

SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION AROUND THE NATION



A Tour of
**Labor Management
Collaboration Exemplars**
Across the United States



This document provides an at-a-glance summary of sustained, successful labor-management collaboration (LMC) examples. These solid examples highlight the positive outcomes associated with including educator voice and influence in developing solutions and in decision-making, and some of the best practices that help sustain LMC as a successful strategy.

Labor-Management Collaboration Is an Educator Voice Strategy



Because educators consistently tell us that their authentic involvement in decision-making is essential to improve teaching and learning, providing for educator voice has long been a priority for NEA. And, labor-management collaboration is a vital part of the Association’s toolbox of effective strategies to help our members have lasting voice and influence in their professions. LMC positions educators to share decision-making with administrators and occurs when local associations and their members work with administrators to co-design solutions toward student-centered goals.

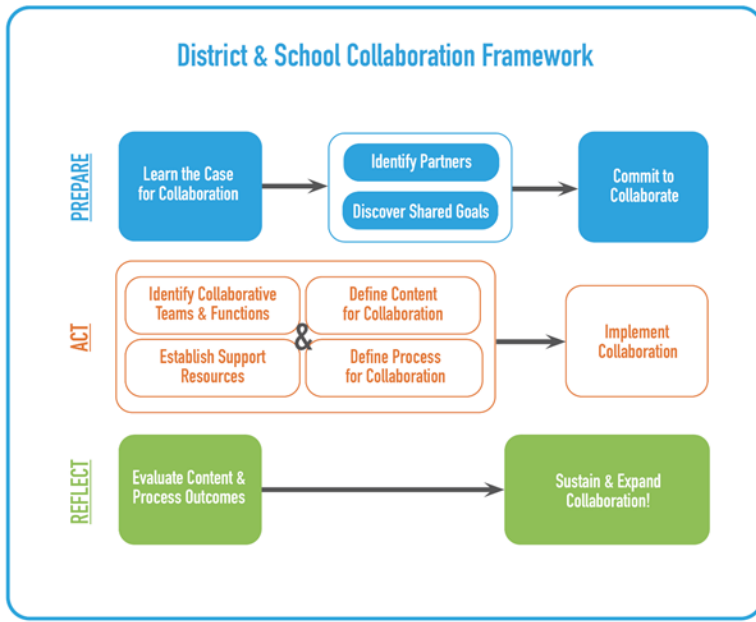
Labor-Management Collaboration Yields Tangible Benefits

Labor-management collaboration has been proven to yield tangible benefits for both students and educators. Recent research verifies that systems with higher levels of collaboration see: increased student achievement in math and language arts; reduced teacher turnover, particularly in high-poverty schools; greater goal alignment between educators and principals; increased educator efficacy; stronger mentoring relationships between educators; expanded association representatives’ roles to include professional and social justice issues in addition to their traditional involvement in grievance processing and information dissemination; and the sharing of innovative practices across schools and districts through the association’s/union’s natural network.

In addition to these research-verified benefits, the enclosed stories highlight additional benefits, such as increased student attendance, school climate improvements, and increased student and educator engagement.

Systemic Labor-Management Collaboration Produces Sustained Outcomes

Labor-management collaboration is a long-term, ongoing strategy that is ideally embedded in the system’s culture in order to outlast individual relationships. But culture shift is hard, and without a clear roadmap collaboration is often reliant on individual behaviors and personalities rather than being embedded in the norms of the system.

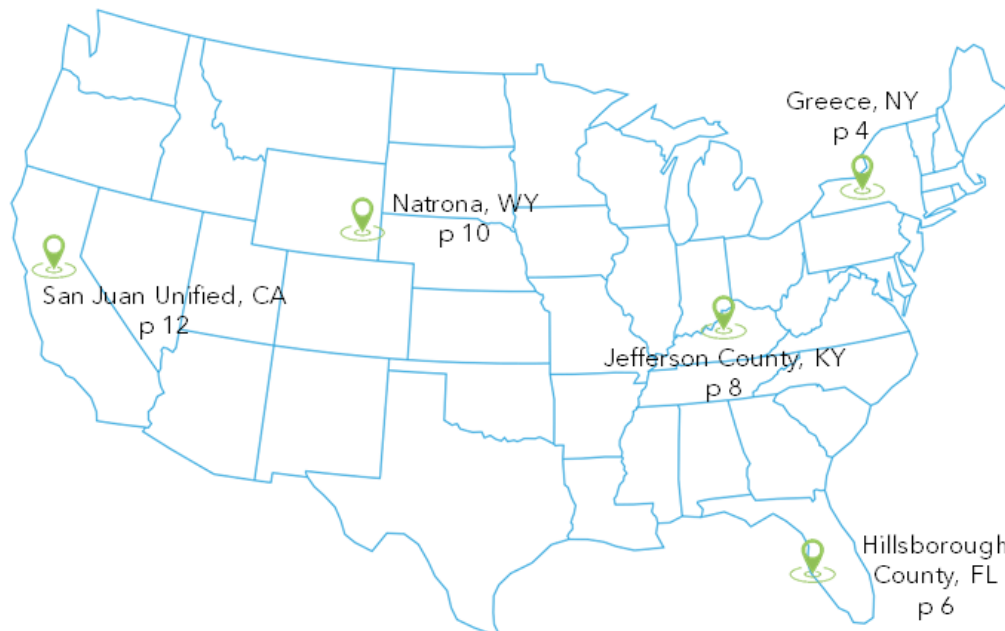


One such roadmap is the District & School Collaboration Framework shown to the left. The Framework is based on the collective experience and best practices of those successfully engaged in this work and can provide the staying power that allows culture shift to occur. As collaborative teams work through the three framework stages (Prepare, Act, Reflect), they establish a collaborative partnership, build productive working relationships, foster school-level collaboration, form teams and committees to work together on student-centered issues, and repeat and grow these structures and processes.

The Case Studies

The examples of successful labor-management collaboration that follow represent a variety of collaboration starting points and district characteristics. And, although the case studies themselves are structured around the Prepare, Act, and Reflect stages shown in the framework above, you'll see that labor-management collaboration looks different in different contexts, but consistently leads to positive outcomes when best practices are used.

Our hope is that these examples can educate and inspire others to advance LMC as an effective strategy for amplifying educator voice and influence. We've included a small sampling of districts successfully using LMC, based on their notable sustained collaboration rooted in solid collaborative processes and structures. The following districts are featured:



Greece Teachers Association & Greece Central School District Greece, NY

Joint attendance at Teacher Union Reform Network (TURN) meetings spurred the union and administration to enhance and formalize their already collegial relationship. The suburban Rochester district serves 11,000 students in 18 schools sites and ranks between the 8th and 10th largest school district in New York. Demographically, Greece mirrors the nation. The students speak 38 different languages and schools within Greece range from 42% - 75% of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch.

Outcomes:

- Redesigned standards-based report cards that include ratings for social emotional competencies, and an SEL website with lessons and resources for teachers
- District-wide continuum of service manual to increase knowledge of special education requirements, processes, vocabulary, decision-making and to ensure communication
- District-wide RtI (Tiered Instruction) manual to ensure common language, clear problem-solving processes, and that students get appropriate supports
- A more restorative Code of Conduct, updated annually
- New Culturally Responsive Education course for staff, plus online resources and toolkits
- Increased student achievement (reading and reading fluency scores increased 5% from 2017-2019 in Grades 3, 5 and 8)
- Collaboratively developed hybrid teaching model for 2021/2022 school year
- Restructured professional learning with built in choice PD

Keys to Longevity:

- Commitment to building relationships and trust, modeling a collaborative culture, and setting collaboration as an expectation for all
- Collective bargaining agreement includes expectations for collaboration and shared decision-making
- Hiring folks with values aligned with Greece's: humility, teamwork, listening
- Strong system of open, two-way union/administration communication at upper leadership levels
- Administration hiring and onboarding processes and union leadership succession planning

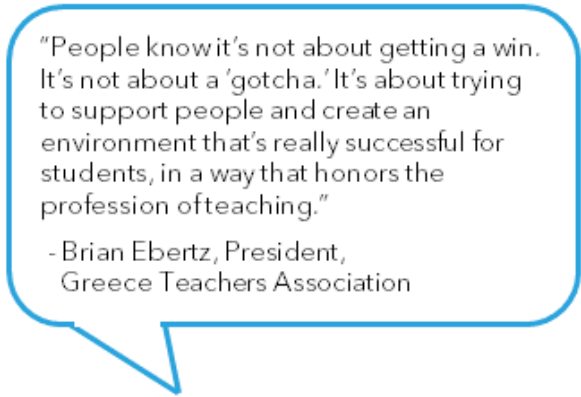
Stakeholders Involved:

- Greece Teachers Association leadership, building reps, and members
- District superintendent, Board of Education, district administrators, principals
- School board members on committees, including Equity Design and Code of Conduct
- The district also has collaborative partnerships with their ESP, substitute teacher, support staff, and Teamster unions
- Partnership with Parent Leadership Training Institute at district and school levels

PREPARE

Around 2012, the superintendent at the time encouraged administration and GTA leaders to attend several TURN meetings. From these learnings came a “50/50” lens, with committees made up of half teacher representatives and half administration, with equal voice and shared decision-making. Greece also took on an NEA student-centered grant that helped fuel their collaboration. An early win was designing and rolling out a new elementary report card, a typically very contentious process that turned out to be “seamless.” GTA and the administration are committed to building relationships and trust. Their aligned vision of what they want for the district and how they want to operate is spelled out in their contract, as are expectations for shared decision-making at both the district and school levels, and that problems will be solved at the lowest possible level.

ACT



“People know it’s not about getting a win. It’s not about a ‘gotcha.’ It’s about trying to support people and create an environment that’s really successful for students, in a way that honors the profession of teaching.”

- Brian Ebertz, President,
Greece Teachers Association

Greece’s extensive collaborative structures provide a constant flow of information that enhances understanding, builds relationships, and helps identify and solve smaller issues before they grow. As a result, GTA reports that formal grievances have declined sharply. These structures include: a district leadership team that meets twice a month; standing meetings between union leaders and their district-level administration counterparts; a School Improvement Team in each school; regular meetings between principals and reps; a series of

school-level committees to address specific issues, such as school culture and equity; and the superintendent and GTA president have a practice of visiting each school as a team to listen to educators’ challenges and successes. Having multiple lenses on the same issue helps develop a fuller picture, and makes issues easier to solve. These structures have helped instill a culture of collaboration and unity.

Processes include regular Data Dives that bring teachers and administration together from all 18 buildings to examine data and develop action plans. They recently noted a need for shared decision-making skills, particularly at the school level, and formed a Shared Decision-Making Committee to build understanding and create tools and practices.

REFLECT

Greece has a well-designed system for sustaining and expanding collaboration. GTA representatives are at the table for all administration hiring, and part of the interview protocol is designed to evaluate the candidate’s propensity for working collaboratively. New administrators are matched with a mentor and tasked with real-world scenarios so they can learn how the district works with the union to approach challenges. GTA is also very succession-plan oriented, and tries to identify collaborative individuals and good communicators. Those new to GTA’s committees are given a collaboration orientation so they know what to expect. New GTA reps and administrators are also invited to TURN meetings to learn more about collaborative practice. Both administration and GTA are intentional about modeling collaborative processes and behaviors in their internal meetings.

Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association & Hillsborough County Public Schools* Hillsborough, FL

The HCTA/HCPS partnership grew out of a 1968 administration-supported strike in response to state government cuts to public education resources. Hillsborough is the third-largest school district in Florida and encompasses Tampa as well as surrounding rural areas. HCPS has 243 schools serving over 220,000 students, 58% of whom are eligible for free or reduced lunch and about 10% of whom are English language learners.

Outcomes:

- Student learning, high graduation rates and Advanced Placement enrollment
- Successful incentive program to retain teachers at schools with a high percentage of academically struggling students
- Good-faith bargaining
- A range of mentoring, PAR, and training opportunities

Keys to Longevity:

- Collective bargaining agreement requires HCTA members on district decision-making committees
- Standing meetings between administrators and union leaders
- Strong collaborative climate built on transparency, trust, and mutual respect
- Collaborative Steering and School Improvement Process committees at every school
- Stability of leadership, including most administrators hired from within the school system

Stakeholders Involved:

- HCTA leadership, building reps, and members
- HCPS administration, including the superintendent, HR chief and staff, and principals
- School board
- Parent, students, and community groups

PREPARE

The 1968 strike in opposition to state funding cuts, which was supported by Hillsborough administration, fostered solidarity of purpose and made explicit a shared HCTA and HCPS commitment to student achievement. Initially, collaboration focused on curriculum, examinations, and textbook selection. In the 1990s, there was a joint union-administration effort to build a collaborative climate built on transparency, collaboration, trust, and mutual respect. Teacher participation on district committees is codified in the CBA.

ACT

The partnership undertook innovations in teacher evaluation and compensation in the 2000s, as well as developing an extensive range of mentoring, PAR, and training opportunities. More recently, HCTA and HCPS have collaboratively developed a teacher retention program for schools whose students are struggling with reading and math. The program has greatly reduced teacher turnover at these schools where the students are most in need of educator consistency.

"We know that when people feel ownership of their school and have a say in what's happening there, they do better work, and our students benefit. That is foundational."

- Ron Kriete, President,
Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association

Consistent communication and the ability to meet frequently are keys to building trust and maintaining transparency. During COVID, meetings between union leaders and the superintendent and HR chief moved to a more frequent weekly schedule. This has proved so beneficial to mutual understanding and building the relationship that the weekly meetings continue after the pandemic.

There is broad educator involvement on school- and district-level committees, including Collaborative Steering and School Improvement Process committees at every school. In many schools, the site reps and principals meet regularly to jointly problem solve. This system of addressing problems at the outset has led to a low number of grievances. Union leaders and administration provide collaboration advice and support to the school-level committees, and model and talk about collaboration in their own internal meetings.

HCTA works closely with parent and community groups and school board members to help ensure that these stakeholders understand teachers' perspectives and their passion for meeting students' needs. Parents have lobbied school board members on behalf of teacher union bargaining asks.

REFLECT

One way the district identifies issues to be addressed is through employee surveys, which are often customized to a particular site. The data is shared with the union so that site reps can weigh in on what's happening on the ground before decisions are made.

A key to sustaining the collaboration is HCTA's efforts to proactively recruit school board candidates. The school board has historically made a priority of hiring superintendents who support a collaborative approach.

* Information on the early decades of this partnership is drawn from: Rubinstein, S. A. & McCarthy, J. E. (2010, October). Collaborating on School Reform: Creating Union-Management Partnerships to Improve Public School Systems. Rutgers University School of Management and Labor Relations.

Jefferson County Teachers Association & Jefferson County Public Schools Louisville, KY

The Jefferson County Teachers Association (JCTA) began their labor-management collaboration journey at an NEA conference in the late 2000s, which led to the formation of their joint labor-management Educator Quality Oversight Committee. Jefferson County Public Schools is a large district with 167 schools that serve more than 94,000 students, about 6% of whom are English language learners.

Outcomes:

- Improved student learning and engagement
- Added a goal of fewer district-mandated assessments to the district's strategic plan
- Collaborative oversight of educator professional growth and evaluation
- Increased member communication

Keys to Longevity:

- Third-party coaching and support
- School board members are supportive of collaboration

Stakeholders Involved:

- JCTA leadership and members
- JCPS administration
- School board members
- Louisville Metro government
- Community partners, including nonprofits and local businesses

PREPARE

JCTA's interest in labor-management collaboration was spurred at an NEA conference in the early 2000s. With coaching from Jerry Weast and Bonie Cullison and some field trips to observe a similar structure in Montgomery County, Maryland, the district established its joint labor-administration Educator Quality Oversight Committee (EQOC), which oversees educator professional development, protocols for PLCs, and teacher evaluations.

The partnership also had support from Harvard University's By All Means initiative, which selected Louisville and five other cities to pilot integrated systems of education and child well-being to close achievement gaps. By All Means provided coaching and data support.

ACT

"We take a 'hats off' approach to problem solving, discussing issues and problems without bringing our roles into it. Eventually, it becomes the way you engage with each other, and it's the way you want to be."

- Brent McKim, President,
Jefferson County Teachers Association

Another early win involved forming a collaborative committee to rethink the number of district-mandated assessments. The committee was able to add the goal of fewer district-mandated assessments to the district's strategic plan, and this work is ongoing.

When considering school reopening amid the COVID-19 pandemic, JCTA surveyed their members and concluded that far too many educators had questions and concerns, so JCTA engaged with district

administration, who recognized that more work needed to be done. As a result, they created a Collaborative Reopening Committee (CRC) at each school, with equal numbers of administrators and teachers, co-created agendas, and co-chaired meetings. These committees were highly successful across the district, resulting in safe and smooth reopenings that both administrators and educators felt good about.

JCTA and JCPS also formed a collaborative district-level reopening committee to support the CRCs by providing guidance on collaborative processes, answering questions, and providing resources. Although the CRCs were temporary, they changed the dynamic between the principal and building reps in many cases, and laid the foundation for school-level collaboration throughout the district.

There's now an expectation that if a district committee is going to be working on a district-wide problem, JCTA representatives will be on that committee.

REFLECT

JCTA and JCPA recently called in Dr. Saul Rubinstein from Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations to help them establish more comprehensive collaborative structures. They are working on establishing the district-level 50/50 Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Committee which will be empowered to create working committees to address specific issues.

Their collaboration is also sustained by JCTA's work to elect pro-collaboration and pro-public-schools school board candidates. JCTA is highly active in school board elections and has a positive relationship with the seven-member school board.

Natrona County Education Association, Natrona County Classified Professionals Association, & Natrona County School District Casper, WY

Natrona's collaborative work began with using interest-based bargaining as a way to work towards common interests. The Natrona County School District serves roughly 13,000 K-12 students in 28 schools in the city of Casper and surrounding towns. About 28% of the student body is eligible for free or reduced lunch, and 2% are English language learners.

Outcomes:

- School climate improvements
- Student achievement/performance and engagement
- New educator evaluation system designed to grow, rather than punish, educators
- Implemented a successful educator recruitment initiative
- Program that reduced class sizes, hired aides, and increased classified teacher salaries
- Educator retention and satisfaction

Keys to Longevity:

- The Compact: The Agreement of Trust Between NCSD's Board of Trustees and Employees codifies that major decisions impacting students are reached through a collaborative interest-based decision-making process including trustees, the recognized employee associations, parents, students, and the community
- A strong structure of collaborative committees as well as standing meetings between association leadership and administration
- Training on collaborative processes
- Association succession planning

Stakeholders Involved:

- Local president and educator representatives of the Natrona County Education Association and the Natrona County Classified Professionals Association
- Natrona County Public Schools administrators, including superintendent and associate superintendents
- School board members
- Parent representatives
- Community groups are invited to participate on relevant issues

PREPARE

A 1999 failed negotiation made both sides recognize the need to focus on common ground, so they called in a third-party facilitator for training on using an interest-based agreement process. In January 2002, they came to an agreement known as the Natrona County School District Compact, which established and codified labor-management collaboration processes and structures, including a shared vision, guiding principles, and four governing committees, all of

which include educators, administrators, a parent representative, and a school board member. The Compact helped establish a new culture in the district.

ACT

The Compact defines four governing committees: Leader Group, which acts as a District Leadership Team addressing issues that arise and assigning them to the Problem Solvers committee for resolution; Problem Solvers, which functions as a working committee; Compact Steering Committee, which defines training on the Compact itself, evaluates the Compact, and recommends changes to keep it current and relevant; and Compact Issues Committee (CIC), which meets annually with a collaboration facilitator to address employment issues including salary and benefits, and is also responsible for amending the Compact.

The local president meets monthly with the superintendent, as well as with the associate superintendents of Human Resources and Curriculum and Instruction to identify issues and solve problems. The association also has an active member feedback loop in place that provides two-way communications from members to building reps to the local president, who raises potential issues in his meetings with administration. Results and feedback are then communicated back to members through the reps. Collaboration is embedded at the school level as well, with School Leadership Teams, content area teams, and professional learning communities.

In 2015, Natrona used state funding to expand the CIC to use the process for program-type decisions that still exists today. The program they built reduced class sizes, hired aides, and gave classified teachers a big salary increase.

Educators had a strong voice in developing the district's Smart Start Reopening Plan in 2020. With parent allies at their side, educators successfully ensured funding for a school nurse for each building, a school counselor available to students daily, as well as increased funding for contracted mental health services and a cadre of school counselors to address urgent needs.

REFLECT

Natrona has structures in place to help them sustain their collaboration. They've designed their Compact to be a living document, with regular evaluation and continuous improvement practices. In addition to training on the Compact itself, the district offers a graduate-level course (developed collaboratively) on the interest-based agreement process, which administrators and educators are encouraged to take. Individuals must have completed at least Level 1 of the course before they are eligible to serve on the CIC.

NCEA is strengthening their succession planning by changing their bylaws to elect the president one year before turnover, so that the outgoing president can work with and train the incoming president for a year before the new president takes office.

NCEA distributes a questionnaire to all school board candidates that includes questions to gage their openness to and potential support of collaboration in the district.

San Juan Teachers Association & San Juan Unified School District Sacramento County, CA

San Juan began their labor-management collaboration efforts in the 1980's in the aftermath of a 1977 teachers strike. San Juan is one of the largest districts in California serving almost 40,000 students living in six distinct communities, about 50% eligible for free or reduced lunch, about 50% using Supplemental Education Services, 15% English language learners, and changing demographics in the last ten years with a large influx of refugee students, many coming from South Central Asia.

Outcomes:

- Increased attendance and stabilized enrollment
- Improved educator retention
- Redesigned the practitioner evaluation system and shared governance of PAR
- Redesigned elementary report card to align with Common Core
- Redesigned early childhood education system

Keys to Longevity:

- Shared beliefs and agreements
- Collective bargaining agreement includes commitments to and structures for collaboration
- Open and transparent communication, including a "no surprise" commitment
- A District Leadership Team and School Leadership Teams at each school
- A structure of standing meetings between administration and the union across programs
- Respecting each other's concerns, perspectives, and experiences

Stakeholders Involved:

- San Juan Teachers Association (SJTA) president, executive director, and associate executive director
- San Juan Unified School District superintendent, deputy superintendent, and upper level management
- School administrators and faculty reps
- School board members

PREPARE

LMC in San Juan cultivates its roots in the 1980's and a need to work together to address turmoil that carried over from a 1977 teachers strike, negotiations deadlock, and mediation. During this tumultuous time, SJTA and administration realized the need to establish shared goals to work towards together. They used a Theory of Action to establish core beliefs to unite and guide their efforts that include: recognizing that they both care about all students; a mutual desire for a high quality education system for students; recognizing the need for creative and dynamic systems that also provide sustainable conditions for the adults; understanding and respecting each other's

political realities; and respecting each other's concerns, perspectives, and experiences. They also established interest-based bargaining (IBB) for negotiations.

ACT

SJTA and SJUSD embrace the philosophy that the presence of conflict does not mean the absence of collaboration, and their work together proves this to be true. This value drove the decision-making process as they navigated historic budget cuts in 2007-2008, contractualized a collaborative culture, and worked in partnership during an unprecedented pandemic.

San Juan used collaboration to transform their educator evaluation system. They focused on helping the vast majority of members who were meeting standards move to the next level of performance, and created a system based on evidence of student learning paired with the practitioner's reflection on next steps to move student learning forward.

Additional collaborative initiatives include an agreement to prioritize social justice and equity work, to designate professional development hours, and to formalize in their CBA a shared budget review committee that includes representatives from the union and administration. In addition to these efforts, the school district publicly recognizes and stresses the importance of mutual problem-solving in the bargaining process.

Collaborative structures that support this work include: standing meetings between the superintendent, local president, and local executive director twice monthly; additional standing meetings between a broader group of union leaders and district leaders across programs; a twice-monthly joint senior leadership meeting between SJTA and SJUSD; School Leadership Teams at every school; commitments to discuss issues as they emerge and develop solutions together; and a "no surprise" agreement to foster open and transparent communication. They are active in CalTURN as a way to support their partnership.

REFLECT

San Juan is intentional about creating a system that will outlast the current leadership. In addition to the budget review committee, their contract includes their commitments to collaboration, provisions for a School Leadership Team at each school, and collaborative qualification requirements for department chairs.

The superintendent helps ensure school board members understand that collaboration is a priority for the district, and seeks to hire administrators and leaders who value collaboration and want to work together. Every labor group appoints one person to the hiring committee for any management position, and the joint labor group makes a recommendation to the school board. New administrators take part in a joint district/association training to move them from adversaries to problem-solving teams.