districts, regardless of the particular standards under which they operate, teachers and administrators recognize their shared mission to work together to help struggling students learn and move to the next grade level. And because teachers in collaborative settings actively support each other, there is less variability in what they teach.

What will it take for the budding experiments in school collaboration to take hold much more broadly? The critical step is wider recognition that better student outcomes will emerge from concerted efforts to build school cultures on trust. If a few more urban districts follow Cincinnati’s example and produce comparable improvements in test scores and graduation rates, other district leaders—as well as governors and mayors—will take notice. In much the same way, within particular schools, when teachers see that students taught by a colleague consistently perform at higher levels on team-developed assessments, they become more receptive to changing their instructional practice. The positive peer pressure of the collaborative team process fosters improvement. As Richard DuFour, who has helped dozens of school districts undergo such successful transformations, says: “Nothing changes the mind like the hard cold world hitting it in the face with actual real-life data.” □

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Banding Together

Union City's Teachers and Administrators
Work Together to Improve Student Achievement



BY DAVID L. KIRP

The report of a blue-ribbon commission chaired by Joel Klein, former chancellor of New York City's public schools, and Condoleezza Rice, secretary of state in the administration of President George W. Bush, came as a shocker. *U.S. Education Reform and National Security*, published in the spring of 2012 and carrying the imprimatur of the prestigious Council on Foreign Relations, ominously concludes that the miseducation of America's students poses an imminent threat to our country's capacity to defend ourselves. "Educational failure puts the United States' future economic prosperity, global position, and physical safety"—physical safety!—"at risk."¹

What can be done to avert this catastrophe? Klein and Rice plump for giving parents more choice about what school their children attend, arguing that charter schools and vouchers will generate needed innovation. The old-line public schools cannot merely

be reformed, the report contends: if these institutions are going to do a decent job of educating our kids, a discipline-and-punish regimen of strict accountability is needed. Schools whose students aren't improving at a sufficiently rapid pace should be shuttered. Teachers' livelihoods should depend on how their students fare on high-stakes reading and mathematics tests, with pay raises handed to some and pink slips to others. Teachers should be recruited from among the top colleges, as Teach for America does, rather than being drawn mainly from run-of-the-mill education schools.*

For years, critics have lambasted the public schools as fossilized bureaucracies run by paper-pushers and filled with time-serving teachers preoccupied with their job security, not the lives of their students.

Washington has been delivering a similar, if less bombastic, salvo ever since the No Child Left Behind Act became law in 2002. The Obama administration's \$4.35 billion Race to the Top initiative, the crown jewel of its education reform agenda, morphed into NCLB on steroids, as the U.S. Department of Education deployed the carrot of new money to prod the states into expanding charter schools and closing low-performing public schools.²

Look dispassionately at the evidence, and you'll find little justification for the proposition that imposing perform-or-die

David L. Kirp is the James D. Marver Professor of Public Policy at the University of California at Berkeley and the author of numerous books, including Kids First: Five Big Ideas for Transforming Children's Lives and America's Future. This article is reprinted from Improbable Scholars: The Rebirth of a Great American School System and a Strategy for America's Schools by David L. Kirp with permission from Oxford University Press USA. Copyright © 2103 by David L. Kirp.

*Wendy Kopp, the founder of Teach for America, served on the commission.

accountability on teachers or expanding choice for students will cure what ails public education.

NCLB, with its hyperemphasis on the three Rs and its command to close or remake “failing” public schools, was supposed to end what President George W. Bush called “the soft bigotry of low expectations.” But a decade later, scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP, the nation’s report card, have improved only slightly; and poor, black, and Latino students haven’t been able to close the achievement gap. What’s more, despite the hosannas for charters, the bulk of the research shows that, overall, they don’t do a better job than traditional public schools.³

In short, there are no quick fixes, no miracle cures.

But if superstars and clean sweeps can’t deliver that, how can the typical school district, filled with ordinary teachers, most of whom grew up nearby, do it? Enter Union City, New Jersey.

Amid the hoopla over choice and charters, the public schools of this poor, densely packed community that is mainly composed of Latino immigrants—four miles and a psychological light year removed from Times Square—point the way toward a more promising and more usable strategy.

A quarter-century ago, Union City’s schools were so wretched that state officials threatened to seize control of them. But since then, the situation has been totally reversed. The district now stands as a poster child for good urban education. By bringing kids, elsewhere dismissed as no-hopers, into the mainstream, it has defied the odds.

Here’s the reason to stand up and take notice: from *third grade through high school, Union City students’ scores on the state’s achievement tests approximate the New Jersey averages.* You read that right—*these youngsters, despite their hard-knock lives, compete with their suburban cousins in reading, writing, and mathematics.*

This is no one-year wonder. Over the course of the past generation, these youngsters have been doing better and better. What’s more, in 2013, more than 90 percent of the students graduated—that’s nearly 15 percent higher than the national average. Moreover, three-quarters of them enroll in college, and top students are regularly winning statewide science contests and receiving full rides at Ivy League universities.

Nowadays, the reputation of a school system depends heavily on its high-stakes achievement test scores. The pressure keeps intensifying as the U.S. Department of Education and its handmaidens in the state capitals expect that, year after year, more and more students must prove their proficiency in the three Rs. New Jersey, like many other states, has made the outsized pledge that by 2020 every student will graduate from high school prepared for college or career.⁴

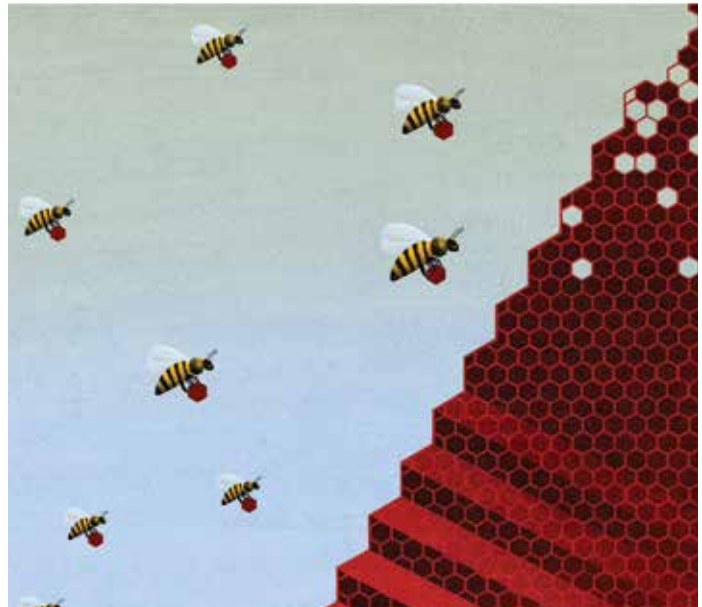
Union City’s schools are constantly struggling to balance this command against other priorities—sparking students’ creativity, responding to the health problems and emotional baggage that many of these youngsters bring with them, generating a sense of community within the schoolhouse. Sometimes these schools succeed in maintaining that balance; always they try. What’s more, those dazzling test scores don’t depend on drill-and-kill instruction—the schools aim to turn kids into thinkers, not memorizers.

Union City passes my personal “Golden Rule” test—I’d be happy if my own child went to school there.

What makes Union City especially headline-worthy is the very fact of its ordinariness, its lack of flash and pizzazz. The

district has not followed the herd by closing schools or giving the boot to hordes of allegedly malingering teachers or soliciting Teach for America recruits. And while religious schools educate a small minority of students in this city, not a single charter has opened there.

When boiled down to its essentials, what Union City is doing sounds so obvious, so tried-and-true, that it verges on platitude. Indeed, everything that is happening in Union City should be familiar to any educator with a pulse.



Union City has not followed the herd by closing schools or giving the boot to hordes of allegedly malingering teachers.

Here’s the essence:

1. High-quality full-day preschool for all children starts at age 3.
2. Word-soaked classrooms give youngsters a rich feel for language.
3. Immigrant kids become fluent first in their native language and then in English.
4. The curriculum is challenging, consistent from school to school, and tied together from one grade to the next.
5. Close-grained analyses of students’ test scores are used to diagnose and address problems.
6. Teachers and students get hands-on help to improve their performance.
7. The schools reach out to parents, enlisting them as partners in their children’s education.
8. The school system sets high expectations for all and maintains a culture of *abrazos*—caring—which generates trust.

This is a tale of evolution, not revolution; a conscientious application of what management guru W. Edwards Deming calls “total quality management.” “Improve constantly and forever the system of production and service,” Deming preached for half a century, and many Fortune 500 companies have profited from paying attention. So has Union City.⁵

The bottom line is simple enough: running an exemplary school system doesn’t demand heroes or heroics, just hard and steady work. Stick to your knitting, as the saying goes, stay with what’s been proven to make a difference, and don’t be tempted by every trendy idea that comes along. Of course that’s much easier to say than to do—otherwise we wouldn’t be talking about an achievement gap—but you don’t have to be a genius to pull it off.

The school system sets high expectations for all and maintains a culture of *abrazos*—caring—which generates trust.

Success stories are to be found across the country—in communities that spend frugally on their students as well as those that are lavishly funded, in big cities as well as rural communities, and in districts with black, Latino, and poor white students. In each instance, as we’ll see, the school system has taken the same playbook—the same priorities, the same underlying principles, the same commitment to hard and steady work—that Union City uses, adapting it to suit its circumstances.⁶

When Teachers Learn from Each Other

This story begins in the classroom: room 210, a third-grade class, presided over by longtime teacher Alina Bossbaly, whose students start the year speaking little if any English and, eight months later, will be taking the first high-stakes tests of their young lives. The classroom makes a logical starting point, for no matter how well-intentioned an initiative, how adroit the principal or managerially savvy the superintendent, if the teacher can’t ignite fires in the students then the rest of it doesn’t really matter.

All kids possess Holden Caulfield’s innate talent for sniffing out the fakes and phonies. The good news is that they can be galvanized by teachers who they intuit are committed to their futures. What President Barack Obama said in his 2012 State of the Union address—“every person in this chamber can point to a teacher who changed the trajectory of their lives”—fits all of us. That’s the goal of the teacher who presides in room 210—to have an enduring impact on these kids’ lives.

From the classroom to the school to the district, our story opens up. The best teachers will thrive even in the educational equivalent of the Sahara desert, but most teachers will do a lot better if they are part of a group effort and are given coaching,

shown how to use information about their students to their best advantage, and encouraged to forge a “we’re in this together” sense of rapport. That’s where George Washington Elementary School, where room 210 is located, enters the picture.

Many school districts operate as loose confederacies, with each school going its own way, and only pockets of excellence amid the underwhelming, but Union City has worked hard to make the pieces fit together. For the district’s administrators, maintaining a cohesive system is a never-ending grind, and constantly striving for improvement is harder yet. For the system builders in Union City, the 2010–2011 school year is especially rough, for a soup-to-nuts state review is looming. School systems aren’t autonomous; they operate in a world largely delineated by the politicians who oversee and fund them. In Union City, the Democratic mayor, who doubles as a state legislator, has been a godsend, and because of his clout, there’s a spanking new preschool and a \$180 million high school. With a Republican in the governor’s office, can he continue to work wonders?

Union City has done well by its children—very well indeed—but wherever you look there’s unfinished business. It would be a mistake, however, to regard that reality as evidence of failure. Rather, it’s a salutary reminder that America’s public schools cannot be quickly and easily transformed. In Union City, as in every school district, simple answers cannot be found and there’s always work that remains undone.

Nowhere at Washington School are the virtues of collegiality and collaboration more visible than in the third grade. The Dream Team—that’s how other teachers at Washington refer to Alina Bossbaly, Marilyn Corral, Jen Chuck, Mary Ann Hart, and Irene Stamatopolous. Although their personalities differ greatly, they mesh as smoothly as a 400-yard relay team, and this bond helps to explain why, year after year, their students have been the school’s top performers on the ASK, the state achievement test. On the May 2010 exam, 79 percent passed the reading and writing test, and an off-the-charts 93 percent were rated proficient in mathematics—the best results in the entire district.

It’s unlikely that these teachers would have been accepted by Teach for America. They all grew up within a half hour’s drive from Union City and never moved away. Only a higher education expert or someone who hails from northern New Jersey would have heard of the commuter schools—William Paterson, Jersey City, Stockton State, and the like—that they attended. Their GPAs weren’t necessarily stellar, and while some of them are more naturally gifted teachers than others, they all had a hard time at the start of their teaching careers.

The best explanation for their effectiveness is what they have learned—and keep learning—from their colleagues. Experience matters, of course, but these teachers improve—the passable ones becoming solid practitioners, and the good ones maturing into candidates for a demonstration video—in good measure because of the informal tutelage that the old hands give the newbies, the day-to-day collaboration, the modeling of good practice, and the swapping of ideas about what’s worth trying in their classrooms. “The most productive thinking,” the researchers conclude, “is continuous and simultaneous with action—that is, with teaching—as practitioners collaboratively implement, assess, and adjust instruction as it happens.”⁷

The culture of *abrazos*, of love and caring, at Washington School is rooted in close relationships of long standing between the principal, Les Hanna, and the teachers; among the teachers; and between the school and the families. These professionals know and trust one another, for they can draw on their history of working together and that eases the path to collaboration. Their ties to the kids come naturally because they have an intimate understanding of their students' lives. Many of these teachers grew up and still live close by, so when they talk about the students as *our kids*, they mean it almost literally.⁸

To be sure, there are the outliers, who stand apart from this community, as well as the grumblers, who look for slights and stir the pot, for rare indeed is an organization free from outliers and grumblers. But at Washington School, the outliers and the grumblers are decidedly in the minority. Almost everyone at this school wants to belong to their *own* Dream Team.



You won't find any Teach for America recruits here, and with good reason—they would destabilize the school. Bright they surely are, but raw intelligence does not translate into skill in the classroom. Fresh out of college and with only the briefest of training, they are at the very beginning of the learning curve, and so are less effective than experienced teachers like Alina. Washington School runs on loyalty and longevity, but 80 percent of Teach for America teachers quit after three years, many of them headed for careers in law or business. Presumably, those who sign on with Teach for America care for children, at least in the abstract, but these cosmopolitans have been parachuted into a community about which they know nothing.⁹

"We never use the Dream Team label to put ourselves above everyone else," says Alina Bossbaly. Just as she perceives her colleagues' faith in her ability to "Bossbaly-ize" her students, extracting the best from them every year, as both a compliment and an incitement, she regards the Dream Team sobriquet as both accolade and goad. "C'mon, girls, let's keep up the good work because it's expected of us," Alina cheers on the crew. "We take a lot of pride in what we do. Just like the kids want to be praised by other teachers, we want our parents and our administration to be proud of us. There's no 'I want my bulletin board to be better,' no complaining. We do it together. The attitude is contagious. It happens—you make it happen."

Traditionally, no one questioned what teachers were doing in their own classrooms, but no one came to their aid either, so they had to sort out the whats and hows of teaching on their own. Engaging in shoptalk with the teacher down the hall, pulling apart a particular lesson, or sharing ideas about how to handle a certain kind of student makes them better at their job. A wise district like Union City doesn't leave these exchanges to happenstance—it carves out time for teachers to work together.¹⁰

It's reality TV minus the camera crew on the second floor of Washington School, where the third-grade classrooms are clustered. Alina is the group's de facto leader, and from one moment to the next she may be the strategist, the influential, the calming influence, or the shoulder to cry on (occasionally she's the one doing the crying).

Among these teachers, only Alina has non-English speakers in her class, though other classes include students who are in an

The best teachers will thrive even in the educational equivalent of the Sahara desert, but most will do a lot better if encouraged to forge a "we're in this together" sense of rapport.

English-only environment for the first time. In the room around the corner from Alina, Irene Stamatopolous presides in no-nonsense, meticulously organized, and perpetually unflustered mode. "Irene is the first one done with everything," marvels Marilyn Corral, whose classroom is adjacent to Alina's. But Irene, who came to Washington School in 1990, wasn't always so sure of herself. "My first year was rough," she recalls. "The kids weren't learning, and I felt like I was teaching to the walls. I put it all on me—I thought that these children should be competing at the same level as children everywhere, and that's still my goal every year."

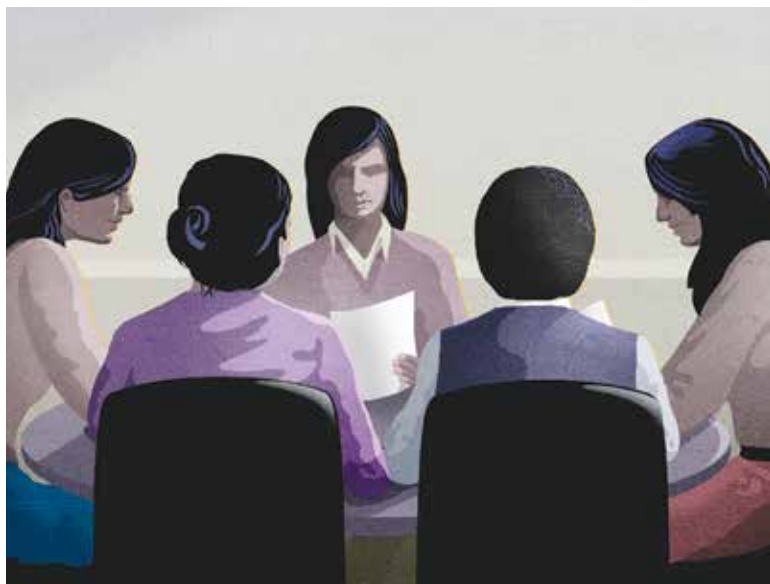
Some kids in Irene's room came to the United States just a couple of years earlier, and this is their first experience in a class where everything is in English. Other school districts treat students like these as if they were born speaking English, tossing them in with everyone else. In Union City, these children are assigned to a teacher like Irene, who's trained to teach English as a second language, as they ease their way from one language to another.¹¹

Marilyn Corral adds spice and drama to the mix. Instinctively, she'll fight if she feels she's been wronged, and Alina the diplomat sometimes finds herself talking Marilyn down.

Jen Schuck, one room farther down the hall, calls to mind the girl next door grown up, everyone's best friend, and she's the shyest

in the group. Mary Ann Hart, a tall, angular woman who could have sat for a Modigliani portrait, hovers slightly outside the frame. While that's partly due to the school's layout—her classroom is the farthest away—her personality doesn't lend itself to easy sociability. "I'm not really part of the social world of the other teachers," she tells me. "I'm intrapersonal—I value the quiet time."

This quintet has been together for a long time; Mary Ann, the latest addition, joined the group in 2005, a year after Marilyn.



In Union City, as in every school district, simple answers cannot be found and there's always work that remains undone.

Such familiarity can breed contempt, akin to what happens in a dysfunctional family, but these teachers genuinely like and, what's more important, respect one another. Personality and teaching style are intertwined, and if you spend some time in their classrooms, you can readily detect the variations. Alina will most likely be pirouetting among groups of students, Irene will be firmly in command, Marilyn passionate and boot-camp tough, Mary Ann nurturing, and Jen a gentle and soothing presence. Good teachers can't be shoehorned into a single mold. These are five distinct individuals, five distinct teaching styles—and five capable professionals.

These teachers are often in and out of one another's rooms, swapping materials and helping out, covering if one of them arrives late or has to leave for a meeting. And while some teachers safeguard the student projects they have devised as if they were top-secret documents, everything that's generated by a member of the Dream Team is open-source. "We are all very different women who

complement each other when we get together," says Marilyn. "We plan, we share our ideas. If something works well for me or I have a cute activity, I give it to my girls—I want them to look good too."

Sometimes I go to lunch with two or three of these women for *ropa vieja* and plantains at Gran Via, the Cuban hangout a few blocks away. Typically there's some girl talk, banter about who's getting married or whose kid has gotten into college. But the conversation often loops back to their work—what their students are up to, how they reacted to the latest writing prompt, what belongs in the all-important plan book.

Walk by room 210, Alina's classroom, most Thursdays at 9 a.m. and the din that rockets off the walls sounds like a gaggle of adolescent girls careening out of control. But the voices you hear aren't those of students—these are the third-grade teachers deep into planning mode. In every Union City school, the class schedule gives teachers in each grade 45 minutes a week for brainstorming, and the Dream Team uses this time to tackle the questions that arise in the practice of their craft.¹²

On this mid-October day, I'm sitting in the back of the room, scrunched in a chair designed with an 8-year-old in mind. Alina, Marilyn, and Irene gather around a table piled high with papers, all the projects that they've devised. They are all talking at once, raising their voices so they can be heard, while Jen is taking notes. "We get so excited," says Alina, who sounds super-excited. They are preparing their plan books for November, a month away, and despite the racket, this is serious business.

Hollywood portrays great teachers, like Robin Williams in *Dead Poets Society*, as great ad-libbers, but in this era of hyperaccountability a teacher must get the minutest and pickiest details exactly right. "We have to show what we're doing to the nth degree," Alina tells me.

Even though the state's achievement test is more than half a year away, it is already on their minds. On the 2010 exam for second-graders, a trial run for the New Jersey ASK, the 7-year-olds had a hard time understanding the passages they were asked to read, and those are the kids these teachers have inherited. "Their vocabulary is extremely small because many of them speak English only when they're at school," says Alina, by way of explanation. "When they're home, Spanish is what they hear, and they're watching Spanish TV."

Words, words, and more words—if these youngsters are going to prosper academically, they need to become immersed in a world of language. The more words you know, the faster you acquire new words, the research shows, and so the third-grade teachers spend lots of time honing the skills of comprehension. All their classrooms feature ever-expanding word walls, and each child is given a dictionary, something that most of them have never seen. "It's your tool, like the computer," Alina tells these computer-savvy youngsters. "You need to use it a lot."¹³

"The key is to make sure that from kindergarten on, every student, from the start, understands the gist of what is heard or read," writes literacy expert E. D. Hirsch Jr.,* and that's what these teachers are aiming for. If all goes well, their students will emerge from third grade with a bigger and more evocative vocabulary. They'll be using hundred-dollar words like "gorgeous" and "exquisite," not just

*For more on E. D. Hirsch Jr.'s work on reading comprehension, see *American Educator's* authors index at www.aft.org/newspubs/periodicals/ae/authors2.cfm.

“pretty,” and they’ll know how to extract the central themes from what they read, not just regurgitate the story line. Those skills make for good writers as well as successful test takers.¹⁴

Third-grade mathematics is just as demanding. By year’s end, these students must understand fractions; know how to convert $\frac{3}{12}$ into its simplest form; complete the pattern, $\frac{1}{3}$, $\frac{2}{6}$, ____; estimate the volume of a rectangle; and use the metric system. “Although the timetable is crushing,” says Marilyn, “we like to extend certain topics even if it takes more time.” They want their students to come away with an understanding of what they are doing, not simply memorizing formulas. That ability too will serve them well in later grades.

Although every teacher uses the same basic material, each of them can add to that core, and there are scores of books from which to select. Characteristically, the Dream Team agrees on the same stories, and today they’re in search of a good opening question for a story their classes will soon be reading—a question that will bring the tale to life. In making this kind of decision, they have character development in mind, not just on the page but among their own students. “I try to run my classroom as a community,” Jen tells me. “Of course I want them to become better readers, writers, and mathematicians, but in the long run, I really want them to become good people, respectful and responsible for themselves.”

These teachers know intuitively that efforts designed to shape children’s values can have a powerful long-term impact. They bat around several candidates for the opening gambit: “What moral lesson did you learn?” “What are the moral messages behind the story?” “What lessons did the author want to teach?” Eventually they agree that they’ll ask how the author’s moral message can be incorporated into everyday life. Each of them inserts that theme in her plan book, and each will launch a classroom dialogue with that question. But what happens next depends on their students’ reactions, and in each class the ensuing discussion will bend in distinct ways. “A lot of the time, inspiration comes from the kids,” Jen explains. “Someone will say something that will spark an idea, and then my entire lesson will take a turn.”¹⁵

A Steady Focus on Continuous Improvement

A century ago, Max Weber, an architect of modern social science, wrote about the “routinization of charisma,” and while Weber had religious leaders in mind, his analysis characterizes any enterprise that hopes to endure when an inspirational leader departs. Flashy companies have forgotten this lesson to their detriment. “The organizations that are most successful ... are the ones where the system is the star,” writes Malcolm Gladwell, contrasting the enduring success of dishwasher-dull Procter & Gamble with the multibillion-dollar debacle at Enron. “The talent myth assumes that people make organizations smart. More often than not, it’s the other way around.” This understanding of how the world works captures Union City’s approach: people come and go but the organization endures.¹⁶

Except for a handful of school chiefs who style themselves as crusaders, superintendents don’t sweep anyone off their feet. There’s no glamour to what they do, no dash and swagger either. It’s just the daily grind. In “To Be of Use,” poet Marge Piercy honors the work of such people. “I want to be with people who submerge in the task, ... who are not parlor generals and field deserters,” she writes. “The work

of the world is common as mud. ... But the thing worth doing well done has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.”

Sandy Sanger, Union City’s superintendent since 2003, typifies the breed. His Irish German family, who moved to Union City when he was a young boy, was perpetually poor—“a bit dysfunctional,” he says, skipping the details. He earned his bachelor’s degree at nearby William Paterson College, and for his entire career he has been on the Union City school payroll, as a history teacher, basketball coach, and administrator.

That’s a familiar career path for a conventional guy—you might even call him a “square”—and in Union City, being conventional counts as an asset. Sandy knows how to use bluntness—his motto is “GOYA,” legendary football coach Lou Holtz’s admonition to “get off your butt”—and when to deploy gentle suasion as well. Square-jawed and often stern-visaged, his gray hair receding, he has put on considerable weight since his college basketball-

The best explanation for their effectiveness is what teachers have learned—and keep learning—from their colleagues.

playing days, and the six-packs of Diet Coke in his office refrigerator vouch for his never-ending attempts to shed pounds. He spends his summer vacations on the Jersey Shore, devouring thrillers by Lawrence Sanders, not boning up at Harvard on the latest theories of leadership with high-flying colleagues. On the school district’s website, he identifies his hero as Jesus Christ, and he tells me that after he retires, he plans to spend his time “giving back to the Lord through local missions and outreaches.”

“I’m no genius,” says Sandy, “but I do have a talent for choosing good people,” and selecting Silvia Abbato to be the assistant superintendent in charge of academics illustrates this talent. Silvia arrived in Union City in 1969 in the first wave of migration from Cuba and, despite having to learn English on her own, she did well at school. As an undergrad at Jersey City College, she thought hard about becoming a doctor, but teaching was in the family’s bloodstream. Both her parents had PhDs from the University of Havana, but when they came to the United States, they had to start over. Her father drove a truck and her mother did embroidery to support their family while they learned English. They persevered, receiving their teaching certificates, and they eventually made it into the classroom. Those life stories conveyed a potent message—that teaching is not just a career but the secular equivalent of a religious vocation.

When she became the assistant superintendent in 2003, her first big assignment was to convince the high school math teach-

ers that they needed to rewrite the curriculum. At that time, fewer than 40 percent of the high school students were passing the mathematics section of the state's graduation exam, but the teachers didn't want to hear from her. "When I arrived at the high school, the teachers were angry," she remembers. "They sat with their arms crossed. The message was plain: 'What is this kid going to show me?'" "I know you are working hard," she reassured them, "and we are going to show you how to get better." By the end of that workshop, "the arms were uncrossed and teachers were volunteering to write new material. And as the math scores improved, they wanted to do more."

No one would describe Sandy or Silvia as a charismatic personality, but charisma is not a job requirement in Union City. "We're worker bees," says Silvia.

Ask Sandy Sanger what accomplishments he's proudest of and he'll tell you about two things—the school system's blueprint,

assessments—the second item on Sandy's checklist of major accomplishments—mimic the New Jersey ASK, and students' scores have proven to be good predictors of how they will do on the state tests. The results are supposed to focus teachers' energies on skills the students haven't picked up, such as solving word problems in mathematics or making sense of complex prose passages.

The data also pinpoint which students, as well as which teachers, most need help. They specify how the youngsters in a particular class are doing overall; how this year's results compare with last year's as well as how they compare with the scores of other fourth-grade teachers; which kinds of questions are causing trouble for students; and which students—those who take the test in Spanish, those with special needs, those who are new to the school district—are having the toughest time, and which are on the verge of passing.

These professionals know and trust one another, for they can draw on their history of working together and that eases the path to collaboration.

which lays out what it takes to run an effective school, and its homegrown assessments of student performance. There's nothing in this recital that will earn headlines or bring a president to town, but it's the sort of incrementalism that can keep a successful enterprise humming.

The "Blueprint for Sustained Academic Achievement" emerged in typical Union City fashion, as a practical way to solve a problem. In 2005, the district's reading and mathematics test scores slipped, and while the dip was slight, it prompted serious soul-searching. Sandy's message was unequivocal: "This can't happen again."

One plausible explanation for the drop-off was the uneven quality of stewardship at the schools—too many managers and too few educational leaders—and that realization prompted the drafting of the blueprint. Silvia, its primary author, looked to see what the principals in the highest-achieving schools in the district were doing and catalogued those effective practices. She describes the 73-item checklist as a how-to book—"Leadership 101"—that spells out what had worked best in the school district.

The precepts sound obvious, even platitudinous, but before the blueprint was drafted, some principals weren't following them. Take the first item on the checklist: "Analyze testing results for targeted students [those on the verge of passing] to maximize student potential." A history of counterproductive behavior underlies that dictate. (A more sound practice, of course, would be to focus on maximizing all students' potential, not just those on the cusp of passing a test.)

In recent years, Union City has invested considerable time and money to construct its own reading and mathematics tests. These



The "no excuses" camp of education reformers—those who are pushing for greater "accountability" and who believe that teachers should be judged on the basis of how much they raise students' test scores—would salivate at the opportunity these tools offer to reward and punish teachers, but this isn't how the information gets used in Union City.¹⁷ There, the emphasis is on helping teachers do a better job. Armed with this information, a principal knows where to send a coach or an experienced teacher to model what works in the classroom.

In every school, these test results are intended to launch one-on-one conversations between the principal and the teachers, and out of those meetings, a strategy for improvement is meant to emerge. But Silvia discovered during her school visits that some principals, perhaps fearful about potential confrontations or unaware of what intervention might work, were stashing the scores in a desk drawer. Hence the first precept of the blueprint: use the test scores.

Other checklist items sound similarly commonsensical: "conduct professional development with staff," "assist the administration in the development of the school's budget," "review teachers' plan-books for instructional strategies to support best teaching practices," "deploy data-driven decision-making," and "emphasize learning experiences that require all students to use higher-order thinking

skills, develop in-depth knowledge about concepts, and be able to apply what they learn to real life situations.” Each one of them responds to a failure of leadership that Silvia encountered in the field.

Principals who have been on the job for years may not want—or may not be able—to do things differently. “Change comes hard,” says Sandy. But in recent years, several principals have retired, and this has created an opening for improvement. “We can build leadership capacity,” Silvia tells me. “Mentors have been working with teachers but not administrators. We are beginning to change that.”

One thing the district can’t change is the heavy dose of oversight from state and federal officials. Local control of education was once regarded as inviolate—as sacrosanct as “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” as one superintendent put it—but on many policy matters, the state now has the final say.¹⁸

Whether the measure is the NAEP test, the nationwide metric, or the percentage of students who graduate, New Jersey ranks near the top. This accomplishment matters, especially in a state trying to shed its massive inferiority complex, its status as the butt of New York’s jokes. And naturally, it is hell-bent on remaining among the best. The baleful gaze of state education officials focuses on its weakest links, *Abbott** school districts such as Trenton, which graduates fewer than half of its students despite having received buckets of money.¹⁹

The state acts as a middleman, obliged to bring its districts in line with federal dictates. Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, the rule has been that every child must be proficient in mathematics and reading by 2014, and every year, each school district is supposed to be progressing toward that goal. The command remains on the books, but as it became blindingly obvious that no state could meet it, in 2012, the U.S. Department of Education effectively nullified the law by allowing many states, including New Jersey, to set their own benchmarks. With these waivers came new marching orders—the states had to guarantee that, by 2020, every student would graduate from high school prepared for college or career. Never mind that this new aspiration is as unachievable as the old one—Washington still passes the buck to the states, which in turn will send it along to the school systems and on down the line.

“Do better or face the consequences” is the unvarying message. That’s where the nation’s 13,500 districts, Union City among them, enter the picture.

Reports by the carload flow from Sandy Sanger’s office to Trenton. The most onerous state intrusion is the audit conducted every few years—the Quality Single Accountability Continuum, or, less tongue-trippingly, QSAC, jargon that camouflages a world of pain.

Asking a school system to look in the mirror, as the QSAC does in requiring a detailed self-evaluation, sounds like a good idea. Trust but verify: inviting knowledgeable outsiders to look over the administration’s shoulder also makes intuitive sense. “QSAC keeps you on your toes,” Sandy says philosophically. But when bureaucrats are given free rein, good ideas can spin out of control, and what’s worth doing disappears under an Everest of paper.

*In 1998, the New Jersey Supreme Court, as a result of a school funding lawsuit known as *Abbott v. Burke*, sought to address disparities between the state’s impoverished and more affluent school districts. Through court orders and subsequent state regulations, 31 high-poverty school districts, including Union City, received increased state funding to provide a variety of mandated supports for students and teachers, most significantly full-day preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds.

Preparing for the QSAC devours thousands of hours and can turn into a travesty of bureaucratic overreaching. A few years earlier, the district lost points in the state’s arcane grading system because its Asian American students—all two of them—had “only” scored in the 98th percentile on the state’s English and mathematics tests. Even though those scores nearly topped the charts, they didn’t demonstrate the “adequate yearly progress” that the federal law requires for each racial and ethnic minority, as well as for English language learners and special needs students.

This audit not only covers the big ticket items, like the overall academic record and the safety of the schools. It also extends to the minuscule, such as the text of every pamphlet that’s sent home to parents and the minute-by-minute details of teachers’ plan books. For every meeting that involves the administration and a school principal or a parents’ group, the agenda, attendance lists, and minutes must be gathered—thousands of discrete items that fill binders fat enough to fell a small forest. This process is repeated

Engaging in shoptalk with the teacher down the hall, pulling apart a particular lesson, or sharing ideas about how to handle a certain kind of student makes these teachers better at their job.

every three years—more frequently if the schools come up short, which is typically the case with the *Abbott* districts.

For Union City, the QSAC reviewers will come calling in the spring. Sandy, who has been through this ordeal twice before, knows what must be done to satisfy the officials in Trenton. He sets the wheels in motion during the preceding summer, marshalling his troops with the precision of a military operation.

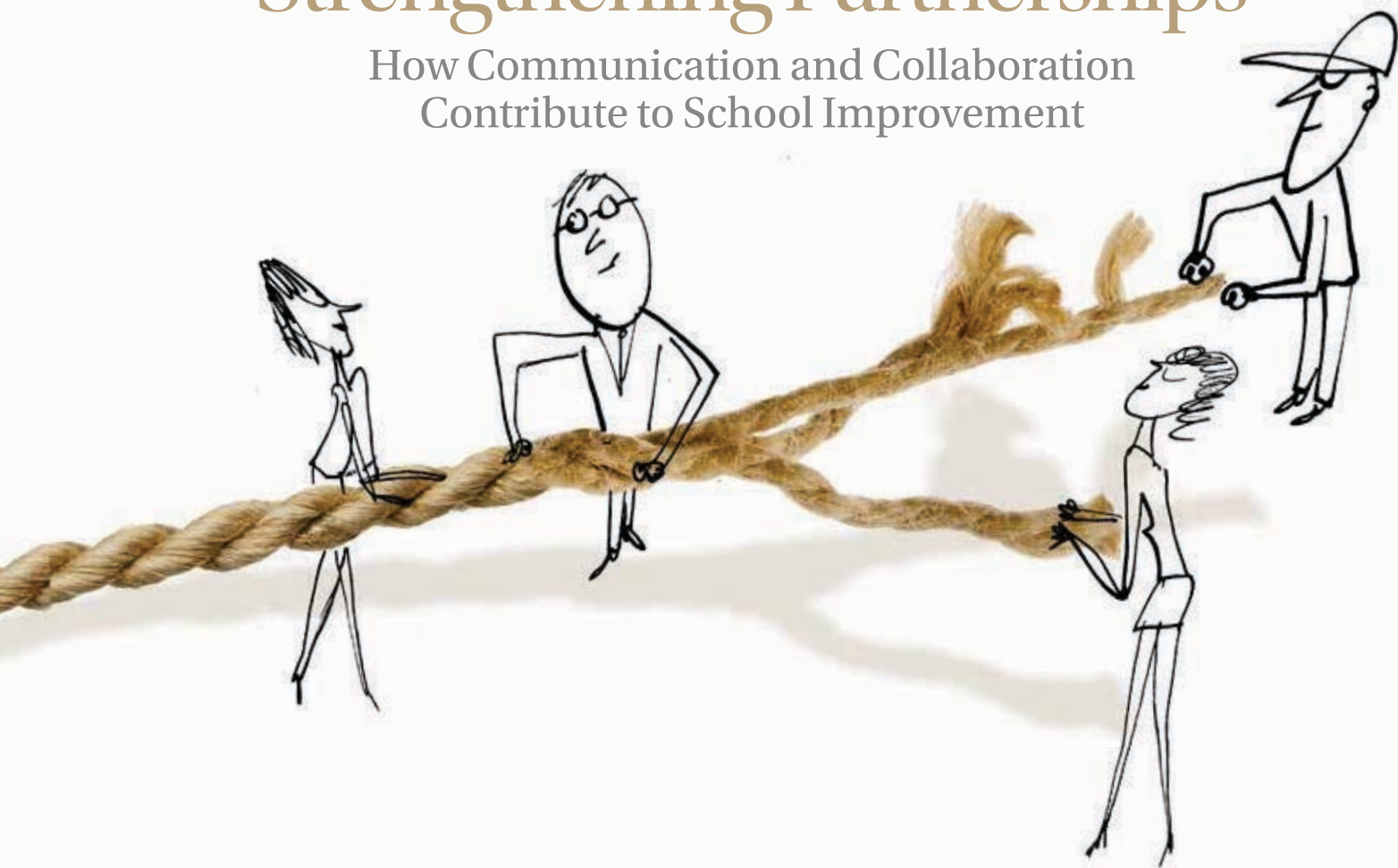
By the following summer, Union City will learn whether it has survived the QSAC inquisition. But whatever the outcome, there won’t be time or laurels on which to rest. Sandy, Silvia, and their colleagues will be scrutinizing a new batch of state test results, picking principals, revising the curriculum, addressing budgetary concerns, and the like. Theirs is a story without an ending.

Over the long term, demography poses the most profound challenge to Union City’s public schools. As more poor and uneducated youngsters from across Latin America throng the community, students whose profiles differ markedly from those who came from Cuba years earlier, the schools’ task becomes harder and harder. The administration is too smart to leap at the facile answer, too self-aware to believe in a magic bullet. It will stick with its strategy of continuous improvement—*plan, do, review*. □

(Endnotes on page 44)

Strengthening Partnerships

How Communication and Collaboration Contribute to School Improvement



BY SAUL A. RUBINSTEIN

For most of the past decade, I have studied union-management efforts to improve public education. In this time, I have witnessed extraordinary examples of teachers, union leaders, and administrators who are working together to improve teaching and learning. These examples provide a counterstory to the policies that seek to reform education through the use of markets—specifically, charter schools and vouchers—or through the use of high-stakes testing as a way to evaluate teachers and improve instruction.

Reforms based on market forces and testing take school improvement in the wrong direction, yet these ideas have dominated the policy debate over improving public education. In this debate, teachers and their unions have often been characterized

as the problem, not part of the solution. What is missing in all the discussion is a systems perspective on improving public schools that examines the way schools are organized, the way decisions are made, and the way teaching and learning are improved.

Before starting my career in academia, I spent nearly 10 years as a consultant to unions and management that were trying to improve their quality and productivity performance in the face of increasing global competition. While unions and management have conflicting interests around certain elements in the employment relationship—for example, the division of profits—they also certainly have common interests in making the organization as strong as possible with high-quality products and services. So working together around those common interests made sense. I was also interested in the “productivity of democracy,” the idea that more democratic organizations, ones that value employees’ voice and offer them more decision-making opportunities, can be more productive. When employees are allowed to contribute meaningfully to solving problems and making decisions, better solutions are found, and those solutions are implemented more effectively because people are more committed to solutions they have a hand in developing.

This approach toward improving productivity and quality included developing systems of extensive employee participation. It involved creating more-collaborative team-based organizations that could plan, identify, and solve problems; make decisions; and

Saul A. Rubinstein is a professor in the School of Management and Labor Relations at Rutgers University and the director of its Program on Collaborative School Reform. His research has focused on labor-management efforts to transform industrial relations, work systems, and performance in a wide variety of industries. This article is adapted from two reports by Rubinstein and John McCarthy, written for the Center for American Progress: Reforming Public School Systems through Sustained Union-Management Collaboration (2011), and Teacher Unions and Management Partnerships: How Working Together Improves Student Learning (forthcoming).

implement solutions. I've been fortunate to work with unions and management in a variety of industries undergoing these extensive changes due to globalization, including auto, steel, electronics, telecommunication, aerospace, pharmaceutical, and paper-making—and now education.¹ My first experience extending this participative approach to public schools dates back to 1988 in Altoona, Pennsylvania, where I saw the potential of collaborative arrangements.²

Through those years consulting, I learned that collaboration between labor and management around common interests such as quality can be a tremendous competitive advantage. I also saw how unions as democratic institutions can mobilize a workforce in ways that management cannot achieve on its own. Union leaders who are elected by members have a level of greater trust that management on its own cannot generate. Unions mobilizing members and providing independent leadership can add tremendous value to organizations by finding new solutions to problems and implementing those solutions effectively.³

I also witnessed that, while organizations could develop team-based work systems and joint union-management partnerships to improve problem solving, decision making, and performance, sometimes those changes were undermined by the forces of international markets. So, I went back to graduate school to learn more about globalization. My doctoral work focused on General Motors' Saturn Corporation, an excellent example of a union-management partnership that achieved levels of quality never before seen at GM.⁴ I became convinced that this type of industrial democracy could lead to a competitive advantage as well as a much more satisfying and fulfilling work experience for all employees, because they had more voice in identifying and solving problems, and shared in managerial decision making and firm governance.

After many years researching these partnership arrangements in a variety of industries, I was invited to join a study tour of unions in the United Kingdom that Sandra Feldman, then the president of the American Federation of Teachers, and officials from the Albert Shanker Institute were taking. Our visit there focused on another form of industrial democracy—the learning representative system. In this case, union representatives in the U.K. were taking on the responsibility for helping members improve their skills and knowledge through additional training and education. This was my first introduction to the AFT, and I became aware of a number of excellent examples of long-term union-management partnerships that were transforming education in local school districts. These partnerships fostered collaborative approaches to curriculum development, scheduling, budgeting, strategic planning, hiring, K–12 subject articulation, interdisciplinary integration, mentoring, professional development, and evaluation. I became interested in whether a set of underlying patterns existed that was common to all these partnerships that had been sustained for more than a decade. This led to the research in which I am still engaged today.

Where Partnerships Are Strong

In the first stage of this research, my doctoral student John McCarthy and I studied seven cases of collaborative partnerships between teachers' unions and administrators who had been working together in innovative ways to improve teaching quality and student performance for more than a decade.⁵ The school districts included:

- ABC Unified School District in Cerritos, California;
- Toledo Public Schools in Ohio;
- Hillsborough County Public Schools in Florida;
- Plattsburgh City School District in New York;
- Norfolk Public Schools in Virginia;
- Independent School District 15 in St. Francis, Minnesota; and
- Charlotte County Public Schools in Florida.

These districts are located across the country and are a mix of urban and rural, large and small. A number of AFT leaders helped us identify these districts and locals based on their strong reputations for having institutionalized a long-term collaborative partnership between the district administration and the local union focused on school improvement, teaching quality, and student

When employees are allowed to contribute meaningfully to solving problems and making decisions, better solutions are found.

achievement. AFT staff often accompanied us on our visits. So these cases were not selected randomly, and I do not claim they are a representative sample of all districts nationally. Rather, they are examples of what is possible when unions and administrators develop collaborative partnerships to manage and improve a school district. As such, they are worthy of study to see what can be learned from their stories.

Our research team visited all of these districts and interviewed union presidents, school board members, superintendents, central office administrators, principals, union representatives, executive board members, teachers, support staff, and members of the community. In addition, we studied their collective bargaining contracts, memorandums of understanding, student performance data, and relevant internal reports.

We then analyzed these cases to identify the themes and patterns that were common to all these districts. The themes fell into four broad categories:

1. Motivation for initiating collaboration
2. Strategic priorities for improvement
3. Supportive system infrastructures
4. Sustaining characteristics

1. Motivation for Initiating Collaboration

In almost all of these cases, a crisis or some pivotal event helped motivate a change in union-management relations. In most cases, a strike, or a vote to strike, was the critical event that prompted the districts to seek a new direction in their union-management relationships. In doing so, they recognized that the adversarial relationships that led to the strike or vote were coun-

terproductive and not in the best interests of teachers, administrators, or students. Union and administrative leaders in each district made the choice to change their relationship, which was the first step in establishing a collaborative partnership in school improvement.

2. Strategic Priorities for Improvement

In their union-management partnerships, all districts emphasized joint work on strategic priorities, including teaching quality and student performance. To that end, they all engaged in substantive problem solving and innovation for improvement. For example, districts developed union-led professional development, new systems for teacher evaluation, teaching academies, peer-to-peer assistance, and mentoring programs. The result for most of these districts was very low levels of voluntary teacher turnover.

These districts also created multiple opportunities for teachers and administrators to work jointly on analyzing student performance data in order to target areas for improvement. School-level partnerships facilitated collaboration on developing data-based improvement plans. Teachers also formed teams at the grade or department level to use student performance data to guide improvement efforts. Partnership districts reported high levels of student achievement, including in schools with high percentages of students receiving free or reduced-price lunches.

Through these partnerships, districts engaged in substantive innovation and experimentation around areas critical to student achievement and teaching quality. Some examples of these innovations include the joint establishment of:

- Reading programs in schools with high percentages of students receiving free or reduced-price lunches;
- Peer assistance and review programs;
- Systems for teacher evaluation that measure student growth;
- Teacher academies focused on professional development;
- Curriculum development; and
- Sophisticated systems for analyzing student achievement data to better focus student interventions.

The partnerships are clearly vehicles for system improvement, not ends in themselves.

3. Supportive System Infrastructures

Culture of Collaboration

Most of these districts have created an organizational culture that values and supports collaboration. In this “culture of collaboration,” school district administrators promote trust and value the leadership that the union brings to the entire district. Both union and management leaders speak of a culture of inclusion and involvement, as well as the importance of respect for teachers as professionals and for their union. Collaborative planning, problem solving, and decision making are embedded in the way the district is managed.

Shared Governance and Management

Additionally, these districts have established a model of shared governance, in which formal joint planning and decision-making forums allow the union and administration to work together and align the strategic priorities of the district. They have also developed an infrastructure that gives the union significant input in

planning and decision making around issues such as curriculum, professional development, textbook selection, school calendar, and schedules. The act of managing is viewed as a set of tasks that leaders (both union and administration) must engage in for the benefit of teachers and students. As a result, “management” is not viewed simply as a separate class of employees.

Collaborative Structures at All Levels

Collaborative structures are found at all levels in these districts. Such structures allow district and union officials to promote and facilitate collaborative decision making at the school level through forums such as building teams, school improvement committees, school steering committees, leadership teams, or school advisory councils that meet regularly. These bodies are vehicles for planning and decision making around issues such as goal setting, budgeting, policymaking, discipline, and safety.

Both union and management leaders speak of a culture of inclusion and involvement, as well as respect for teachers as professionals.

Union as a Network

In these partnership districts, collaboration extends beyond top district administrators and union officials into the school buildings themselves. Data teams, grade-level teams, and department teams are led by union members who participate in substantive decision making around curriculum, instructional practice, and K-12 articulation. Further, most of these districts have developed peer-to-peer mentoring programs to support professional development courses that involve teachers as teacher-leaders, master teachers or mentors, and professional development trainers. When we look at the numbers of union members involved in district- or school-level committees or teams, along with the numbers of teachers involved as mentors, teacher-leaders, master teachers or professional development trainers, in many cases they add up to more than 20 percent of the union membership, which is a high percentage of members involved in union activities compared with most locals. This results in a dense union network, meaning that professional relationships between union members and administrators, and among union members themselves, are very strong and allow for open lines of communication for improving teaching and learning. The “denser” or stronger the network, the better the district can solve problems and implement new initiatives or programs rapidly and effectively with a great deal of support. This union-based implementation network is something managers report they could not create on their own. It also institutionalizes the partnership in the district by embedding collaboration in the way the district is managed.

Social Capital and Joint Learning

These partnership districts have invested heavily in creating opportunities that allow for joint learning and for building the professional capacity of administrators and teachers. In such districts, opportunities exist for union and management leaders to learn together through shared educational and training experiences. These experiences, in turn, allow for knowledge acquisition (the development of human capital) while also strengthening working relationships (the development of social capital).

In some cases, the development of both human and social capital has meant inviting hundreds of union leaders and administrators to attend planning retreats within school districts; AFT-sponsored events such as the TEACH conference, Center for School Improvement training, Union Leadership Institute programs, offerings from the Professional Development Program for Educators; university-based educational programs; and corporate leadership programs. Since these experiences are shared between the union and management, leaders from both hear the same message and get the same information at the same time. Through this education, they can experience each other as colleagues with mutual interests who can work together to improve teaching and learning.

4. Sustaining Characteristics

Long-term leadership plays an important role in districts with strong labor-management partnerships. In most of these districts, the local unions have been led by longtime union presidents—some who have led for as long as several decades. Many of these districts have also enjoyed long-term leadership from their top administrators. Continuity of leadership provides stability for these district-union partnerships, and also allows for effective working relationships to be formed directly between the union president and the superintendent. Most of these superintendents came from the districts themselves, with some having served as teachers and union members before joining the administration. Such steady internal labor markets support the culture of collaboration by allowing trust to be built between leaders who have known each other and worked together for years.

These districts have also recognized the importance of engaging the community. They have involved community members

or parent groups in school-based governance structures or in district-level planning processes.

In many districts, after deciding to engage in greater collaboration with management, local unions have also become increasingly involved in school board elections by recruiting or supporting specific candidates. In some cases, they have helped

Local unions and districts have received support for partnerships from the national union. AFT President Randi Weingarten has made collaboration a high priority.

defeat candidates who did not support a partnership approach to school governance. These locals have realized that since the school boards hire the superintendent, electing board members who support collaboration will increase the chances of finding willing partners in administration.

These local unions and districts have also received support and resources for their collaborative partnerships from the national union. AFT President Randi Weingarten has made collaboration in school reform and improvement a high priority:⁶

More and more, ... our leaders are building strong relationships with school administrators, doing the hard work of collaborative school improvement—and producing better results for children. ... The one thing [partnership districts] all have in common is a culture of collaboration—a universal recognition among business leaders, public officials, community leaders, parents, and teachers that they can accomplish great things for students if they work together.





The quality of formal school-level partnerships had an important and significant positive impact on student performance.

This support has translated into several types of AFT-sponsored technical assistance, including the conferences and training I mentioned earlier, as well as resources from the AFT Innovation Fund, which supports initiatives for union-led innovation and improvement.

In some cases, unions and districts have negotiated contract language (see the sidebar on page 10) or memorandums of understanding that support their collaborative efforts so as to institutionalize the partnership. For instance, these contracts may call for collaboration in district-level decision making by requiring union representation on key committees. In other cases, enabling language in contracts has expanded opportunities for union involvement in decision making through school board policy that promotes inclusion in professional development programs, textbook selection, hiring, peer assistance, mentoring, and teacher academies.

What We Have Learned

These examples of collaborative school reform represent an alternate path in the debate over education policy. This path views schools as systems; it allows for a focus on improving and restructuring public schools by the people working in the schools themselves to improve planning, decision making, problem solving, and the ways teachers interact. The districts described here demonstrate how teachers and their unions have been vital to improving public education systems in collaboration with administrations.

To highlight these examples, the AFT, in collaboration with scholars from Rutgers University's School of Management and Labor Relations, Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations, and the Sloan School of Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, organized the first National

Conference on Collaborative School Reform, which was held in October 2010 (see the box on page 6). This event was a precursor to the conferences later sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. Thirty-five district teams of union leaders and administrators from across the country came to Washington, D.C., to learn from these examples and the relevant research, and to discuss how models of collaboration, which contribute to school improvement, might be pursued in their own districts. Conference participants heard presentations from teams representing the ABC Unified School District in Southern California; Plattsburgh, New York; Toledo, Ohio; St. Francis, Minnesota; Norfolk, Virginia; and Hillsborough County, Florida. They explained how deep, sustained partnerships have resulted in true shared decision making at the district and school levels, new support networks for innovation and instruction, and data-informed decision making in schools.⁷

These union leaders and managers discussed how partnership efforts were created and sustained over the past two decades. In 2011, the research from the conference was published in a policy report by the Center for American Progress, *Reforming Public School Systems through Sustained Union-Management Collaboration*, by Saul Rubinstein and John McCarthy.⁸

Next Phase of Study: Collaborative Partnerships and Student Achievement

At a time of increased focus on student performance data, we felt that an important but underexplored area of study within union-management partnerships was the relationship between collaboration and student achievement. So, we are currently examining the patterns of collaboration that occur within schools among teachers and administrators, and looking to see if and how they affect student performance.⁹ As a first step, we collected data from the ABC Unified School District and the ABC Federation of Teachers in California. This district has 30 schools and more than 900 educators. Forty-six percent of its students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches.

To understand the impact of partnerships and school-level collaboration on student performance, we used partnership attitude and climate surveys, data from the California Academic Performance Index (API), and social network analysis. The API includes standardized test results in math, English, social studies, and science as well as graduation and dropout rates. Social network analysis explores whom teachers and administrators communicate with on a regular basis, how they communicate, and what topics they discuss. From this we can model the patterns of communication within and between individuals and schools.

We measured partnership quality at the school level using questions from a districtwide partnership survey in 2011 that dealt with union-management communications, collaboration among staff, and openness to input from all educators. Communication network data were drawn from a social network survey administered in 2011. In this network survey, educators were asked to indicate the other teachers and administrators they communicated with, and, specifically, if they communicated to:

- Discuss student performance data;
- Discuss curriculum development, cross-subject integration, and articulation;
- Share, advise, and learn about instructional practices; and
- Give or receive formal and informal mentoring.

The density values for these networks are calculated as the proportion of existing communication links in a school, to the total possible in the school.

Results

Using our 2011 survey data on the quality of school partnerships, and analyzing those data against 2011 and 2012 student performance data, we were able to examine the relationship between the strength of the partnership and both the level of API performance in 2012 and the difference in student performance between 2011 and 2012. First, we found that partnership quality bears a positive and statistically significant association with overall API performance in 2012. A 1-point increase in partnership quality in 2011, based on a survey with a scale of 1 to 4, corresponded with more than a 25-point gain in API scores in the 2011–2012 school year after controlling for poverty. On average, this represents an increase of 3 percent in API for each 1-point gain in partnership quality. Further, we found that partnership quality in 2011 bears a positive and statistically significant association with performance improvement from the 2010–2011 school year to the 2011–2012 school year. For example, a 1-point gain in partnership quality in 2011 corresponded to a roughly 15-point gain in API scores over the following year.

When we analyzed the relationship of school-level partnerships (based on the partnership survey) with school-level collaboration (based on the network survey), we found that those schools with the strongest partnerships also had the highest levels (density) of teacher-to-teacher communication, meaning that more teachers discussed student performance data, curriculum, articulation, instructional practice, and mentoring with one another in stronger-partnership schools than in weaker-partnership schools.

Figure 1 illustrates the difference between the “density” of collaboration—the strength and number of professional networks among teachers—in stronger- and weaker-partnership schools. For purposes of illustration, this chart combines the densities of the four communication topics—student perfor-

mance data, curriculum and articulation, instructional practice, and mentoring—and compares the density (percentage of teachers communicating regularly with each other) in the strongest- and weakest-partnership schools. As you can see from the chart, teachers in the stronger-partnership schools have almost twice the communication density as the weaker-partnership schools. As with the relationship between partnership quality and API performance, this association was statistically significant.

Unions play a leading role in school improvement by partnering with administrators to improve teaching and learning.

In addition, we found a very interesting difference in the structure of union-management relations in schools with strong partnerships when compared with weaker-partnership schools. As shown in Figure 2, building representatives in strong-partnership schools tended to have more frequent and less formal communication with their principals than did building representatives in schools with weaker partnerships. Again, this difference is statistically significant. This finding illustrates the changes that occur through union-management partnerships at the school level. Institutional union-management partnerships take place between the union as an institution and the school district, but individual partnering also takes place between the superintendent and union president, and between the principal and building representative. What we see in the ABC school district is a strong association between the frequency and informality of communication between the building representative and the principal, and the quality of the partnership from the perspective of the teachers.

Figure 1: Frequency of Teacher-to-Teacher Communications

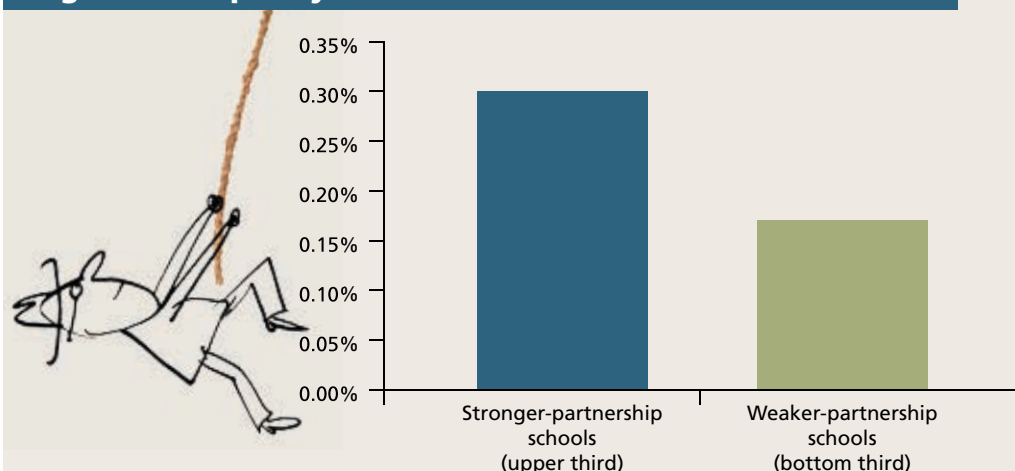
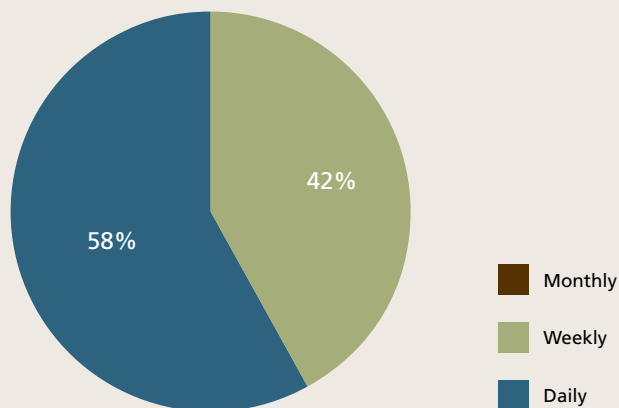
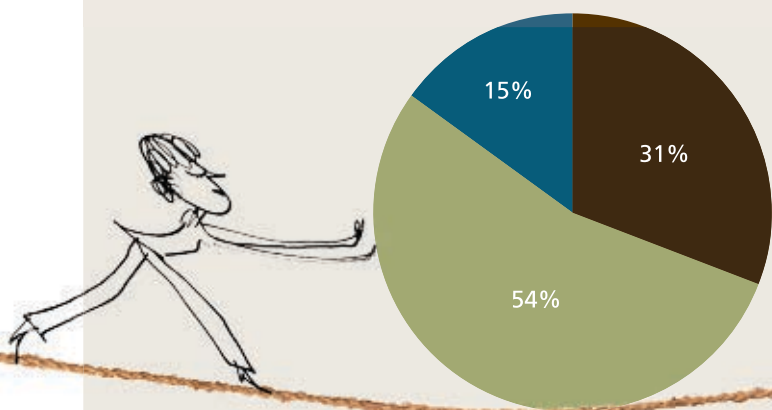


Figure 2: Frequency of Communication between Building Representatives and Principals

Stronger-Partnership Schools



Weaker-Partnership Schools



In schools with strong partnerships, the nature of communications between building representatives and their principals tends to be more frequent and less formal than in weaker-partnership schools.

In summary, our research leads us to conclude the following:

- The quality of formal partnerships between teachers' unions, administrators, and teachers at the school level had an important and significant positive impact on student performance as well as performance improvement, even after controlling for poverty.
- High-quality teacher-administrator partnerships predicted "denser" school-level collaboration and communication (stronger and more numerous networks between teachers and administrators) around: (a) student performance data; (b) curriculum development, cross-subject integration, or grade-to-grade integration; (c) sharing, advising, or learning about instructional practices; and (d) giving or receiving mentoring.
- Strong-partnership schools have structurally different patterns of union-management collaboration. The strength 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.

Our research explores the significant and important impact that school-level union-management institutional partnerships can have on teacher collaboration and student performance. We find that partnerships offer an often overlooked, yet highly relevant, story in policy debates over public education. Our research suggests that unions can and do play a leading role in school improvement by partnering with administrators to improve teaching and learning. Such partnerships add tremendous value to school districts seeking to improve and sustain high levels of student achievement.

Union-management partnerships are a sound alternative to narrow, market-based testing and accountability strategies. Tests can reveal shortcomings in knowledge, but not how to deal with those knowledge gaps. In contrast, union-management partnerships are designed to create solutions for improving teaching and learning. Indeed, partnerships provide the basis for a network facilitating teacher-to-teacher and teacher-to-administrator communication and collaboration, which are crucial to school improvement.

Innovations in collaboration will not be replicated or sustained, or become institutionalized, without widespread support from state and federal policy. In light of our findings, we suggest that policy-makers provide schools and districts with incentives for collaborating on evaluation, mentoring, professional development, and peer assistance and review programs, and also allow for waivers or mandate relief from unproven testing, accountability, and market reforms for districts implementing collaborative reform efforts.

These partnerships take work and are difficult to sustain. But once a culture and system of collaboration is institutionalized, great results do emerge. We hope these findings and experiences will help other districts and local unions that want to pursue a strategy of collaborative school reform. And we hope this research will encourage policymakers to design incentives for greater collaboration among teachers' unions, administrations, and boards of education. □

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In Connecticut, a Road Map for Union-District Relations



ILLUSTRATIONS BY INGO FAST

duo, a much less dour one. Her partner is Meriden's superintendent, Mark Benigni. A native of Meriden and the city's former mayor, Benigni has committed himself and his central office staff to working with the union. Benham and Benigni contact each other several times a day and meet regularly. The partnership is not only between the two leaders; members of the union's executive board and the superintendent's cabinet also are in close touch with each other.

While Meriden administrators and union officials engage in the usual personnel matters such as hiring and budgeting issues, much of their time is spent coming up with joint professional development programs to hone teacher talent. Together, the union and the district have created the Peer Coaching Program, in which educators partner with each other to improve instruction; the Leadership Academy, in which teachers learn to become stronger leaders in their buildings; Professional Learning Communities, in which teachers meet to review student achievement data; and the Meriden Teachers Sharing Success program, in which the district's most effective teachers open up their classrooms to teachers seeking to improve their craft.

The union and the district have also partnered to turn two elementary schools with high poverty rates into extended-day schools, so students can participate in a variety of enrichment activities, including art, music, and physical fitness, to which they are not usually exposed to a great extent during the regular school day. To implement this program, union representatives and district officials worked together on an application to the AFT Innovation Fund. The union was awarded a \$150,000 grant in July 2012 and received another for nearly the same amount in July of this year.

It's money that Meriden desperately needs in order to offer some of its most disadvantaged students an array of learning opportunities they otherwise would not receive. Located in south-central Connecticut, 20 miles from Hartford, Meriden is a small, picturesque city. Horseshoe-shaped cliffs known as the Hanging Hills surround the area and inspire pride in Meriden residents. They like to point out that a stone observation tower, "Castle Craig," peeks out from those hills and stands as the highest point within 25 miles from shore anywhere on the East Coast from Florida to Maine.

Though the hills have remained, the jobs have not. Once referred to as the "Silver City" for its production of silverware, Meriden used to boast a number of manufacturing jobs, but those steadily left in the 1970s. Since then, economic development has sputtered along. Many residents work in retail at Meriden's Westfield shopping mall or in healthcare positions at the city's regional hospital, MidState Medical Center.

Of the district's 9,100 students, 70 percent received free or reduced-price meals in 2012–2013, the year for which the most

recent figures are available, compared with 37 percent who received such meals statewide that year. Meriden Public Schools also enroll a much higher percentage of students who are English language learners: 12.1 percent, compared with 5.63 percent statewide for that same year.

Because of the city's economic challenges, union and district officials have joined forces to strengthen their schools in the hopes that public education will revitalize both the community and the local economy. In Meriden, educators and administrators know that a high-quality education can significantly improve a child's life chances. And they know that a district and a union cannot deliver a great education while fixated on an "us against them" mentality. "[Teachers] know in me they have

someone who's not going to accept that this nation's public school system is the cause of all our problems," says superintendent Benigni. "They know they're going to have someone who says poverty is real. It's a huge factor." As a result, he has spent much of his time making it clear to teachers that the district fully supports them in trying to mitigate poverty's effects.

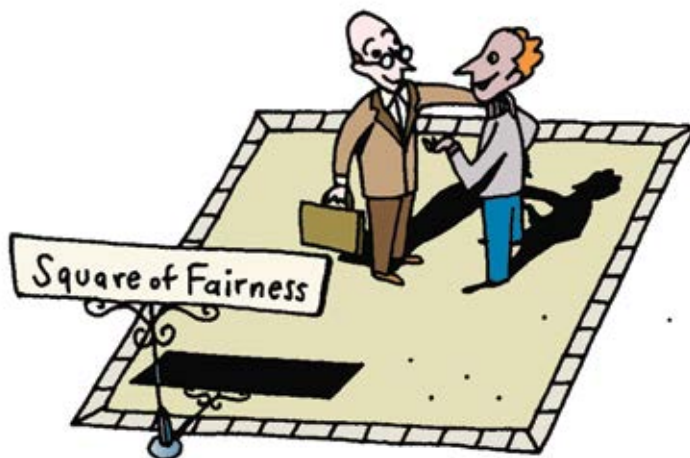
Laying the Groundwork for Collaboration

Even before Mark Benigni became superintendent in 2010, Erin Benham had started to

explore collaborating with his predecessor. Benham became MFT president in 2007. At the time, Mary Cortright was superintendent, a position she held from 2003 to 2010. Earlier in her career, Cortright had served as vice principal at Lincoln Middle School, where Benham taught eighth-grade language arts. For the last five years, Benham has worked at Lincoln as a literacy coach.

Since Benham and Cortright had established a solid relationship at Lincoln, the two started off working well together. Benham took the relationship a step further in the spring of 2009, after she read an article on labor-management collaboration in *American Educator*. The article detailed a thriving union-district partnership in California's ABC Unified School District.* In ABC, the article said, the superintendent and the union president meet weekly, their deputies meet monthly, and members of the union's executive board and the superintendent's cabinet routinely call each other. The open lines of communication between teachers and administrators have allowed them to devise ways to boost student achievement, especially in the district's high-poverty schools.

Intrigued, Benham shared the article with Cortright and then suggested the two of them meet monthly over lunch to catch up on union and district happenings. Cortright agreed. "We would go through personnel issues," Benham recalls. They would also share what each side was considering bringing to the table during



*To learn more about labor-management collaboration in ABC, see "From Picket Line to Partnership: A Union, a District, and Their Thriving Schools," in the Spring 2009 issue of *American Educator*, available at [www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/spring2009/dubin\(2\).pdf](http://www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/spring2009/dubin(2).pdf).

upcoming contract negotiations in order to avoid arbitration. Benham says that after those meetings, she would report back to her executive board about what was discussed, and Cortright would do the same with her staff.

Soon after the meetings between Benham and Cortright started, the two leaders and their staffs found themselves meeting more regularly, not to promote greater collaboration but because of the downturn in the economy. “Unfortunately, during Mary’s tenure, we went through a lot of layoffs,” Benham recalls. For a couple years, more than a dozen teachers were let go, and twice that amount were reassigned to different schools. These meetings did not generate ideas for the union and district to work more closely together to support teachers and improve student achievement. The purpose was simply to keep the schools afloat during the recession.

Since then, the district has not laid off teachers. The first year Benigni became superintendent, in 2010, the district implemented a handful of furlough days but no layoffs, and no layoffs or furloughs have happened since. Benham recalls that Benigni “was pretty proud of that.”

Benigni came to the superintendency as a well-known Meriden resident. He was young, extroverted, and athletic. He graduated from Orville H. Platt High School, one of the district’s two high schools, in 1989. In college at Western Connecticut State University, he played football and was president of his class. After graduation, he taught special education for four years in Meriden, and then became an assistant principal in a neighboring town, though he still lived in Meriden. In 2001, while he was assistant principal, he ran for mayor of Meriden, a part-time position. At 29, he won the election.

Benigni served four terms and then stepped down when he became a high school principal in another neighboring town. The new position demanded too much of his time to continue as mayor.

When the Meriden superintendency opened up, he applied and landed the job. “We were very excited,” Benham recalls. As union president, she had sat on the interview committee, which for many years has been standard practice for administrative hires in the district. Benham recalls that during his time as mayor, both political parties at one time or another had endorsed Benigni. “That will probably tell you something about his ability to make people see things,” she says. As mayor, “he was great,” she adds, “very much like he is as superintendent, very transparent.”

Benham and Benigni had worked together in the district earlier. When Benigni was pursuing his doctorate in education, he worked as an administrative intern at Platt High School, his alma mater. Benham, her colleagues, and their eighth-grade students from Lincoln were housed at Platt for six years while a new, larger middle school was being built. As part of Benigni’s internship, he

worked with Benham and the eighth-grade team, and they enjoyed a good relationship.

As soon as Benigni became superintendent, one of the first people he wanted to meet with was the union president: Benham. He called her cell phone one day in early July 2010. He told her he had a list of topics to discuss with her right away. “I knew that we had to meet and lay out how we were going to be true partners and move this district forward together,” he says.

But Benham was in Seattle attending an AFT convention. The meeting had to wait until she returned home. “If she said she was in New Haven, I might have driven there,” Benigni jokes.

On July 13, Benham and Benigni met. They each brought a list of items to discuss; Benham even still has the piece of paper

on which hers was written. Among the 17 topics on her list were a report on class size and equity, personnel moves, and an administrators’ meeting, next to which Benham had scribbled “suggested to be included.”

Benham’s note refers to central office meetings that she now regularly attends. It was at this first meeting between Benham and Benigni that they agreed that, once a month, Benham and a member of the union’s executive board would meet with the superintendent and his

upper-level central office staff to discuss a range of issues. The purpose of the meeting “was to make sure that I knew we were on the same page on most things,” Benigni says.

That first administrative meeting with Benham and another union representative took place in the fall of 2010. Three years later, these meetings continue. They are largely informal, and there is typically no agenda. They can run as long as three hours or last an hour. It just depends on what everyone wants to discuss.

Keeping the Partners Informed

On a recent morning in September, 13 people sit around a table in a small conference room in the district’s central office. All are district officials except for Benham and Stacy Whittington, a kindergarten teacher and a member of the union’s executive board.

Benigni begins the meeting by asking Miguel Cardona, who is in charge of Meriden’s new evaluation and development plan, to give an update. The plan is part of a teacher evaluation pilot mandated by the state. The program will rate educators as “exemplary,” “accomplished,” “developing,” or “requires action.” Those ratings are based on a mix of factors. Student scores on state standardized tests count for 22.5 percent, as do student scores on district standardized tests, while parent surveys, schoolwide performance data, and classroom observations make up the rest of the evaluation. Four of the district’s elementary schools, Thomas Hooker, Benjamin Franklin, Israel Putnam, and Roger Sherman, are piloting the program this year.

Meriden administrators and union officials spend much of their time coming up with joint professional development programs to hone teacher talent.

Cardona explains that he and some of his colleagues from the central office and the union have just returned from Texas, where they attended an AFT conference, “Connecting the Dots,” which focused on teacher evaluation. “What we heard in Houston supports what we’re doing in Meriden,” Cardona says. “If it’s a unified approach, student achievement will increase.” Cardona then shares his plan to give presentations throughout the district in the next month on how the pilot will work.

“What’s the word from the staff on the involvement in the process?” he asks Benham. She acknowledges there is some anxiety among teachers. But “I always tell the people at the four schools, you’re the lucky ones,” she says. “You get to try it this first year.” She agrees that Cardona’s presentations will help dispel any misconceptions.

Tom Giard, the assistant superintendent for personnel and staff development, suggests that Cardona answer some frequently

The teachers have agreed to open their classrooms to fellow teachers looking to improve their instruction.

Giard says that some of the teachers are uncomfortable being singled out for great work. He says the district needs to reassure them that “it’s OK to feel different from your peers” and “it’s OK to share.” Both are topics that this week’s training will address.

Benham confirms that several teachers have said they don’t want the attention. She says that one teacher on her executive board even asked her, “Why did you put me in for this? I like to be under the radar.” Benham says she told her, “I didn’t put you in. This is where you landed.”

Later in the meeting, Alvin Larson, the district’s director of research, tells the group about the presentation on state assessments he will give to the board of education this week. He says that over the last few years, scores in reading and mathematics in the elementary grades have steadily increased (see the charts on

Thanks to a union-district initiative, teachers and building administrators stay after school one hour on Thursdays to collaborate and review student data.

asked questions and post them on the district’s website. Then Benigni reminds the group that for the pilot to work, “it has to be about development, not just evaluation.”

Since he became superintendent, Benigni has committed his administration to focusing on staff development (notice the “staff development” part of the personnel director’s title). Three years ago, the union and district created a peer coaching program where teachers volunteer to work with a peer who teaches the same grade level at a different school. The pair agree to visit each other’s classroom for at least one full day and then give feedback. Many teachers have formed lasting professional relationships from the program. Giard says that 28 pairs have signed up for it this year.

Giard then gives updates on two other programs: the Leadership Academy and Meriden Teachers Sharing Success. Twenty teachers have been accepted into the Leadership Academy (enrollment is capped each year), a joint union-district program that began three years ago. Teachers who enroll learn what it means to be an instructional leader in their buildings. They also each engage in a yearlong project focused on improving their school or the district as a whole.

Giard also announces that training for Meriden Teachers Sharing Success begins Thursday. For the program, which is taking place for the first time this year, the union and district selected 17 teachers in grades K-5 based on conversations with administrators, classroom observations, and four years of student test scores.

page 33). But results for tenth-graders have tended to fluctuate. Science results for fifth-graders are increasing slightly, though for eighth-graders they remain flat. “Testing isn’t going to change the gaps,” he says. The hope is that the programs the group has just discussed will continue to help close them.

Toward the end of the meeting, Benigni asks Benham, “Any feedback on the dashboards?” Last year, the district rolled out a computer program that annually provides each teacher data on the number of classroom referrals he or she made (how many times students were sent to the office for discipline problems), the number of sick and personal days he or she took, and the growth that teacher’s class made in test scores from the previous school year. The data, known as “dashboards,” include comparisons with the school and district averages for classroom referrals and sick and personal days. For student growth scores, the dashboards include comparisons for school, district, and state averages.

Benham tells the group that she’s received few concerns about the dashboards other than what exactly principals plan to do with the data. Benigni tells her to reassure teachers that “principals know that these are for teachers’ self-reflection.” He also says that if a teacher’s growth scores for four consecutive years do not meet the district’s average, then principals should offer instructional support.

Later, Benham tells me that teachers had serious concerns when the district implemented the dashboards last year. She

recalls several teachers telling her, “We should never allow this.” But Benham explained to them that superintendents in the district have had this data at their fingertips for years. Now the district is sharing the information with teachers for the first time so that teachers themselves can see whether they need to improve their practice. Like many other states, Connecticut is moving toward tying part of teacher evaluation to test scores, hence the state-mandated pilot. Benham recalls telling teachers that by showing them their scores the district is not keeping secrets. In the long run, teachers will benefit by having access to this information that eventually the state will require as part of evaluations.

Enabling Teachers to Focus on Data

The focus on data extends to other parts of Meriden’s labor-management partnership. One of the first initiatives that Benigni and Benham discussed when he took office was the creation of Professional Learning Communities that would meet on Thursday afternoons.

Benham and Cortright, the previous superintendent, had tried to implement what are now known as “PLC Thursdays” but struggled to make it work. Their plan was that students at all grade levels in the district would be dismissed from school 30 minutes early every Thursday so that teachers could stay after school one hour to collaborate and review student data. Because of issues with busing and coordinating dismissal times, the plan stalled.

When Benigni became superintendent, he and Benham and the MFT worked to implement it. They resolved the busing issues, and showed parents and teachers who were initially skeptical that the district was not reducing instructional time for students. Teach-

ers agreed to teach five minutes more on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays during their “wraparound time,” the time the contract already required them to be at school but not have students in front of them. The plan actually increased instructional time by 15 minutes each week *and* gave teachers the vital collaboration time they needed to help boost student achievement.

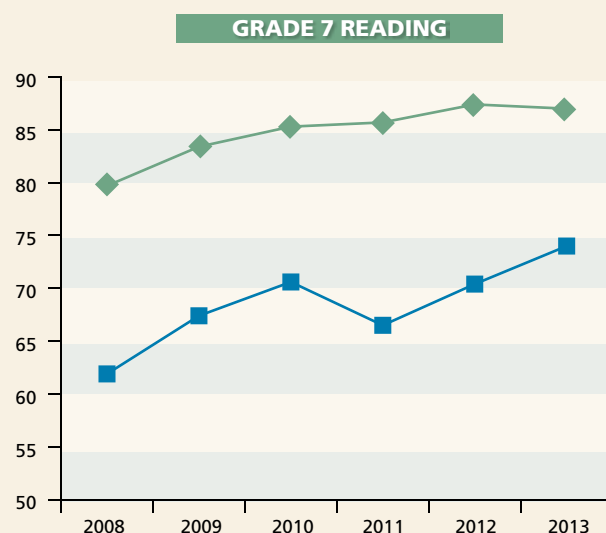
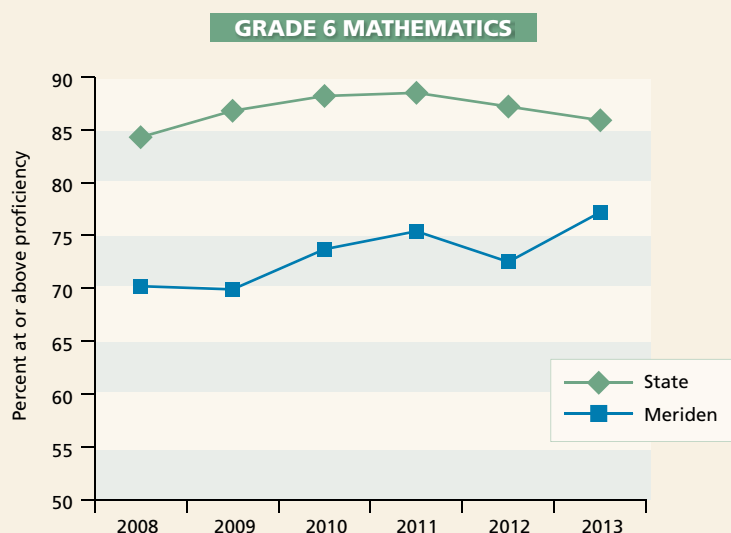
On a Thursday at 2 p.m. in the first week of October, buses full of students depart from Lincoln Middle School as teachers inside the building break into their groups to discuss student data. Schools can structure their PLC Thursdays any way they see fit, as long as teachers are working together.

Each week, Lincoln organizes its Thursday afternoons differently. One Thursday it will hold a faculty meeting for the entire staff, and on another it will have teachers review data within their academic departments. On this Thursday, teachers and administrators have split into four groups: a school climate committee, a positive behavior support committee, a higher-order thinking skills committee, and a schoolwide data committee.

As part of this latter committee, the chairs of each department—mathematics, science, social studies, language arts, special education, physical education, and art—as well as the school’s principal, gather in a conference room in the main office. Today they review the results of different assessments. First, they discuss a district mathematics assessment that all students in grades 6, 7, and 8 took at the start of this school year. The high percentage of students who scored “below basic” concerns them. “At the beginning of the year, it’s always pretty low,” says Krista Romeo, the mathematics department chair. “They do lose a lot over the summer.”

Reading and Mathematics Achievement Steadily Improves for Meriden’s Students

The charts below show the percentage of sixth-graders in Meriden and in Connecticut who passed the state mathematics assessment, and the percentage of seventh-graders who passed the state reading assessment. While student achievement in Meriden falls short of the state average, students in the district are making steady, incremental progress. These results are encouraging given that Meriden’s poverty rate is nearly double the state average: 70 percent of Meriden’s students, compared with just 37 percent of students statewide, are eligible for free or reduced-price meals.



NOTE: THE DATA PRESENTED HERE WERE DRAWN IN OCTOBER 2013, FROM THE CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION’S ONLINE RESULTS DATABASE FOR THE CONNECTICUT MASTERY TEST, AVAILABLE AT [HTTP://SOLUTIONS1.EMETRIC.NET/CMTPUBLIC/INDEX.ASPX](http://solutions1.emetric.net/cmtpublic/index.aspx).

“We need to have year-round school,” Dianne Vumback, the principal, says only half-jokingly. She then says that teachers must discuss the purpose of this test with the students. “We’ve got to say this is important.”

Dave Manware, the chair of the social studies department, says he doesn’t think the entire staff views these scores as “our school’s” scores, as all teachers should no matter what subject they teach. “They’re all our kids,” Vumback agrees.

The group then turns to the results of a mathematics vocabulary assessment that students took the previous week. Romeo, the mathematics chair, reminds everyone that the assessment, which featured all multiple-choice questions, asked students to identify the correct definitions of words such as “product, sum, factor, difference, composite, and area.” Sixth-graders performed better on the test than seventh- and eighth-graders, Romeo explained, because sixth-graders had just started a unit on these words. The teachers then discuss ways to reinforce student learning of these definitions. Among their suggestions is having students make flashcards.*

Vumback wraps up the meeting with the suggestion that students should discuss what they found challenging about the assessment when they meet in their advisory groups—small groups of students who meet with a teacher who is their adviser—next Thursday.

Marie Broadway, the chair of the special education department at Lincoln, who attended the meeting, has taught in the district for 24 years. She says that before PLC Thursdays, the school only held a 45- to 60-minute staff meeting once a month, which left little time for reviewing student achievement data and deciding how to adjust instruction accordingly. Teachers appreciate that time is now set aside weekly to talk to “colleagues about how to help develop the reading skills that are lacking or the math skills that are lacking,” she says.

Vumback, the principal, says that the PLCs give everybody a voice. They “allow us to be one school.” In a sense, Thursday afternoons in Meriden represent the joint effort of the union and the district to make everyone—teachers and administrators—see that they belong to the same team and are working toward the same

goal of providing a high-quality education to all children.

Extending the Labor-Management Effort into Schools

Perhaps the most ambitious labor-management effort to come out of Meriden so far has been its transformation of two elementary schools into extended learning time schools. Two years ago, the AFT invited Benigni and Benham and their staffs to attend a conference in Boston organized by the National Center on Time and Learning, a group that provides technical support to schools and districts looking to add hours and enrichment opportunities to the school day. At the conference, Meriden officials and union representatives liked what they heard and thought such a program

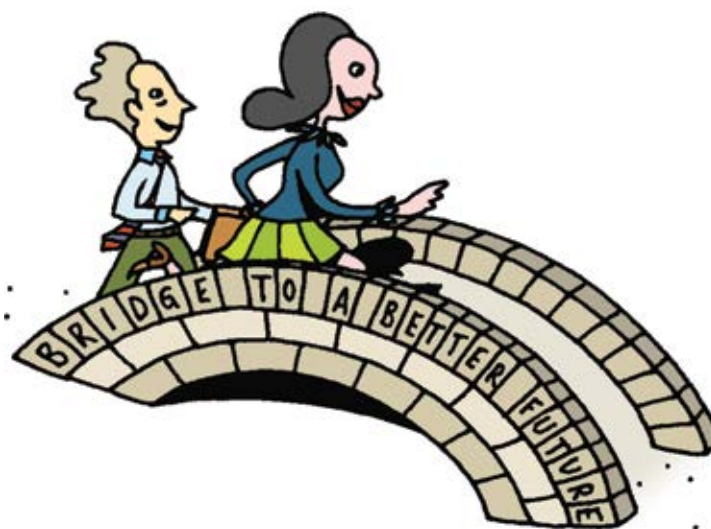
could benefit all students, including some of the district’s most disadvantaged children. So when the AFT Innovation Fund published its list of grant priorities in 2012 and extended learning time was one of them, Benigni and Benham formed a union-district committee to write a grant application. When the application was approved in June of that year, Meriden officials had only a couple months to create from scratch a program for a longer school day.

With the hard work of several teachers and district officials, Casimir Pulaski Elementary School extended learning time for students for the first time last year. This year, the hours and offerings at John Barry Elementary School have also been expanded. Both schools enroll a majority of students who receive free or reduced-priced meals, which is partly why they were selected for the program.

That teachers and administrators at both schools were

willing to try something new was another reason they were chosen. “I’ve always kind of felt this in my heart when I was a teacher: there wasn’t enough time in the day,” says Dan Coffey, Pulaski’s principal. Over the years, what he refers to as “all the fun stuff”—art, music, science, and physical fitness—has often been cut to make more time for reading and mathematics.

At Pulaski, the longer school day has allowed teachers to add the “fun stuff” back into the school day. While the regular elementary school day in Meriden is from 8:55 a.m. to 3:20 p.m., Pulaski begins at 7:30 a.m. and ends at 3:30 p.m. The school also operates on a split schedule. Teachers either work shift A, which begins at 7:10 a.m. and ends at 2 p.m., or shift B, which begins at 9 a.m. and ends at



Meriden’s teamwork has resulted in statewide recognition. The union president and superintendent both received the President’s Award from AFT Connecticut, the union’s highest honor.

*For more on effective learning strategies, see “Strengthening the Student Toolbox: Study Strategies to Boost Learning,” in the Fall 2013 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/fall2013/dunlosky.pdf.

3:50 p.m. A handful of teachers at the school work the entire extended day and earn a \$7,500 annual stipend.

Students in grades 3 through 5 receive an hour and a half of enrichment instruction from 7:30 a.m. to 9 a.m. They take classes in woodworking, technology, instrumental music, scrapbooking, French, Italian, nature studies, vision studies (learning about how vision works and the parts of the eye), world cultures, mathematics games, and physical fitness. Grade-level teachers at the school worked with Coffey and Christine Laferriere, the school's instructional assistant (in Meriden, elementary schools have IAs instead of assistant principals), to create the courses. Coffey recalls telling them to teach their passions. For instance, the educators who teach woodworking and scrapbooking engage in these hobbies at home.

The regular part of the academic day is 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. for grades 3 through 5. Meanwhile, students in grades 1 and 2 receive their core academic instruction from 7:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Then they get an hour and a half of enrichment from 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. During this time, they participate in physical fitness activities, listen to oral readings, work on developing vocabulary, and learn about positive behaviors such as impulse control and empathy.

Coffey says first- and second-graders are more tired at the end of the day, which is why their enrichment takes place in the afternoon. He has found the morning activities energize students in grades 3 through 5, and that helps them focus on their academics for the rest of the day. He says students in all grades have responded well to the program and are eager to come to school. Pulaski's daily attendance rate in the first year of the program (last year) was 96 percent, up from 89 percent the previous year.

The school's demographics have changed since Coffey, who grew up in Meriden, attended Pulaski 42 years ago, and since Mark Benigni attended 30 years ago (Benigni's wife, Amy, teaches at Pulaski). Approximately 80 percent of Pulaski's students receive free or reduced-price meals, and 8.4 percent are English language learners. Parents usually work two jobs and may not have time to help students with homework or take them on educational outings to museums. Many families also live in apartments or condos, high-density areas where children may not have enough space to play outside.

Because of these factors, Pulaski's students especially benefit from the exposure to enrichment activities. "One of the biggest things I noticed in less than a year was they were bringing back more prior knowledge," says David Wheeler, a fifth-grade teacher. "They were saying, 'We did that in the extended day.'"

Wheeler has taught at Pulaski for 44 years. He is professionally and personally invested in the school. His daughter teaches second grade and his granddaughter is a student in third grade there. He chose to work the full extended day because it was a new program he thought would boost student learning and add joy to the educational experience. With the program, "We've been given the go-ahead to do fun things in the classroom that we basically haven't had time to do," he says.

For instance, the school received an \$8,000 science grant from 3M Purification Inc. in Meriden last year to buy model rockets and an accompanying curriculum. He taught rocketry and Newton's laws of motion as part of the morning enrichment and will do it again this year. As part of the class, students built rockets, which they launched

on campus. Wheeler's face lights up when he talks about it: "They had a great time with it," he says. "They learned a lot."

In recent years, Wheeler has noticed the union taking a greater role in educational programming, such as the extended day. "Before, it was always basically bargaining," he says. "Or if there were teachers having difficulty with something, they'd consult the union." He lauds the MFT for its strong support of teachers over the years and is especially pleased to see its efforts in improving instruction. The union was "the instrumental force for getting us the grant" for the extended-day program.

Pulaski's teachers also credit district officials for realizing that educators were crucial to its success. "You have to have buy-in from the teachers," says Colleen May, a first-grade teacher and a member of the MFT executive board. "[The district] really listened to our needs."

Not everyone has always fully supported the close relationship between the union and the district. Robert Kosienski Jr., a longtime member of the board of education, admits he was initially skeptical of Pulaski's program because of the union's role in creating it. When the central office staff and the MFT came forward with the extended-day proposal, he recalls people telling him, "When you start being collaborative with the union, you're going to be beholden to the union."

Kosienski enjoyed good relationships with previous MFT presidents, and he has supported the union and the district's teachers throughout his 22 years on the board. Yet, he still had concerns and decided to share them with his father, who had worked with the police officers' union in his 17 years as Meriden's police chief. Kosienski remembers telling his father, "I'm not really comfortable with letting the union kind of put together a program, and we just follow along." His father leveled with him: "Rob, if I didn't have the union as part of my team, I wouldn't have been able to run the police department," Kosienski recalls him saying. "You need to be able to walk in and look across the table and know that that person, you can trust them. Once you earn their trust, they're going to be loyal."

Kosienski's father persuaded him to give the partnership, and the resulting new program at Pulaski, a chance. In the last year, Kosienski has been impressed by the MFT's leadership, as well as the leadership of Pulaski's teachers and administrators, in helping to implement the school's extended day. And he has begun to realize that student achievement in the district has steadily increased because teachers, administrators, and the board of education "have all bought into the fact that we need to work together."

The overwhelming sense of teamwork has resulted in statewide recognition. Last May, Benham and Benigni both received the President's Award from AFT Connecticut, the union's highest honor. Never before in the 30-plus years of the award's history has it been given to an administrator or been awarded because of union-district collaboration. "There was an openness and a willingness to do what was best for the education of those kids in Meriden," says Melodie Peters, AFT Connecticut's president, as to why she honored the two leaders. She hopes that by highlighting their efforts, other districts in the state will take note and follow their example. "Good things can happen if people are willing to sit down and work things out." □

The Bargaining Table and Beyond

How the AFT Came to Support Labor-Management Collaboration



Israel Kugler (third from left) on a 1973 picket line at Baruch College.

BY PHIL KUGLER

When I first came to the American Federation of Teachers in 1973, there was no such thing as labor-management collaboration. It was a term I had never heard of, and no one used it. Back then, we focused on supporting local unions in their struggles to win collective bargaining rights. At the time, teachers were fighting to achieve basic rights just to organize, so the priority was on establishing locals and helping them achieve the pay, benefits, and working conditions that teachers demanded and deserved as professionals.

For the last 32 years, I have led the AFT's organizing and field services department, which supports our union's efforts to organize the unorganized and to assist affiliates in contract negotiations and administration, internal organizing, and member mobilization. In that time, I have seen a gradual shift within the AFT toward encouraging local leaders to cultivate strong relationships with management. Such partnerships have taken hold in New Haven, Baltimore, Cleveland, Cincinnati (see the sidebar on

page 10), the ABC school district in California (see the article on page 22), and Meriden, Connecticut (see the article on page 29), among other places. These partnerships are the result of hard work between local leaders and school officials, who together have created, as AFT President Randi Weingarten often says, the conditions that enable teachers to teach and students to learn.

Growing up in the labor movement during the 1950s and 1960s, I could not have predicted that a major focus of this great union would eventually be on strengthening labor-management relations. All that I knew, and all that my family knew, was about fighting for basic rights on the job. My grandparents were immigrants. My paternal grandmother was in the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. My paternal grandfather was involved in a painters' union, but I never got to meet him. While picketing with his fellow painters, he was arrested, and he died in jail from a heart attack.

My father, Israel Kugler, who became a social science professor, absorbed the lessons his parents taught him about workers' rights. He was really a pioneer in the AFT in terms of organizing college professors. In the 1950s, he was a professor in Brooklyn at one of the first community colleges established in New York state. At this college, he and some of his colleagues formed an independent union and then affiliated with the New York Teach-

Phil Kugler is the assistant to the AFT president for Organization and Field Services.



Albert Shanker teaching a class at the Harvard University School of Education in 1987.

communities along Lake Erie. I drove around candidates for state legislature and went to union functions for the United Auto Workers and the steelworkers.

On my summers off from college in 1965 and 1966, I got my Coast Guard papers and worked on merchant ships, joining the Seafarers International Union. In the summer of 1967, I worked in a steel mill in Cleveland. Foster Stringer, the former head of the AFT's human rights department, worked in the same steel mill. He was the first African American foreman there. At the time, I didn't know him, but we probably passed each other there. I took the job because I wanted to earn money and work in the political campaign for Carl Stokes, who became the first African American mayor of Cleveland.

In 1968, when I graduated, I was all set to go to graduate school in labor relations. But the summer before I was to enroll, as I waited once again for my merchant ship assignment one day in the Brooklyn union headquarters, I was called to the office of the president of the Seafarers International Union, Paul Hall. I spent three or four hours talking with him about the union, the labor movement, politics, and my career plans. He suggested I delay going to graduate school and work on merchant ships for several years to learn what the workers, who experienced high rates of alcoholism and divorce, really faced on the job. So I took his advice.

When I first came to the AFT in 1973, there was no such thing as labor-management collaboration. It was a term I had never heard of, and no one used it.

After that experience, I attended graduate school at the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations (now the ILR School at Cornell University). I accepted an internship at the AFL-CIO in legislation, where I worked for a year. Then I heard that the AFT had just merged with the National Education Association in New York (becoming the New York State United Teachers) and had brought in 90,000 members. Because of this, the AFT was expanding its staff and wanted to build up its legislative and political operation. Since my internship was in legislation, I applied. In those days, the executive committee of the AFT executive council interviewed every prospective staff person prior to hire. As I walked into the room for my interview, I saw all these people I knew: Al Shanker; Mary Ellen Riordan, the former president of the Detroit Federation of Teachers; and Frank Sullivan, the former president of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers; among others. Needless to say, I got the job. I started at the AFT when I was 26 years old as assistant director of legislation.

ers Guild, the AFT affiliate at the time in New York City. The Guild was one of the predecessor organizations of the United Federation of Teachers. My father eventually became vice president of the UFT for colleges and universities, and later became president of a New York City metropolitan higher education local. He also cofounded the Professional Staff Congress, a union of faculty members at the City University of New York, which now represents more than 25,000 faculty and staff members.

I've been around organizing all my life; it was something my parents constantly discussed at home. We lived in one of the first cooperative housing developments in Queens. Albert Shanker, the late president of the AFT, grew up 8 to 10 blocks away in another housing development. He taught at Junior High School 126 in our neighborhood; so did George Altomare, a founder of the UFT, its vice president for high schools, and later its director of worker education, who lived in the same housing development as us. Eli Trachtenberg also lived in the area and was an activist in the UFT; he was an architect of local school chapter development in the union. (His work was so instrumental that the UFT created an award in his honor.) In fact, Shanker and Altomare were my counselors at summer camp.

Underneath New York City's Triborough Bridge (renamed the Robert F. Kennedy Bridge in 2008) is a stadium on Randall's Island. When the UFT was first organizing for recognition, it would hold its rallies on Randall's Island. I remember more than one occasion when UFT leaders would come over to our apartment after a rally to watch the news coverage on TV. I'd be walking around carrying cookies and drinks. I was about 13 or 14 years old. I was no stranger to politics. I would march with my parents on picket lines and in Labor Day parades. In 1963, I rode on a UFT bus to attend the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.* The importance of the labor movement was deeply ingrained in me.

I pretty much knew in high school and college that I wanted to pursue a career in the labor movement. I went to Oberlin College in Ohio, where I helped develop a chapter of Young Democrats. We had 250 dues-paying members. When Barry Goldwater ran against Lyndon Johnson for president in 1964, we organized students to walk precincts for Johnson in Cleveland and other

*For more on the March on Washington, see our package on the march's 50th anniversary in the Fall 2013 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/fall2013/MOW.pdf.

At the AFT, Shanker asked all professional staff to spend some time out in the field. I was assigned to a campaign in Jefferson Parish, Louisiana. We won that campaign, and it was there that I developed a strong interest in organizing.

Building Bridges after Bleak Times

As I mentioned earlier, in the 1970s, there was no such thing as collaboration between labor and management. In the early 1960s when the AFT was pushing for collective bargaining, the response from critics of the labor movement was that collective bargaining was for blue-collar workers, and for teachers to go after it was unprofessional. Al Shanker would tell stories about his time as a young math teacher in New York City. He was desperate for support, and the first time the assistant principal opened the door to his classroom, Al remembered saying to himself, “Great! He’s coming in to observe my class and to give me help.” But instead of helping him, the assistant principal poked his head in the classroom and said, “Mr. Shanker, do you see the rolled-up paper balls on the floor? Very unprofessional. Very unprofessional.” Al was demoralized. On top of that, teachers suffered other indignities, such as snow patrol, when they had to shovel snow outside of the school, and bathroom patrol, when they had to monitor students as they used the restroom.

Al saw that teachers worked in this rigid, top-down, command-

and-control structure, in which they were not expected to ask questions, make suggestions, or receive help. They were also poorly paid, at a time when the economy was experiencing tremendous growth after World War II. All sorts of opportunities were opening up: veterans were taking advantage of the GI Bill and attending college, and the suburbs were growing, as was the middle class, yet teachers were being left way behind.

So conditions were ripe for a revolution. During the war, people had fought for this country and for democracy abroad, but when they came home, they were denied rights in the workplace. There were no collective bargaining laws; just the law of the jungle. If teachers and other public employees went on strike, state laws often dictated they would be fired. The state labor relations laws granting collective bargaining rights to teachers and other public employees came later and were designed to regulate collective bargaining and actually limit the rights in certain ways. The whole idea of teacher rights captivated the imagination of a courageous group of people, many of whom—like Al—went to jail for these rights. They believed that educators and other public employees deserved the same rights as workers in the private sector. At the same time, these leaders cared very much about students. But without the ability to have a voice, to have basic rights of recognition, they realized they could not help children.

In 1975, Al asked me to become a field director in the organizing department. At that time, it was chaotic at the AFT. I remember having more than 40 strikes going on simultaneously all across the country. I also recall one year when we had the Chicago and New York City locals on strike at the same time. This was after the initial recognitions to engage in collective bargaining. Chicago was striking almost every year for a period of time, sometimes several years in a row, until the union was able to secure a multi-year agreement.

One by one by one, in the 1960s and 1970s, AFT locals—in cities such as New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Kansas City, Toledo, and Minneapolis—were winning collective bargaining representation in election after election. Sometimes we wouldn’t win. There was a lot of strife getting that first, basic recognition, and even strife getting the initial contract and successor agreements. One of the things that actually slowed us down was the passage of state laws before we were ready, because we didn’t have the resources to go everywhere at once to organize. The laws provided the framework for teachers to engage in collective bargaining. The NEA, which already had a membership presence in these states with the new bargaining laws in place, took advantage of the opportunity to win recognition in many places.

A seminal moment for Al came in the middle of all this. Shortly after he assumed the presidency of the AFT (he was president of the AFT and the UFT simultaneously for quite a while), New York City nearly went bankrupt. In 1975, the city laid off 20,000 teachers. As a response to the chaos that the mass layoffs created in the schools, there was basically a runaway strike. But he did not want the strike. He did not think it would make a difference in terms of what the city faced and the kind of issues the union had to deal with under these circumstances.

But the strike was the only option people knew. It was a last-resort weapon of choice that had been used with success in

Shanker realized the labor movement in education needed to build bridges to the business community and to power centers. His forward thinking came out of a bleak time.



LOBBYING FOR THE AFT

Albert Shanker addressing the crowd in 1968 on Randall’s Island in New York City, the site of many UFT rallies.



the past. So they went on strike for two weeks, but they won little as a result.

The Boston Teachers Union was also voting on a strike at this time, and Al was just flat-out depressed. He realized the labor movement in education needed to think beyond the tools and strategies and tactics that we had used up to that point. We needed to be thinking about how to build bridges to the business community and to power centers, to start making arguments about the importance of high-quality public education in meeting the workforce needs of business and effectively competing in a world economy. Al's forward-thinking approach came out of this bleak time, and it meant a big change of direction for the AFT. When he became president, we started building up an educational issues department. And Al started traveling to meet with prominent people outside of education. I remember QuEST (Quality Educational Standards in Teaching, later renamed TEACH) professional issues conferences sponsored by the AFT where we brought in CEOs of major corporations to give presentations about the importance of public education.

Of course, Al was way ahead of the rest of the union. He was brilliant enough to see that we had to do something different.

Another moment when Al saw the need for the union to change was in 1983 with the release of the report *A Nation at Risk*. It basically criticized curriculum, student performance, our whole education system. Every single public education group reacted extremely defensively, except for the AFT. We embraced it and said the commission is right. There *is* something wrong. We're slipping. We're not competing. And we presented it as—don't forget this was still the Cold War—a national defense issue. We invited President Ronald Reagan to an AFT convention in Los Angeles, and he came. My point is that Al was traveling in these circles to do his best, frankly, to keep a lot of balls in the air and build support for public education, higher standards, early childhood education, and sensible evaluation. He was tinkering with lots of thoughts about reform.

One of those reforms came from the Toledo Federation of Teachers. Its president at the time, Dal Lawrence, had started a Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program.* PAR releases “consulting” teachers, who have excelled in the classroom, from

teaching duties so they can mentor new teachers and support struggling veteran teachers. These teachers also make recommendations to a district-union committee on whether the teachers they are assisting are ready to work independently, need further help, or should leave the profession. I read about Dal's work in the Toledo Federation of Teachers' newspaper and showed it to Al. He liked the idea and invited Dal to present PAR at an AFT executive council meeting. Dal was virtually shouted out of the room by all these local and state leaders who said they didn't want anything to do with this. They said the union's role was to defend teachers. In a decentral-

Left, members of the Chicago Teachers Union vote on whether to strike in 1975. Right, members of Local 1352 in San Francisco walk the picket line in the 1970s.

Collaboration may be more difficult to achieve in education than in any other field because you don't have stability. The only stable force is the union.

ized union with autonomous affiliates, like the AFT, change happens slowly. Today, many years after Dal's presentation, several AFT locals have embraced PAR, a program that is based on teachers' commitment to educational quality and an appreciation for their contributions. Because it is a partnership reaching well beyond traditional collective bargaining, it is a great example of labor-management collaboration.

*To learn more about PAR, see “Taking the Lead: With Peer Assistance and Review, the Teaching Profession Can Be in Teachers' Hands,” in the Fall 2008 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/fall2008/goldstein.pdf.

Moving Collaboration Forward

While collaboration is a worthy goal, I believe it may be more difficult to achieve in education than in any other field because you don't have stability in education. You have a constant revolving door of superintendents. A new one comes in, and you've got a whole new batch of priorities moving from one CEO to another. Plus, you have the politics of school boards. The only stable force in the school system is the union. You really need stability within the union if you're trying to achieve cutting-edge programs like PAR, new systems of compensation, and new forms of evaluation. You need a strong, experienced leadership in which the members have near total confidence. You can't do this with 30 percent of the membership. First of all, employers know if you have only 30 percent of the membership because they have all the payroll deduction records. And they know that if you have only 30 percent of the membership, you're going to be weak. Members need to know that their union is strong and unified. There also needs to be confidence on the part of membership to allow for experimentation and innovation beyond the usual.

To move labor-management collaboration forward, I think the responsibility lies with the union because forward-thinking superintendents are in the minority. Local leaders need to think about ways in which they can support friendly superintendents who understand the value of collaboration and engagement. For instance, they can help them write articles for the journal of the American Association of School Administrators or help them get on the map by attending their conferences. I like to look at it this way: At conferences of school administrators, after they're done playing golf and they're in the locker room, we don't want the chatter to be about how they bashed the teachers' union and destroyed it. Instead, we want them talking about what they accomplished for students as a result of working together with the union.

A successful labor-management partnership is based on mutual respect. And it relates directly to the AFT's mission statement. Teachers care so much about children and helping them do well. Teachers also have ideas, and they have needs. And in order to make the system work at its best, the views of teachers and support staff need to be a respected part of the equation; nothing worthwhile gets done without a check of consultation and involvement. It's recognition that in order for the education process to work at maximum effectiveness, you have to honor the teachers, include them, and listen to what they say because they're the ones doing the work each and every day.

Such a partnership comes out of strength and stability of leadership on both sides. Local leaders and school officials must commit to it because it takes hard work. They must devote resources to it and protect it politically. But in order to build it, you need a mature collective bargaining relationship. Once the basics of a contract are in place and there's been some experience in administering the contract, there's a point when local leaders and school officials can resolve issues together, where grievances get worked out, and where problems that are not grievances get worked out. There's a realization that "Hey, we can get a lot more done that's mutually beneficial and good for students by working at it in a different way." Then you get to where you can actually address areas that are outside the formal scope of the bargaining relationship. That's what I mean by maturity. People get to know each other. They trust each other. They

are able to, in some respect, bare their souls and be honest about problems. That honesty is met with trust. You don't have to worry about me going public and saying, "We've got a real problem here politically and internally." Ultimately, labor-management collaboration is a further development and natural evolution of the collective bargaining process.

As a national organization, the AFT has a role to play in enabling this work. An awful lot of how you move things in our union is by modeling and sharing experience. That's tough with 3,300-plus locals, and it's a slow process. But our responsibility is not only working with our own people, but engaging with management officials, guiding them, supporting them, and nurturing them in the right direction.

AFT President Randi Weingarten listens as David Cicarella, president of the New Haven Federation of Teachers, speaks during a press conference on his local's groundbreaking collaborative contract.



For the education process to work at maximum effectiveness, you have to honor the teachers and listen to them because they're the ones doing the work.

The AFT's most important concern is ensuring that every child receives a high-quality education. Even in the current climate, which is often hostile to unions and critical of educators, we must continue to remind the public of the overriding commitment that teachers have to this notion of students being the best they can possibly be. The teacher voice needs to be respected and listened to, for teachers are the education experts. Processes and structures, such as those that grow out of labor-management collaboration, must be in place to ensure that teachers are heard. The leadership of both AFT President Randi Weingarten and of many local leaders from across the country around reclaiming the promise of public education is vitally important—it can strengthen teacher voice and catalyze labor-management collaboration, which has the power to make that promise real. □



Share My Lesson, an online site for high-quality, free teaching resources, features lessons and instructional units aligned to the Common Core State Standards. Many were written by members of the American Federation of Teachers with support from the AFT Innovation Fund. Featured below are some of the more popular resources that can help teachers as they implement the new standards in their classrooms. For more resources, visit www.sharemylesson.com.

MATHEMATICS AND INFORMATIONAL TEXT

Thanks to an AFT Innovation Fund grant, the Chicago Teachers Union Quest Center supported teams of National Board Certified Teachers who wrote four units featured on Share My Lesson: an interdisciplinary unit focusing on informational text for grades K–2; a geometry unit for grades K–3; a unit focused on close reading for grades 3–5; and a high school mathematics unit on quadratics. The quadratics unit prepares students to analyze quadratic and linear functions and to identify key components of the graph of a quadratic equation. This lesson is available at <http://bit.ly/17RSdJJ>.

CINDERELLA AND THE WORLD

The Cleveland Teachers Union, with help from an AFT Innovation Fund grant, supported a team of classroom teachers that wrote lessons for students in grades K–2, with lessons for additional grades to follow. A national expert reviewed each lesson using the EQuIP Rubric, a widely used tool designed to evaluate Common Core materials. One popular example of the work: a first-grade unit, “Cinderella around the World,” in which students compare and contrast multiple versions of the Cinderella story by different authors and from different cultures. Students then retell their favorite version and write an explanation of their choice. The lesson is available at <http://bit.ly/17ICGhp>.

RATIO REVIEW

The Boston Teachers Union, with a grant from the AFT Innovation Fund, created a project called 21st Century Lessons that brings together skilled classroom teachers to collaborate on high-quality lessons aligned to the Common Core State Standards. Each lesson is part of a larger unit, allowing Share My Lesson users to plan for multiple days of instruction. Among the most-viewed items: an “Introduction to Ratios” that begins with a review of simplifying fractions and asks students to represent real-world situations as fractions. Students then are asked to express ratios in three ways (and in simplest terms), to compare a part with the whole, and to explain what terms such as “1 out of 5” mean. This lesson on ratios is available at <http://bit.ly/HMXtDY>.

ANALYZING THEME

The nonprofit Teaching Channel hosts a free online video library that provides educators with practical tools and resources that are organized by subject and grade level (K–12). One of Teaching

Channel’s most popular offerings is a video for grade 6 on how to analyze theme. The lesson’s objective is to understand theme and how it develops throughout a text. It is available at <http://bit.ly/17cOFhi>.

LITERATURE FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

The Albuquerque Teachers Federation, with support from the AFT Innovation Fund, teamed up with the website Colorín Colorado to create a unit for eighth-grade English language learners that explores Kate Chopin’s 19th-century short story “The Story of an Hour.” Activities include interactive readings, embedded vocabulary instruction, and mini-lessons on literary concepts such as irony. The unit also provides students an opportunity to summarize and paraphrase the story. For an overview, visit <http://bit.ly/17cNZZu>.

UNDERSTANDING RATIONAL NUMBERS

The AFT has a cadre of expert math teachers in all grade levels who served as reviewers and commenters on the Common Core State Standards as they were being written. These teachers have stayed involved with the Common Core, offering comments on the standards and on key documents and tools as they have been created. These teachers have also created Common Core-aligned resources for Share My Lesson. Among them is “Clothesline Numbers—Number Magnitude,” a lesson in which students work with the values and ordering of rational numbers. The objective is to understand the order and absolute value of rational numbers (including negative rational numbers and, in particular, negative integers). The lesson is available at <http://bit.ly/17RSQTu>.

PREREQUISITES OF A TRAGEDY

“The Great Fire” is a lesson for grade 6 that focuses on the Chicago Fire of 1871. The lesson explores the historical truths related to poverty, city construction, and city services that led to the devastating fire. Students are asked to develop an essay that requires them to analyze both nonfiction text and historical context. Contributed by Student Achievement Partners, the resource features an exemplar that models what excellent text-dependent questions and a culminating activity look like over the course of several lesson periods. The exemplar includes an appendix with additional reading, websites, and photos. It is available at <http://bit.ly/PpKFlf>.

SOLUTION-DRIVEN UNIONISM

A consortium of New York City public schools that has achieved outstanding results by stressing in-depth teaching over high-stakes testing, and a coalition of state workers that saved Connecticut \$1.6



MICHAEL CAMPBELL

AFT officers honored winners of the union's award for Solution-Driven Unionism at a ceremony in Washington, D.C.

billion through a new preventive healthcare plan, are the two winners of the AFT's inaugural Prize for Solution-Driven Unionism. The New York Performance Standards Consortium and AFT Connecticut each received a \$25,000 award on Oct. 17 during a national AFT ceremony in Washington, D.C. A third AFT affiliate, the Charlotte County Support Personnel Association in Florida, earned an honorable mention and received a \$5,000 prize. For more on the awards, visit <http://bit.ly/1cls04r>.

FINDING COMMON GROUND

Speakers at the AFT Civil, Human, and Women's Rights Conference called the fall gathering a historic moment: parents, students, community activists, faith leaders, elected officials, educators, and labor leaders came together to forge a partnership based on a core set of principles. Attendees embraced "The Principles That Unite Us," a common vision for public education that ensures all school districts commit to providing all children with the opportunity to attend a high-quality public school. This vision also ensures that those closest to the education process—school staff, students, parents, and community members—have a voice in policy and practice. Coverage of the event is available at <http://bit.ly/160Hfxe>.

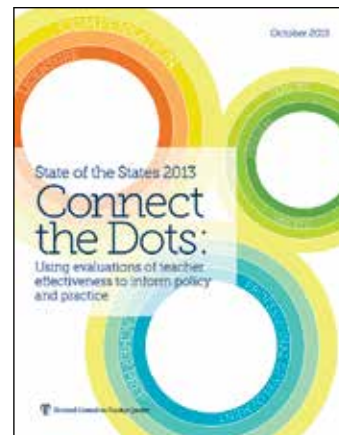
THE PROMISE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION RECLAIMED

The AFT executive council has adopted a resolution to reclaim the promise of public education, which commits the union to this critical work. This vision is about fighting for neighborhood public schools that are safe, welcoming places for teaching and learning. It is about ensuring that teachers and school staff are well-prepared and well-supported, have manageable class sizes, and have time to collaborate so they can meet the individual needs of every child. It is about ensuring that our children have an engaging curriculum that includes art, music, and the sciences. And it is about ensuring that children and their families have access to wraparound services to meet their social, emotional, and health needs. "This is a vision of what parents want for their kids. And by joining with them and the community, we can create a movement," said AFT President Randi Weingarten. The resolution is available at <http://bit.ly/1gwjXY>.



CONNECTING THE DOTS ON TEACHER EVALUATION

The National Council on Teacher Quality's report *State of the States 2013—Connect the Dots: Using Evaluations of Teacher Effectiveness to Inform Policy and Practice* highlights what AFT President Randi Weingarten calls a "surreal dissonance" when it comes to testing and evaluation of teachers. The report shows that teacher evaluation systems in 35 states and the District of Columbia are driven by tests, requiring that student achievement results be a significant, or even the most significant, factor in teacher evaluations. Yet only 20 states and D.C. require teacher evaluation results to be used to inform and shape professional development for all teachers. "We have to stop test-centric evaluations and build systems that will actually improve teaching and learning," says the AFT president, who observes that both the union and the NCTQ report argue that, for the Common Core State Standards to succeed, they need to be implemented properly—with alignment throughout the system, including teacher evaluations. The report is available at <http://bit.ly/195chUP>.



IMMIGRATION: "PART OF AMERICA'S DNA"

The AFT is standing behind the renewed push to get the U.S. House of Representatives to pass comprehensive immigration reform before the end of the year. "Immigration is a part of America's DNA," AFT President Randi Weingarten said at an event this fall in Washington, D.C., where thousands of passionate supporters of immigration reform turned out for a rally, concert, and march to the Capitol. The event culminated in the arrest of nearly 200 people. Among them: Weingarten, AFT Vice President Maria Neira, eight members of Congress, and other allies. Weingarten and Neira were released the next morning after spending the night in jail. Read more at <http://bit.ly/1959NWA>.

COMMON CORE CAVEAT

The Common Core State Standards are a laudable and welcome development in public education, but they demand a clear road map in the form of rich, common curriculum content, along with resources to support teaching all students to mastery. That is the thrust of an online statement from a diverse group of education leaders, including AFT President Randi Weingarten and Chester E. Finn Jr., former assistant education secretary under President Ronald Reagan. Among the major recommendations in the policy statement: developing one or more sets of curriculum guides that map out the core content students need to master the CCSS, and involving teachers, content experts, and cognitive scientists—not just curriculum designers by trade—in the development of the guides. The statement is available to view and sign at the Albert Shanker Institute's website at <http://bit.ly/1avJadR>.

10 Myths about the Common Core State Standards

1. “The standards tell us what to teach.”

FACT: The Common Core State Standards define what students need to know. How to achieve that is up to teachers, principals, school districts, and states. Teachers will have as much control over how they teach as they ever have.

2. “They amount to a national curriculum.”

FACT: The standards are shared goals, voluntarily adopted. They outline what knowledge and skills will help students succeed. Curricula vary from state to state and district to district.

3. “The standards intrude on student privacy.”

FACT: Long before the Common Core, some states already had data systems allowing educators and parents to measure student achievement and growth; those states remain responsible for students’ private information, whether or not they’ve adopted the Common Core.

4. “The English standards emphasize nonfiction and informational text so much that students will be reading how-to manuals instead of great literature.”

FACT: The standards require students to analyze literature *and* informational texts, with the goal of preparing them for college and work.

5. “Key math concepts are missing or appear in the wrong grade.”

FACT: Moving from 50 state standards to one means some states will be shifting what students learn when. Educators and experts alike have verified that the Common Core progression is mathematically coherent and internationally benchmarked. And now, students who move across state lines can pick up where they left off.

6. “Common Core is a federal takeover.”

FACT: The federal government had no role in developing the standards. They were created by state education chiefs and governors, and voluntarily adopted by states. States, not the federal government, are implementing them.

7. “Teachers weren’t included.”

FACT: Lots of teachers were involved in developing the standards over several years, including hundreds of teachers nationwide who served on state review teams. Many teachers are pleased to report seeing their feedback added verbatim to the final standards.

8. “The standards make inappropriate demands of preschoolers.”

FACT: They were written for grades K–12. Several states added their own guidance for preschool.



ILLUSTRATION BY JAMES YANG

9. “Common Core accelerates overtesting.”

FACT: The standards say nothing about testing. Some states are falling into the trap of too much assessment—by testing before implementing or rushing to impose high stakes. Others, however, are taking a more sensible approach. Before administering new tests, states must get implementation right.

10. “Rank-and-file teachers don’t support it—and their unions sold them out.”

FACT: At least four national polls, conducted by the AFT, the NEA, *Education Week*, and Scholastic, show that teachers overwhelmingly support the standards, though some haven’t had the time or tools to implement them correctly. Unions support the Common Core because their members do.

—FROM THE AFT’S EDUCATIONAL ISSUES DEPARTMENT

RESOURCES

EXTRA! EXTRA!

With the Common Core State Standards’ emphasis on informational texts, teachers wanting to supplement their lessons with primary sources that will both fascinate and educate students should look to historic newspapers. *Chronicling America*, a free, searchable database of millions of newspaper pages from 1836 to 1922, is available at <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>. Jointly sponsored by the Library of Congress and the National Endowment for the Humanities, the site enables visitors to search the vast archive by subject, by alphabetical order, or by date.

For instance, the “Topics by Subject” page, which is available at www.loc.gov/rr/news/topics/topicsSubject.html, includes the headings American Enterprise, Industrialization, and Development; Arts and Culture; Crimes and Trials of the Century; Natural Wonders, Disasters, and the Environment; Politics, Government, and World Leaders; Public Spirit, Exhibitions, and Celebrations; Science, Technology, and Innovation; Sports and American Pastimes; Struggle for Human Rights and Freedoms; and War. Each newspaper page on the site also links to an “About” page detailing the dates of the newspaper’s publication, the place of publication, and a brief history of the publisher and the newspaper.

THE POWER OF STORY

To help engage students in American literature and history lessons, teachers can turn to a free, colorful online resource full of stories, speeches, songs, videos, and works of art. What So Proudly We Hail, available at www.whatsoproudlywehail.org, was developed by University of Chicago professors Amy and Leon Kass, and is based on an anthology they have published by the same name.

The site includes study guides on such famous Americans as Abigail Adams and Frederick Douglass, and former presidents such as Thomas Jefferson and Bill Clinton. Songs, including “America the Beautiful,” “This Land Is Your Land,” and “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” are also available and are described as crucial parts of American history for “free men and women.” And thanks to a lesson plan on the American calendar, students will learn about the history and purpose of national public holidays like Memorial Day and Martin Luther King Jr. Day and “how their repeated celebration helps unite and identify us as a people.”

According to the site, lesson plans such as “The Meaning of America” will help students understand “American character and American identity in ways that will produce thoughtful and engaged citizens.”

Banding Together

(Continued from page 21)

Endnotes

1. Council on Foreign Relations Independent Task Force, *U.S. Education Reform and National Security* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 2012). This is not the first time that militaristic rhetoric has prominently figured in an attack on public education. *A Nation at Risk*, a 1983 presidential commission report, declared that "if an unfriendly power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war." That report was highly influential, and the authors of the 2012 report may have hoped that the imagery would have a similar impact.
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3. Diane Ravitch, "Waiting for a School Miracle," *New York Times*, May 31, 2011 ("turnaround" schools); Sam Dillon, "'No Child' Law Is Not Closing a Racial Gap," *New York Times*, April 28, 2009 (achievement gap); and Jaekyung Lee, *Tracking Achievement Gaps and Assessing the Impact of NCLB on the Gaps* (Cambridge, MA: The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, 2006). See generally, Richard Rothstein, *Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic, and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap* (Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute, 2004). The same "no benefit" conclusion applies to voucher schemes. See chapter 9 in David L. Kirp, *Improbable Scholars: The Rebirth of a Great American School System and a Strategy for America's Schools* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
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7. Mike Schmoker, "Tipping Point: From Feckless Reform to Substantive Instructional Improvement," *Phi Delta Kappan* 85, no. 6 (2004): 424-432. See generally, John Seeley Brown and Paul Duguid, *The Social Life of Information* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2000); Peter Senge, Art Kleiner, Charlotte Roberts, Richard Ross, George Roth, and Bryan Smith, *The Dance of Change: The Challenges to Sustaining Momentum in Learning Organizations* (New York: Doubleday, 1999); and Ikujiro Nonaka and Hirotaka Takeuchi, *The Knowledge-Creating Company: How Japanese Companies Create the Dynamics of Innovation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
8. On the importance of "chemistry" among teachers, see Donna Sabers, Katherine Cushing, and David Berliner, "Differences among Teachers in a Task Characterized by Simultaneity, Multidimensionality, and Immediacy," *American Educational Research Journal* 28, no. 1 (1991): 63-88.
9. Paul T. Decker, Daniel P. Mayer, and Steven Glazerman, *The Effects of Teach For America on Students: Findings from a National Evaluation* (Princeton, NJ: Mathematica, 2004).
10. Cynthia Coburn and Jennifer Lin Russell, "District Policy and Teachers' Social Networks," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 30, no. 3 (2008): 203-235; Helen Marks and Karen Louis, "Does Teacher Empowerment Affect the Classroom? The Implications of Teacher Empowerment for Instructional Practice and Student Academic Performance," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 19, no. 3 (1997): 245-275; and Karen Louis, Helen Marks, and Sharon Kruse, "Teachers' Professional Community in Restructuring Schools," *American Educational Research Journal* 33, no. 4 (1996): 757-798.
11. Irene Stamatopolous readily relates to these youngsters' problems, because in some ways her early life paralleled theirs. When she was an infant, her family emigrated from

Greece. As a young child, she grew up in a Greek neighborhood in the Bronx, speaking only Greek, and when her family moved to the suburbs, she had a hard time adjusting. "I never got any extra help in school because I spoke a different language," she recalls. "And I never quite fit in those first few years."

12. Carol Briscoe and Joseph Peters, "Teacher Collaboration across and within Schools: Supporting Individual Change in Elementary Science Teaching," *Science Education* 81, no. 1 (1997): 51-65; Schmoker, "Tipping Point"; Roger Stewart and Jonathan Brenden, "Fusing Lesson Study and Authentic Achievement: A Model for Teacher Collaboration," *Phi Delta Kappan* 86, no. 9 (2005): 681-687.
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19. For New Jersey graduation rates, see www.state.nj.us/education/data/grate. For an account of a perpetually failing district, see "How We Fail the Kids in Camden," *NJ Left Behind* (blog), April 27, 2010. See also David L. Kirp, John P. Dwyer, and Larry A. Rosenthal, *Our Town: Race, Housing and the Soul of Suburbia* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

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Coastal Living 2 yrs	36.00	16.00
Conde Nast Traveler	19.97	12.00
Consumer Reports	29.00	29.00
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