

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

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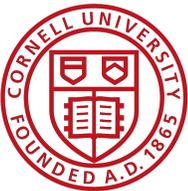
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Collaborative School Leadership Initiative Working Paper

The six page Working Paper can be found at:



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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.

¹ Psychological safety is the extent to which one perceives that he or she can be open and question policies or decisions without fear of reprisal.

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.