

National Study on Union-Management Partnerships and Educator Collaboration in U.S. Public Schools

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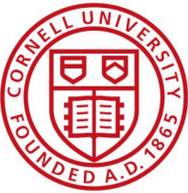
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Adapted from the October 2017 Collaborative School Leadership Initiative Working Paper

The entire six page Working Paper can be found at:



bit.ly/2sVzFRP



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Over the past 16 years, federal efforts to improve public education have focused on market reforms (charter schools and voucher programs). To date, there is little evidence that these reforms have produced the promised benefits. However, for the past 10 years, we have been studying a different approach to improving and reforming public education—one based on building strong relationships among teachers’ unions and school administrations, and developing collaborative institutions in schools and school districts focused on improving teaching and learning. We have been conducting a national study on union-management partnerships and educator collaboration in public schools across the country, which includes over 400 schools in 21 school districts in six states: California, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and New Jersey.

We focus on school and district decision-making and problem-solving, particularly as they apply to the relationship among administrators, teachers, and their unions. We are interested in how collaborative processes at the school level—specifically shared decision-making; goal alignment; and teacher discretion, voice, and psychological safety¹—impact student performance, teacher turnover, and engagement, and the extent to which teachers view their principals and union leaders as educational resources. In addition, we study how union-management partnerships in school districts shape school culture. Our findings reveal that union-management partnerships help to catalyze productive collaborative behaviors that benefit students and educators alike.

Summary of Findings:

- School-level collaboration **improves student performance** (ELA and math), even after we control for poverty.
- School-level collaboration **reduces voluntary turnover and increases school commitment. (These effects are particularly strong for high-poverty schools.)**
- Highly collaborative schools and strong union-leader networks **increase cross-school knowledge sharing.**
- Formal union-management partnerships at the district-level seem to be **a catalyst for building highly collaborative schools**, as we find that district partnerships are positively associated with school collaboration.
- School representatives in high-partnership districts are more likely to **view** collaboration-building as central to their union roles and responsibilities.

In addition, we also found that collaboration, including shared decision-making, goal alignment, teacher discretion, voice and psychological safety, are all positively associated with teachers' perceptions of:

- Individual teacher and collective faculty effectiveness;
- Principal resourcefulness;
- Union representative resourcefulness.

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District Culture Attribute Descriptions

Partnership Quality

The relationship between the union and management. High quality partnerships are demonstrated by shared decision-making, collaboration, and mutual respect between formal union leaders and administrators.

Attribute	Description
Peer Collaboration	The amount and quality of collaboration among administrators within a district. It encompasses information sharing, social support, and the extent to which administrators successfully work together to accomplish goals.
Discretion	The amount of autonomy afforded to school administrators within a district. In high employee discretion settings, administrators have the latitude to make school-level decisions independently.
Goal Alignment	The extent to which administrators work towards common goals. High goal alignment is demonstrated by a common purpose and shared priorities.
Psychological Safety	The extent to which school administrators are comfortable voicing their concerns and sharing their opinions. Administrators that experience psychological safety believe that they will not be harshly judged for making mistakes or voicing concerns about district policies. Psychologically safe environments allow for respectful discourse that includes all viewpoints.
Shared Decisions	The extent to which school administrators, district administrators, and the superintendent collaborate on important decisions. In environments high in shared decision-making, the superintendent and district administrators regularly consult with school administrators for input on significant issues.

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School Culture Attribute Descriptions

Partnership Quality

The relationship between the union and management. High quality partnerships are demonstrated by shared decision-making, collaboration, and mutual respect between formal union leaders and administrators.

Attribute	Description
Peer Collaboration	The amount and quality of collaboration among teachers and faculty members within a school. It encompasses information sharing, social support, and the extent to which faculty successfully work together to accomplish goals.
Discretion	The amount of autonomy afforded to teachers and faculty within a school. In high employee discretion settings, teachers have the latitude to make classroom-level decisions independently.
Goal Alignment	The extent to which teachers and faculty members are working towards common goals. High goal alignment is demonstrated by a common purpose and shared priorities.
Psychological Safety	The extent to which teachers and faculty are comfortable voicing their concerns and sharing their opinions. Teachers and faculty that experience psychological safety believe they will not be harshly judged for making mistakes or voicing concerns about school policies. Psychologically safe environments allow for respectful discourse that includes all viewpoints.
Shared Decisions	The extent to which school management and teachers/faculty collaborate on important decisions. In environments high in shared decision-making, school administrators regularly consult with teachers/faculty for input on significant issues.