



AFT Labor-Management

Baltimore Teachers Union and Baltimore City Public Schools
Case Studies in Labor-Management Collaboration—Summer 2013

Making Change Together:
Career Pathways for Student Achievement

Baltimore City's Lessons Learned from Implementation

In November 2010, the Baltimore Teachers Union and the Baltimore City Public Schools agreed to a landmark contract based on the mutual belief that things needed to change to meet the needs of students. Among the changes was an agreement to jointly design and implement a career pathways system that would replace the traditional step-and-lane salary schedule. What follows are three key lessons from Baltimore City's experience in making the compensation system a reality.

Baltimore City's contract is the result of a healthy working relationship. Committing to changes as fundamental as the ones in Baltimore City requires an existing level of trust that working together works. This belief was forged over many years in Baltimore under union leadership from the now AFT Secretary-Treasurer Lorretta Johnson. A district and a union can work to bridge information gaps and share experiences before executing projects together. Resolving the issues that are a barrier to true partnership is critical before attempting to make large-scale changes. Once certain barriers are removed, it is possible to do bold and innovative work together.

True partnership takes time to do it right, not just get it done. In Baltimore City, partnership between the union and the district means that both entities have decision-making power, and this means it takes more time to reach decisions. Their experience shows that taking the time to consider multiple perspectives results in a system that is right for the people it affects. The conversations will be ongoing and the challenges won't disappear, but there is greater buy-in when decisions are made together and openly.

There must be a line of sight from the contract to the teacher. The Baltimore City contract represents the use of collective bargaining to recognize and reward teacher professionalism as a driver of student outcomes. It is critical that this commitment goes beyond the negotiating teams by becoming something each teacher in the district can work with and understand. Since a smaller group is responsible for design and development, this means that it must be clear to teachers how the system affects them and how the system meets the contract's vision.

In 2010, Baltimore City educators voted to ratify the nation's first truly innovative contract. Coming from a place of mutual understanding that changes had to be made to bridge instructional and achievement gaps in the district, the Baltimore City Public Schools and the Baltimore Teachers Union used collective bargaining to commit themselves, among other things, to change the educator compensation system in such a way that it would promote student achievement. The contract set clear parameters for the district and union to jointly design and implement a system where the goal would be improved student achievement and the drivers would be educator practice and career development. The contract introduced new terms like "achievement units," "intervals" and "career pathways." Reaching more than 6,500 school-based staff, the Baltimore City career pathways system effectively places control over a teacher's rate of salary increase and professional aspirations in his or her hands. But more than this, as framed in Baltimore City, the system created formal spaces for the district and union to come together on substantive decision-making to create a system that would disrupt the status quo yet remain fair to employees. Now in its third year of implementation, the system reflects the district's and union's values for what it means to be an excellent teacher, how this can be demonstrated and what impact it will have on compensation and career growth.

Forged by failure, a commitment to partnership

The contract's changes to compensation were so fundamentally different from the well-known step-and-lane structure that teachers initially voted against the contract in October 2010. The BTU shared a vision with then-CEO Andre Alonso for a completely different compensation system, and had developed with the district through negotiations a system that would move the teaching profession toward excellence, with the ultimate goal of increasing student performance. But when the teachers voted against ratification, the BTU recognized that one-to-one outreach with every educator was still critical. In that period of re-engagement and defending the contract in every school in the district, BTU leaders demonstrated their commitment to the contract. They scaled up buy-in to such a degree that the contract was approved just one month later. That level of commitment was not lost on BCPS leadership, who, upon ratification, proceeded with the same level of partnership it had used in approaching the contract. BCPS' Interim CEO Tisha Edwards reflects, "We know what [the BTU] agreed to do. This contract is different. It is bold.

... We want to strengthen and build what we created together. To sustain the partnership, we have to keep doing this in partnership.”

Beginning in November 2010, with the support of a majority of teachers, BTU and BCPS leaders set about the difficult work of creating a new compensation system from scratch. That work would begin with the creation of two governance bodies tasked with giving meaning to the contract’s new terms.

Growing Pains: Joint Structures for Design and Implementation

After ratification, BTU and BCPS senior leaders began to meet as the Joint Oversight Committee, and they appointed members of the Joint Governing Panel, each composed of equal parts BTU and BCPS appointees. With roughly six months to assemble a system before the 2011-2012 school year, the Governing Panel was initially tasked with defining each pathway (Standard, Professional, Model and Lead), designing a peer review process, building out achievement units, and presenting their proposals to the Oversight Committee. Developing a system together was new territory for everyone involved and required changes in group relationships and behaviors. Indeed, as they got going they realized that collaboration inherently involved considering more perspectives and addressing different challenges.

The substantive work in the first year centered on defining what it meant to be a Model teacher and creating the peer review process by which a teacher would move to the Model pathway. In many ways, the Model teacher represented the heart of the contract—creating a place for the type of teacher that is innovative in the classroom and affects student achievement in meaningful ways. These teachers go above and beyond teaching duties by making contributions to their colleagues and schools. To date, these teachers had largely gone unrecognized and unrewarded. To fully leverage the promise of the

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Separate Design from Decision-Making. In practice, the Oversight Committee and the Governing Panel represent two components of developing any initiative: considering the options, and making final decisions. The Governing Panel had freedom to come up with proposals for each aspect of the system, and they were encouraged to conduct focus groups and mini-pilots to test out their ideas with a broader group of teachers. Because the Oversight Committee is not involved in generating the initial ideas, they receive each proposal authentically and focus squarely on whether it meets the policy vision for the system. Though the Oversight Committee makes final decisions on key components, the Governing Panel serves as a forum for teacher voice with a decision-making process that is not top-down.

contract, this work flow required the Governing Panel and Oversight Committee members to ask challenging questions, like “What does an excellent teacher do every day in the classroom?” and “What types of artifacts would demonstrate excellence?” The eight Governing Panel members shared office space in BCPS’ central office, which forced initial collaboration to some degree. As they created the rubric content and responded to the Oversight Committee’s feedback, they challenged each other to justify their reasoning and pushed each other to think about what was too high or too low a bar. BTU members were sensitive to the fact that their members needed a line of sight between the contract’s vision and their careers, and that becoming a Model teacher should not be an unreasonable process. For BCPS, the stakes were equally high, as they had committed to a significant salary increase for Model teachers and wanted to ensure that those teachers were thoughtfully selected. These early tensions influenced the way the Governing Panel’s and the Oversight Committee’s members interacted internally and between each other, but as the following two illustrations indicate, Baltimore City demonstrates that it is possible to push through the initial discomfort.

As the work progressed to the point where they were presenting proposals for the Oversight Committee, the Governing Panel encountered an internal struggle to avoid picking sides. For example, the BTU appointees on the panel and the BCPS appointees on the panel differed on whether those applying to be Model teachers should be required to submit a videotape of their teaching. Some were concerned it would be another hoop to jump through, while others thought it was the only way to really measure a teacher’s performance. As the debate continued in an Oversight Committee meeting, one Governing Panel member produced a document outlining research on the important role a classroom videotape can play in certain types of evaluation or decision-making, a document that was not part of the Governing Panel’s preparations. They learned from the experience that if they were not on the same page, they risked looking as though they were divided on what the

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Transparency and mutual accountability are critical to successful partnership work. Jointly implementing something on the scale and importance of the pathways system has demanded continuous transparency about everything from concerns about rubric language to the quality of the peer reviewers. This level of openness fosters a working environment where the union and the district are comfortable calling each other out when the conversation strays from the contract’s intentions. In the end, the contract represents mutual commitments, and it is fair to ensure those commitments are upheld in implementation.

system should be. As adversarial experiences like this happened more and more, they came together for a self-imposed retreat and decided that the work of collaboration had to begin with them. Even though Governing Panel members had different leaders with some different ideas about how the system should take shape, they agreed that it was important to jointly represent the Governing Panel's work to the Oversight Committee and to the teachers, even if it meant presenting things they did not all fully agree on. They also agreed to be transparent with each other about conversations with their respective leadership so there would not be any more surprises. This agreement early on had the effect of bringing together what could have been a divisive group.

Composed of senior leaders in the BTU and BCPS, the Oversight Committee also had its share of growing pains as it shifted from negotiating toward agreement to making decisions together. Their job has been to maintain integrity of the system and carefully analyze and provide feedback on the Governing Panel's proposals until they are ready for approval for use systemwide. Linda Eberhart, the 2002 Maryland Teacher of the Year who proposed the career pathways idea in negotiations and a former Oversight Committee member, says initially, the Oversight Committee would caucus in their respective BTU and BCPS groups before coming together as a committee. This had the appearance of reverting to traditional negotiations where the parties would caucus ahead of time. They felt that seeing proposals for the first time at the Oversight Committee meeting did not allow for thoughtful response time, which resulted in difficult conversations, so they preferred to caucus separately about their positions. In an effort to move the parties on the Oversight Committee closer to joint decision-making, the Governing Panel members introduced working norms. The Governing Panel provided materials and briefed Oversight Committee leadership prior to the formal meeting, which allowed Oversight Committee members to consider the issues before discussing them as a group.

Though joint discussions did not come naturally at first, members of the Oversight Committee and the Governing Panel deliberately changed their habits for the benefit of the system. These changes have since permeated other aspects of the union and district's work.

The Oversight Committee and Governing Panel’s impact on the labor-management relationship

In Baltimore City, collaboration is the result of deliberate actions by both the union and district to develop routines, structures and policies for behavior that will ultimately create an environment focused on readying students for college and career. To that goal, the Oversight Committee has been critical to demonstrating the commitment to joint implementation because it is a designated space for collaboration. Having that space has since affected other aspects of the relationship. Rather than have a linear relationship where interaction on substantive issues only occurs around contract negotiation time, in Baltimore City the union and district are constantly communicating. The regular twice-monthly Oversight Committee meeting provides an opportunity for union leadership to communicate directly with district leadership.

Before a partnership, there is work the district can do with the union. BTU and BCPS leadership both emphasized that their contract is the result of a healthy relationship. They are able to navigate solutions to day-to-day issues *and* collaborate on initiatives with long-term impact, like the pathways implementation. In districts where the labor-management relationship does not yet have the trust needed for partnership, the district and union can take deliberate steps toward bridging information gaps, addressing pressure points and discussing each entity’s set of priorities. This can create inroads to move the relationship toward partnership.

And though the Oversight Committee was established to create the career pathways system, other topics began to come up indicating there were many issues that needed to be jointly addressed.

Over the last two years, addressing the union’s concerns honestly and openly has effectively removed barriers to discussion on implementation of the joint initiatives. For example, district leaders and union leaders had different perceptions on the number of unresolved grievances and how they were being handled. Reflecting on this, BCPS’ interim CEO Edwards described how she learned that these other issues could distract the group from the Oversight Committee’s work at hand. By sharing information about the grievances backlog, the district and union have begun to think through ways to build the capacity at the building or network level to handle grievances before they reach the central office. Now, as issues arise, there is little hesitation to bring them directly to the attention of the union or district leadership, and this practice has become embedded in the relationship.

In a practice that began with BCPS' former CEO Alonso and will continue with interim CEO Edwards, whenever district staff seek approval for something, they are met with the question, "Was there a conversation with the union?" In turn, this has changed the culture at the central office, where staff now seek out the union not to be compliant, but because they see value in it. When the district wanted to do three days of professional development on the Common Core State Standards before the end of the year, they shared the plans with the BTU. The BTU encouraged them to ensure the days were not only geared toward mathematics and English language arts teachers, which in turn pushed the district's academic office to expand the professional development offerings. Though leaders at the highest level consistently model this behavior, there are opportunities to replicate this at the network level between area directors and union field representatives and at the building level between principals and building representatives.

Problems of Practice: Time, Turnover and Communications

Bringing contractual commitments to life in a large urban school district is not straightforward. Union and district leadership have committed considerable resources to create a new basis for teacher advancement, but they have encountered the typical problems of practice: time, turnover and communications.

Joint implementation takes time

Jointly designing something on the scale and importance of the career pathways system has demanded considerable time, but both BCPS and the BTU agree it was time well-spent to get the system right and not just done. During contract negotiations, the BTU and BCPS committed themselves to specific timelines for development and implementation of aspects of the system. In retrospect, BTU and BCPS leadership reflect that this was a double-edged sword.

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True partnership takes time; set realistic timelines. When the systems and processes for implementation do not yet exist, it is critical not to set unreasonable timelines. Be thoughtful about the time it will take to create the system in good faith and with the proper deliberation. However, teachers and members are depending on the outcomes of the deliberations, so it is equally critical to create milestones that make sense for the initiative.

The strict timelines were a strong accountability tool early on, but once the work began in

earnest, it became clear that some timelines would not be met. Members of the Oversight Committee and the Governing Panel found they were approaching the work thoroughly and in good faith, and that doing so took time. They found it took significant time to carefully consider both the district's policy goals and the practical impact on teachers; it took time to construct a process mindful of these things and then to pilot rubrics and conduct focus groups with teachers. As contractual timelines were missed, there was some pushback from teachers who wanted to enter the Model pathway peer review process and so wanted an understanding of the achievement units that would determine their salary increases. Governing Panel members responded with presentations explaining the design process and a graphic showing the amount of back and forth that occurred between the Governing Panel and the Oversight Committee before a component was ready for implementation with teachers. Interim CEO Edwards observed that strict short-term timelines make sense when systems and processes have been established, but they are not practical when creating a system from scratch. In the end, the system has been designed and implemented in understandable segments, and a defined scope of work remains to be done.

Member turnover

It's not unusual in many school districts for leadership to leave the district and new staff members to come on board, and it has been no different for the members of the Oversight Committee and the Governing Panel in Baltimore City. As the district's representatives change, a certain amount of re-education is needed to bring new members up to speed on the culture of collaboration involved in this work, the way proposals are generated and vetted, and the BTU and BCPS' approach to implementation. Marietta English, BTU president, notes that the contract operates as an anchor, but as the words become real, it becomes critical to understand the intent during negotiations and how it has manifested in development and implementation. "We are constantly saying, 'What we meant was'" Turnover brings uncertainty, and it is critical that new members are invested in the intent of the contract and in the system as is it now, and that they are prepared to continue the work in the collaborative tradition with which it has been done so far.

Communication with teachers

The Baltimore City contract changed not only how much teachers could be paid but how they approach their careers in the district, which is why communication is becoming an increasingly critical component of implementation. The Governing Panel leads this aspect of implementation by sending update documents to members' homes, doing school-based presentations on each aspect of the system as it rolls out, and responding to all emails within 24 hours. The Governing Panel has developed a reputation among teachers for being responsive, but in this case

responsiveness is a measure of service to teachers who approach the panel. Kenya Campbell, the Governing Panel's executive chair, points out that some teachers seek information as the Governing Panel and the Oversight Committee reach decisions and not just when the system is ready for implementation. There need to be ways for this information to reach all teachers, not just those who reach out. When a system affects professional decision-making and promotion opportunities, teachers seek regular information and the Governing Panel has committed to making this more central to their work in the upcoming school year.

Advice from Baltimore City

Communication with teachers matters. BTU leadership recognizes that as implementation progresses, an important component of the partnership's success will be ongoing communication with members. From monthly contract updates to the BCPS website to presentations at each school building, one of the Governing Panel's goals for the third year of implementation is to improve its communications so that every professional knows what is new and how they can advance their careers and salaries.

Impact: The Role of Teacher Voice

On the role of teacher voice in implementation, BTU President English reflects, "Districts want to do things, change things. To do the work, if you want teachers to do what you want, then you have to respect them and give them voice." Initially, leading up to negotiations, then-CEO Alonso called upon Eberhart, a 37-year veteran teacher, to suggest a new model. With support to create something different, BTU teachers on the negotiating team worked with BCPS leadership to grow what started as an idea into a system of achievement units, career pathways and peer review. Later, when members of each bargaining team required significant persuasion, the idea gained credibility because it was developed by teachers. In this way, the contract itself demonstrates the district's commitment to teachers and their professional contributions—a

commitment that also supports the district's goal of improving teacher recruitment, retention and professional growth.

Since ratification, teacher voice has been a central component to the design and implementation of Baltimore City's career pathways system. The most obvious example of teacher voice has been the selection of eight classroom teachers to step away from the classroom and work full time as Governing Panel members. Their initial proposals formed the foundation of the career pathways system as Baltimore City teachers know it, and the collaborative culture and work ethic they established has provided a solid implementation base. However, the Governing Panel's work has evolved to show that their eight perspectives—though quite varied—were not enough. At the suggestion of the Oversight Committee, the Governing Panel has included many more teachers through pilot tests of the Model pathway rubric, focus groups after each Model teacher cohort completes the process, and teacher testimonials that are now a component of Governing Panel proposals and Oversight Committee meetings. Even teachers who do not agree with the changes have had space to voice their concerns with BTU leadership. Given their experience with joint development of the career pathways system, both the BTU and BCPS are considering the role of teacher voice in new ways for the design and implementation of other initiatives, like the upcoming new teacher evaluation system.

Teacher impact: A system made by teachers for teachers

Perhaps most compelling about the last two years in Baltimore City is that the contract has flowered into a functional system created, led and run by teachers. With all teachers transitioned to a pathway and an interval comparable to their place in the old step-and-lane system, implementation has since affected 6,500 school-based employees in a variety of ways. The Oversight Committee continues to track the system in its current form and to ensure that new components come out on time, and the Governing Panel leads day-to-day operations of the system. The system has a life of its own now, and will continue to grow for the foreseeable future.

Teachers are navigating the variety of ways in which they earn achievement units, which feed into their base salaries. The contract outlined five ways to earn achievement units: annual evaluation; approved professional development; contributions to student learning; contributions

to colleagues; and contributions to school and district. As of the end of the 2012-2013 school year, teachers were earning achievement units for all but the last two of these methods. Baltimore City has awarded teachers more than 3,000 achievement units for course completion at institutes of higher education. The Governing Panel has also approved more than 100 professional development courses to count as achievement units, and the district has processed and awarded more than 5,000 achievement units for completing approved professional development. Since professional development feeds into an achievement unit that can increase a teacher's base salary, the offering must pass muster as one that ultimately affects teacher practice. Teachers seeking achievement units for contributions to student learning may submit proposals to the Governing Panel at any time. The requirements are demanding and allow currently uncompensated work to count as achievement units (e.g., after-school remediation for targeted students, coaching chess club). Within each of the two school years that the system has been in place, some teachers have jumped more than one interval by earning 24 or more achievement units.

Teacher impact: The contract in practice

Four cohorts of teachers have gone through the Model Pathway application process:

- More than 500 teachers submitted complete applications.
- 212 have become Model teachers.

139 professional development courses were approved for achievement units (AUs):

- There were 3,278 course completions (1 course = 1 AU).
- 5,129 AUs were awarded from professional development (12 AUs = salary interval increase).

For more information, visit www.baltimorecityschools.org/Page/14078.

Four cohorts of teachers have gone through the Model pathway peer review process with the Model rubric as the bar in the district for excellent teaching. It represents the value the organization places on using formative and summative assessment data, differentiating instruction, student mastery, applying professional development and demonstrating high-quality teaching methods, among other standards. More than 500 teachers have submitted complete applications, and 212 teachers have moved onto the Model pathway. Some of these teachers' salaries doubled, from about \$40,000 to \$80,000, because they demonstrated the skills and practice associated with an excellent classroom.

BTU and BCPS leadership have expressed confidence in the Model pathway process, believing that it targeted the mindsets and outcomes of an excellent educator. Indeed, recent value-added

analysis suggests a strong correlation between the Model process and an impact on student achievement on certain tests. The peers who conduct the assessment have been rigorous in their review, showing that, sometimes, teachers can be the toughest critics of teachers. Because promotion to the Model pathway is through a peer review process and not an evaluation by a supervisor, it cannot be grieved. The Governing Panel counsels teachers who are not promoted and encourages them to wait one cohort cycle before applying again. In setting a high bar for excellent teaching, the Model pathway process has given younger teachers something to aspire to, and they can apply whenever they are ready. The process has also revealed deeper issues related to professional development, classroom supports and student data collection. On balance, the achievement unit and Model pathway processes have effectively transitioned most Baltimore City teachers into the new system, and with continued outreach, increasing numbers of teachers will tap into a system that requires more of teachers but links that effort to compensation.

There is still work to do. The Governing Panel will continue to approve achievement units through professional development and contributions to student learning. In the upcoming school year, they will tackle the requirements and process for earning achievement units for contributions to colleagues, school and district. They will also work with building principals to flesh out how Model teachers can support principals' targeted needs. The Oversight Committee will build out the process for promotion to the Lead pathway, since it will put teachers in academic support positions in their schools. Finally, BCPS has begun the process of evaluating the effectiveness of the career pathways processes. Having defined the bar for excellent teaching in the district, and with teachers in the classroom who have met that bar, BCPS is in a unique position to examine student outcomes data over time to see whether teachers who meet that definition have a greater impact on student achievement. Though work remains, both BTU President English and interim CEO Edwards reflected that the contract has accomplished what they intended it to do and that younger teachers are capitalizing on its offerings.

Looking Ahead

BTU and BCPS leadership agree that maintaining the momentum of the last two years will take continued commitment to the values of the contract from the district's board of education to each and every teacher. This includes a commitment to the financial, personnel and structural

resources required to implement the pathways system, and a commitment to support teachers as they continue the transition and take advantage of its offerings. At a practical level, entities like the Governing Panel and the Oversight Committee will be needed to implement the system and continuously improve it. And the technology platform for submitting and tracking achievement units will streamline the administrative aspects of implementation. While the BTU and BCPS have done much to turn the black-and-white letters of the contract into a functional system that promotes teacher professionalism, it is still early. Changes this big arguably take five to seven years to prove their impact on long-term outcomes like student achievement and graduation rates. Leadership at the union and the district have voiced caution in expecting too much too early. Staying the course is rare in education reform, but fundamental change deserves time.

The scope of educational issues on which BCPS consults the BTU is broad, but both agree that the scope of true partnership—where BTU has decision-making authority—will remain limited to what is negotiated in the contract. Going forward, the BTU president wants to make sure the district follows through on all the contractual commitments before getting involved in other partnership work. Nevertheless, the level of involvement required by the pathways system has changed the relationship between the BTU and BCPS. They have fostered a mutual commitment and sense of obligation to communicate openly about issues affecting teachers and to create solutions together. Though this aspect of the relationship is broader than implementing the pathways system together, it promotes what BCPS' interim CEO describes as “cultivating the relationship so it is always primed for risk.” The full impact of the pathways system may not be clear for a few more years, but the greatest accomplishment may already be a rigorous working relationship and a willingness to do things differently together.