

## Successful School Turnarounds Through Labor-Management Partnerships from **The State Role in School Turnaround: Emerging Best Practices**

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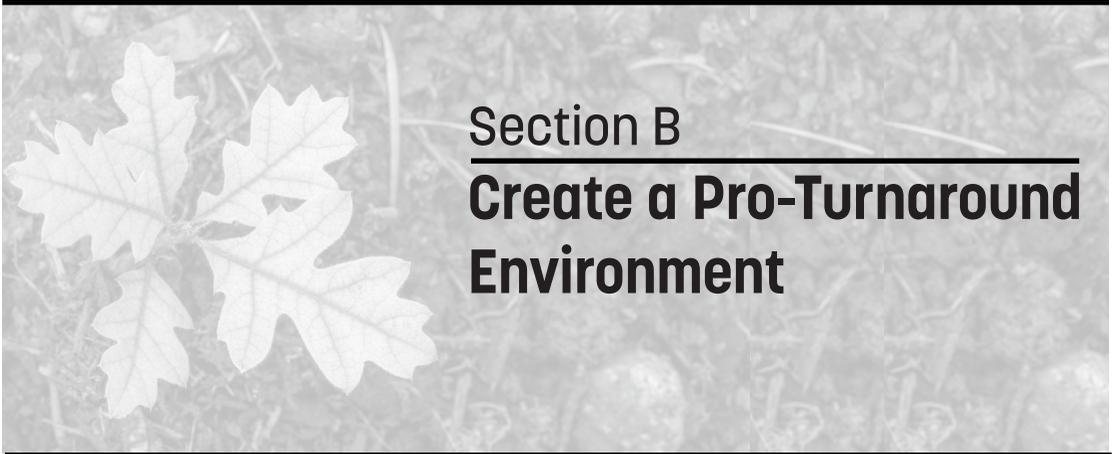
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## About the Center on School Turnaround

The national Center on School Turnaround focuses on providing technical assistance to, as well as building the capacity of, states to support districts and schools in turning around their lowest-performing schools. The Center is led by WestEd in partnership with the Academic Development Institute, the National Implementation Research Network, and the Darden/Curry Partnership for Leaders in Education at the University of Virginia.

## Focus Areas

- Developing SEA Staff Capacity and SEA Organizational Structures
- Building District Capacity
- Creating Policies, Incentives, and Partnerships to Ensure a Pipeline of Turnaround Leaders
- Promoting Cooperative Labor-Management Relations
- Promoting the Use of Expanded Learning Time
- Creating Systems and Processes to Ensure a Pool of High-Quality Turnaround Partners
- Ensuring the Availability and Use of Data Systems at the SEA Level
- Supporting Schools and Districts in Establishing a Positive School Climate
- Monitoring and Evaluating School Turnaround Efforts
- Improving Capacity of School Boards to Support Turnarounds
- Engaging Families and Communities
- Building Political Will for Dramatic Change



Section B

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**Create a Pro-Turnaround  
Environment**



## Successful School Turnarounds Through Labor–Management Partnerships: The Role for State Education Agencies

*Ken Futernick and Adam Urbanski*

In recent years, the federal government has made unprecedented investments in programs designed to turn around the nation's lowest performing schools. The Race to the Top program (RTTT), announced in 2009, provided \$4.35 billion in grants to states that agreed to adopt specific reforms and to turn around their lowest achieving schools. That same year, the U.S. Department of Education also provided \$3.5 billion in Title I School Improvement Grants (SIGs) to turn around the nation's lowest performing schools.

It's too early to tell whether RTTT and SIG will produce dramatic and sustainable improvements in the schools they target, but if similar efforts to turn schools around in the U.S. are any indication, the odds may be low (Smarick, 2010). As University of Chicago sociologist Charles Payne notes in his book, *So Much Reform, So Little Change*, "After a couple of years of being energetically reformed, most schools, especially bottom tier schools, and most school systems seem to be pretty much the same kind of organizations they were at the beginning" (Payne, 2008, p. 4).

However, Payne is referring to reforms that have been undertaken in the U.S. A significant number of low performing schools in places like Finland, Canada, and Singapore, have made significant and sustained improvements, demonstrating that chronically failing schools can, in fact, be turned around at scale (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Fullan, 2011; Mourshed, Chijioko, & Barber, 2010). The question is, what lessons can education officials in the U.S. learn from these countries? Researcher Michael Fullan believes the U.S. must place more emphasis on building social capital:

By adding social capital-based strategies you get multiple benefits. For example, focused collaborative practices mobilize and customize knowledge in the system, enabling teachers to know what other teachers do and to learn from them. In addition to leveraging instructional capacity, purposeful collaboration serves as the most effective form of lateral accountability. When combined with transparency of results, the whole apparatus fosters both collective ownership of educational practice and accountability to the public. Finally, these actions represent the best route to developing a trusted and respected profession. This is what successful countries are doing. (2011, p. 12)

One way that educators in countries with successful turnaround records build and sustain social capital is through collaboration between teacher unions and management. Government officials in Finland's widely acclaimed school system have long worked closely with the country's strong teacher unions and view them as essential partners. Struggling public schools in Ontario, Canada have made dramatic improvements in academic achievement in recent years, but government leaders and teacher unions had been bitter adversaries prior to this turnaround. In 2003, officials tried a different approach to address stagnating student performance. According to writer Marc Tucker, who studied the reform effort in Ontario, "They brought teachers and their unions to the table for discussions of education reform strategy and won their trust by listening hard to what the teachers had to say and then providing the needed support. The reform strategy that they adopted assumed that teachers wanted to do the right thing but lacked the capacity to do it" (2012, p. 20).

Relations between management and labor unions in the U.S. have historically been adversarial, which may help to explain why school turnaround efforts here have floundered. Many local and state teacher unions have actively resisted some of the turnaround policies required by programs like RTTT and SIG (e.g., replacing 50% or more of the teaching staff; using academic growth to evaluate teachers), and the absence of a collaborative environment has surely not promoted the "collective ownership of educational practice" that Fullan and others have observed outside the U.S.

The good news is that partnerships between labor and management are rapidly emerging in the U.S., and the impact of these partnerships appears promising, especially in districts that are engaged in school turnaround work. Our goal in this chapter is to acquaint state education agencies (SEAs) with key findings from case study research on the impact of labor-management collaboration on school policy and practice and to show how this collaboration is breaking down the fierce resistance to change that has hampered so many turnaround efforts. We also offer specific recommendations to SEAs based on the success several have had promoting a climate of trust, innovation, and collaboration among local stakeholders in their states.

## **School Turnarounds and Resistance to Change**

Successful school turnaround efforts—those designed to produce swift, dramatic, sustained improvements in student academic performance—require drastic changes in policy and practice. In the case of the federal SIG program, for instance, schools using the “transformation” model must replace the principal and extend learning time for students and collaboration time for teachers. They must also adopt new teacher and principal evaluation systems that use student academic growth as a key indicator. Teachers who perform well must be rewarded, and those who don’t must be removed. In schools following SIG’s “turnaround” or “restart” models, most or all of the teachers can be replaced. Other turnaround strategies, like getting “quick wins” and breaking organizational norms, while not mandated, have emerged as recommendations from the research on successful turnaround efforts (Calkins et al., 2007; Kowall & Ableidinger, 2011).

Explanations for the dismal results of school turnaround initiatives abound, but one of the most compelling is that the changes in policy and practice are frequently met with apprehension and resistance from education stakeholders (see, for instance, GAO, 2012).<sup>1</sup> Considerable opposition has come from teachers and their unions who have argued that teachers should not be expected to work a longer day or longer school year without additional compensation; that standardized test scores are an imperfect indicator of learning and should not be used to evaluate or compensate teachers; and that teachers who struggle in highly challenging schools should not be removed unless and until they have been given ample support from accomplished colleagues.

Such resistance from local stakeholders presents formidable challenges to local and state education leaders. If teachers and their unions do not buy into the changes, or worse, resist them, the prospects for successful school turnarounds will surely be diminished and may well be doomed from the start. In 2009, many states competed for federal RTTT funds, but many were denied because management and labor leaders were unable to agree on required elements of the program. Many local districts have had difficulty implementing required elements of the federal SIG program, again because local labor and management leaders could not agree to the terms of the program (Garland, 2012; Klein, 2012; Lachlan-Haché, Naik, & Casserly, 2012).

A growing body of research shows that many of the reforms required for successful school turnarounds are successfully implemented when local labor and management leaders establish a foundation of trust, agree to make student learning their primary objective, and implement critical reforms collaboratively. In Delaware, for instance, where \$100 million in RTTT funds were awarded, change management advisory councils led by state education officials helped

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<sup>1</sup>See, for instance, the GAO report, *School Improvement Grants: Education Should Take Additional Steps to Enhance Accountability for Schools and Contractors* (April 2012).

resolve a number of contentious labor issues that arose during the grant competition (Cavanagh, 2011).

As noted above, the use of new teacher evaluation systems based on student academic growth has proven to be particularly challenging for many districts. However, after union leaders and administrators in the Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland agreed to operate as partners rather than adversaries and then worked together to replace the district's antiquated teacher evaluation system, they created a comprehensive alternative that included high-quality professional development and extensive training for principals to ensure teacher evaluations would be fair and constructive. When leaders in two California districts—Poway Unified and San Juan Unified—used collaboration rather than confrontation to jointly develop peer-assistance and review programs, they created nationally recognized models that provide intensive support for struggling teachers and an effective, union-supported way to dismiss those who do not improve (Humphrey, Koppich, & Bland, 2011). Similar turnaround-friendly reforms have emerged through labor-management collaboration in New Haven, Connecticut; Memphis, Tennessee; and Seminole County, Florida (Hobbs, 2012). It behooves SEAs to promote labor-management collaboration because many of the reforms that are critical to successful school turnarounds are more likely to be adopted and implemented effectively when labor and management are working together.

Despite the encouraging reforms that have emerged through collaboration, labor-management partnerships have been the exception and not the rule. But recent events suggest that labor relations in U.S. public education may have reached a critical turning point—one that may signal a dramatic increase in the number of districts in which unions and management are collaborating to improve the quality of their schools. In February 2011, the nation's leading management and labor organizations and the U.S. Department of Education co-sponsored the first of its kind national conference on labor-management collaboration. Superintendents, labor leaders, and board presidents from 150 school districts convened in Denver, Colorado to hear first hand how districts like those mentioned above are leveraging collaboration to improve student learning and to support school turnaround efforts. A follow-up study conducted a year after the conference found that many of the participating districts had begun to collaborate on a broad range of policies and practices designed to improve the academic outcomes of their students (Futernick, McClellan, & Vince, 2011). A similar conference was conducted in Cincinnati in May 2012, and the same group of labor and management co-sponsors signed a shared vision statement to transform the teaching profession into an environment where leadership and responsibility are shared. Because of the success of these two national conferences, additional national, regional, and state events are in the works (Education Week, 2011).

In the next section, we examine research on labor-management collaboration and the impact it has had on policies associated with successful school

turnaround initiatives. Then, to help SEAs understand the role they can play in promoting collaborative partnerships, we describe several successful initiatives that have emerged at the state and regional levels. In the final section, we recommend specific strategies that SEAs can use to strengthen school turnaround efforts through labor–management collaboration.

## **Labor–Management Collaboration and Its Impact on School Quality**

### **The Purpose of Collaboration**

Collaboration, simply defined, calls for parties to communicate well and to work in a productive manner. However, as Daniel Humphrey and Julia Koppich point out in their book on peer review, “The promise of collaborative bargaining is not simply in changing the tenor of the discussion, in increasing the level of civility. The promise of collaborative bargaining lies in altering the substance of labor–management discussions and agreements. It lies in management and union being willing to examine the previously unexamined, doing the hard work together of confronting tough, high-stakes issues, and reaching accord on how to proceed when decisions carry real and human consequences” (Humphrey et al., 2011, p. 30).

Simply getting along with one another is not the goal for highly collaborative districts that have something to show for their efforts. Collaboration is a means to an end—a way to create conditions for powerful teaching and learning and, ultimately, to achieve equitable outcomes for all students. When parties are not collaborating, they usually resort to an adversarial approach to achieve their respective goals. Without a common set of purposes, parties do compromise but usually only to avoid losses or costly and time-consuming arbitrations.

In districts where collaboration is practiced, disputes still occur, and some of them must still be resolved through mediation. The difference is that these district leaders continue collaborating to solve other problems where progress is being made. Important work does not come to a halt just because an impasse has been reached on particular issues. With a foundation of mutual trust, collaborative leaders engage in “constructive conflict” and work together to avoid problems before they emerge (Futernick et al., 2013). In Douglas County, Colorado, union president Brenda Smith described the tangible benefits of improved professional relationships in her district:

Our district has really focused in on relationship building. We, as an organization, as a teacher’s voice, are always at the table talking about what’s next so there are no surprises. We have not filed a grievance in over six years. We typically make a phone call prior to a grievance and solve issues through dialogue and open communication. Part of this comes from building relationships, getting to know whom you’re dealing with inside the system and when there are problems, solving them very quickly. (as cited in Eckert, 2011, p. 17)

Another misconception about collaboration is that overly friendly relationships among parties with different interests will lead to collusion—that leaders will “give away the store,” not represent the interests of their constituents, and weaken their power base. This fear may account for much of the skepticism about collaboration that is prevalent among labor and management leaders who are unacquainted with the outcomes achieved in highly collaborative districts. This skepticism can be overcome when conferences, symposia, and site visits provide opportunities for school leaders and school board members to learn first hand from those working in similar roles how collaboration can produce the results they want for their schools and students.

### **The Impact of Labor–Management Collaboration**

A meta-analysis of case study research<sup>2</sup> on districts where labor–management collaboration is practiced shows that this strategy frequently leads to two types of outcomes that are particularly important for districts engaged in school turnaround efforts. The first outcome is improved professional relationships and trust among leaders in the district. The tangible benefits of increased social capital are effective communication, innovation, and problem solving, which are vital to school turnaround work. Turning around chronically failing schools, each with their own unique challenges, is exceedingly complex work, and there are no scripts or formulas for district leaders to follow. All stakeholders—including teachers, classified staff, union leaders, administrators, community leaders, and parents—must be able to devise and implement sound, creative strategies with maximum support from all groups. Tension and conflict are an inevitable by-product of change, and they are quick to surface in places where reform efforts have repeatedly failed in the past and the expectations for rapid change are high. But tensions and conflicts can be mitigated and the prospects for successful turnaround heightened if labor and management leaders can establish a foundation of trust and communicate effectively in the turnaround effort.

The second way that labor–management collaboration has influenced school turnaround efforts is by helping local stakeholders adopt policies that are recommended by research or required by government agencies (e.g., the federal RTTT and SIG programs). Some of the key policies that have emerged through labor–management collaboration include: improved teacher evaluation systems that take into account student academic growth; extended learning time for students and collaboration time for teachers; and peer-assistance and review programs that provide additional support to struggling teachers and remove those who

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<sup>2</sup>In 2012, WestEd conducted a meta-analysis of 7 recent investigations that examined 50 district cases from across 23 states where labor–management collaboration was practiced. Data from these case studies typically came from interviews, direct observation, surveys, and artifacts such as contracts, informal agreements, reports, and meeting minutes. WestEd researchers used this data to identify common patterns and themes within and across these district cases. This study is being published by WestEd.

cannot improve. We examine a few cases to illustrate how collaboration has enabled districts to enact policies that not only met the turnaround requirements but often exceeded them.

In Minnesota’s St. Francis Independent School District, union leaders working with management established a “Teacher Academy” to support professional development, evaluation, and compensation innovations. In response to a state funding initiative, the collaboration led to the development of the Student Performance Improvement Program (SPIP), which incorporated a career ladder and additional pay for accomplished teachers and a new teacher evaluation system. Initially, only 54% of the district’s teachers supported this program, but within one year, 85% of the district’s teachers voted to support it, and 90% of the teachers were participating in SPIP a few years later (Eckert, 2011). Evidence of success is seen in the district’s low teacher turnover rate—less than 2% per year—which leaders credit to SPIP (Rubinstein & McCarthy, 2010).

The Plattsburgh City School District in New York experienced years of contentious labor–management relations before adopting a collaborative approach. A new relationship and shared decision-making process laid the groundwork for the successful implementation of a Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program. Such programs, which first emerged in Toledo, Ohio in 1981, were designed to improve classroom instruction by allowing accomplished teachers to work with new teachers and struggling veteran teachers. PAR programs were also designed to assist with decisions about whether to retain teachers. Prior to implementation, a diverse design team in Plattsburgh, which included teachers, administrators, and a representative from State University of New York at Plattsburgh, attended two 3-day meetings every three months for over a year (WestEd, 2011). The design team eventually implemented a PAR system that emphasized “shared risk taking, informed professional practice, and high-level student outcomes” (Eckert, 2011, p. 38) and continues to direct the district’s professional development efforts, observe all new teachers up to 20 times each year, and provide administrators with extensive data to support tenure decisions (WestEd, 2011).<sup>3</sup> The reforms undertaken in these districts may not be ones that others would want to adopt to help turn around their schools, but the key lesson is that these important changes in district policy would not have come about were it not for the commitment leaders in these district made to collaborate with one another.

Labor–management collaboration has also led to the effective implementation of extended learning time (ELT). ELT is a key component of many school turnaround initiatives and another policy change that often leads to resistance from teacher unions.<sup>4</sup> In 2005, a coalition of state government and education

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<sup>3</sup>Dan Humphrey and Julia Koppich recently conducted a study of PAR programs and the role labor–management collaboration played in the design and implementation of these programs (Humphrey et al., 2011).

<sup>4</sup>Increases in the length of the school day was one of the major issues that led the Chicago Teachers Union to strike in fall 2012.

leaders in Massachusetts launched the Expanded Learning Time Initiative to improve student outcomes in core subjects and to ensure that all students receive a well-rounded education. According to the Boston-based National Center on Time and Learning:

In the fall of 2006, Massachusetts became the first state in the nation to implement a statewide initiative to dramatically expand the school calendar in traditional public schools. Ten schools in five districts implemented a new school day adding approximately two extra hours a day for all students. Over the past four years, the Expanded Learning Time (ELT) Initiative has grown. In school year 2010-2011, 19 schools in 9 districts across the Commonwealth, serving more than 10,500 students, are participating. (National Center on Time and Learning, 2010, p. 1)

The goals of extending learning time for students are laudable, but adding time to the school day or days to the school year poses several challenges for labor and management. How will teachers be compensated if they work longer hours or additional days? Where will the resources come from to pay them? What if teachers with children of their own at home are unable to teach a longer school day? Many schools and districts have been unable to find solutions to questions like these, but others like the Chelsea Public School in Massachusetts and the Oklahoma City Schools have adopted extended learning policies that both sides find amenable. As illustrated below, collaboration between management and labor enabled parties to agree to extended learning time policies.<sup>5</sup>

The Chelsea Public School District was one of several to participate in the state's ELT initiative. After working with management on a plan to increase learning time, teachers in eight of the nine district schools voted to submit extended learning proposals. Deputy superintendent Mary Bourque and Chelsea Teachers union president Mary Ferriter believed collaboration between labor and management was essential to the successful implementation of this initiative. Leaders from both sides said this was one of the first times they had worked together to solve an important educational problem. According to Bourque, "Everyone needed to be talking. We couldn't exist in silos anymore" (Vince, 2011).

The Oklahoma City Schools were recipients of SIG funds, which required the district to implement several reforms, including extended learning time for students in the district's five participating schools. A collaborative relationship that had formed between a new district superintendent, Karl Springer, and union president Ed Allen laid the groundwork for the cooperation that was needed to develop a restructuring plan for SIG. Several months of meetings facilitated by the American Federation of Teachers resulted in customized reform plans,

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<sup>5</sup>It remains to be seen, of course, whether extended learning time, as required by programs like SIG, will lead to improved outcomes for students. If it does, districts that want to sustain it will have to find funds to support it when their current grants expire.

including provisions for ELT, for each SIG school. Springer and Allen credit the progress made to a commitment on both sides to work together on matters affecting student learning (Vince, 2011).

One of the hallmarks of successful school reform efforts is a high degree of collaboration and buy-in from local stakeholders (Blair, 2000; Rubenstein & McCarthy, 2010). Nowhere is this collaboration more important than among labor leaders and management, especially when it comes to developing sound policies on matters such as teacher evaluation, support for struggling teachers, and extended learning time. Because school turnarounds are extraordinarily challenging, these leaders must be able to communicate effectively to solve complex problems as partners rather than as adversaries.

### **State and Regional Efforts to Promote Labor–Management Collaboration**

In this section, we highlight efforts at the state level that contribute to collaborative labor–management relations. These efforts provide valuable lessons for SEAs that want to help lay the groundwork for successful school turnarounds in their states.

#### **Massachusetts**

Massachusetts’ public schools have consistently ranked among the top in the U.S. in terms of academic achievement. The state is also widely recognized as a leader in educational collaboration—between labor, management, higher education, and nonprofit organizations (Bluestone & Kochan, 2011). Many state educators believe much of the success of their schools and a successful bid to receive federal Race to the Top funds is attributable to this collaboration.

A strong track record with labor–management led to the formation of the Massachusetts Education Partnership (MEP) in 2012 that had broad representation from the state’s administrator organization, the two leading teacher unions, and four leading research centers. MEP’s purpose “is to help labor–management teams of superintendents, union leaders, school committee members, teachers, and administrators to develop active collaborations in the area of labor–management relations and school-site operations, in order to:

- Accelerate student achievement and promote student success;
- Increase teacher engagement and leadership in school and district governance;
- Improve the productivity of bargaining practices; and
- Institute policies, structures, and practices for sustainable collaboration and reform. (MEP, n.d., para. 1)

MEP recently launched several initiatives, including support for interest-based bargaining, dissemination of knowledge through a new website, and the convening of conferences for labor and management leaders, researchers, and policymakers to discuss educational issues of mutual interest. In addition, MEP

has announced the District Capacity Project (DCP) that will allow local districts to receive intensive support from a team of experts on challenges selected by local labor and management leaders. According to Nancy Peace, Executive Director of MEP, “[t]he selected districts will also be given the opportunity to participate in Capacity Institutes for skill development, planning, and networking, and join other DCP teams in an online community that will encourage them to share their learning and gain access to experts in specific areas of education reform” (2012, p. 2).

### **California**

In 2012, California Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tom Torlakson, appointed an Educator Excellence Task Force to formulate recommendations that would strengthen educator effectiveness in the state. Members of the Task Force included representatives from the education policy community, higher education, teacher unions, school management, school boards, family and community advocacy groups, philanthropic organizations, nonprofit support providers, and the business community. In September 2012, the Task Force released a report titled *Greatness By Design*, which included detailed recommendations on topics ranging from educator preparation, teacher recruitment, professional learning, educator evaluation, leadership, and career development. The report also included these recommendations for labor–management collaboration:

Implementation of many of the Task Force’s recommendations will require policy changes at the state level, but some will also require innovative new agreements between labor and management at the district level. New systems of evaluation for teachers and administrators recommended in this report will need to become part of the collective bargaining process, with care taken to ensure that they are fully understood by all stakeholders in a district, including parents, students, and community members.

The state should...promote labor–management collaboration to enable innovation in educator roles, responsibilities, and compensation systems. Concrete steps should include a statewide conference on labor–management collaboration to share innovative practices and to promote cross-district dialogue; creation of a comprehensive statewide agenda for improving labor–management relations in school districts across the state; and a focus in training programs for both teacher leaders and administrators on understanding strategies for labor–management collaboration and opportunities to learn new collaborative skills. (Educator Excellence Task Force, 2012, p. 18)

Since the release of the Task Force report, several steps have been taken to implement these recommendations. Local and state labor leaders from the state’s largest teacher unions are formulating plans with management leaders to conduct symposiums and on-site district study tours so educators throughout

the state can learn from districts that have formed labor–management partnerships.

In spring 2013, CalTURN, the state chapter of the national Teachers Union Reform Network, and WestEd co-sponsored a conference on collaboration; the theme was “Effective Implementation of Common Core State Standards Through Labor–Management Collaboration.” Close to 150 educators, including labor–management teams from nearly 20 California school districts, attended the conference.

## **Illinois**

Nearly 25 years ago, the Consortium for Educational Change (CEC) was formed by union leaders, administrators, school board members with support from local universities, and philanthropic organizations. CEC’s collaborative mission has been to improve student learning and achievement, and its work focuses on:

- Building educator capacity through coaching, training, mentoring, networking, and facilitating;
- Accelerating use of leading school improvement ideas, practices, and practitioners through robust partnerships;
- Supporting implementation of customized, evidence-based, effective practices across districts and schools; and
- Enabling district and school teams to be more effective and efficient in continuous improvement efforts.<sup>6</sup>

Through a “Dialogue Group” formed in 2006, CEC laid the groundwork for several education policy initiatives, including the Burnham Plan which established a comprehensive reform agenda for the state, and the Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA), signed into law in 2010 by Illinois Governor Pat Quinn. PERA requires all districts to implement multiple-measure teacher evaluation systems that include observations by trained evaluators and evidence of student academic growth. As noted previously, these evaluation systems are key components of RTTT, SIG, and general guidance from the U.S. Department of Education. The state board of education has contracted with CEC to provide training for approximately 9,000 teacher and administrator evaluators. CEC will also help design standards-based evaluation systems for principals and will provide technical assistance to districts implementing these educator evaluation systems.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the strong track record of collaboration among education stakeholders in Illinois, it did not avert the bitter 7-day strike by the Chicago Teachers Union in fall 2012 over teacher evaluations, the length of the school day, and

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<sup>6</sup>These focus areas and additional information about CEC are listed in the organization’s website at <http://cecillinois.org/about/mission-vision/>

<sup>7</sup>Information about PERA and CEC’s role in implementation is available at <http://www.growththroughlearningillinois.org/>

job security. After a settlement was reached with the Chicago mayor's office, both sides were positive about the outcomes, but a recent announcement by the mayor to close 54 of the city's schools has refueled tensions among local stakeholders. It remains to be seen how these ongoing disputes in Chicago will impact progress by the CEC to promote collaboration among the state's education stakeholders.

### **The Teachers Union Reform Network**

Early efforts to advance labor-management collaboration in education were first made by the Teachers Union Reform Network (TURN), a coalition of local teacher unions founded in 1996 by Adam Urbanski, president of the Rochester Teachers Association, and the late Helen Bernstein, former president of the United Teachers Los Angeles. TURN's mission has been to promote a "responsible and responsive teacher unionism" in which labor and management work together to protect the interests of teachers and students, improve working and learning conditions in schools, and implement solutions to advance student learning.

Operating now in five regions,<sup>8</sup> TURN's regional satellites conduct meetings throughout the year and often invite state and national education leaders to participate. At the September 2012 meeting of Northeast TURN, for example, 70 participants representing 17 local districts and 6 states heard presentations on "Building a Culture of Collaboration, a Case Study of Collaboration in Providence, Rhode Island," and "Lessons from Delaware: Race to the Top and Teacher Evaluation." At the Fall 2012 Southwest TURN meeting in Denver, the Colorado Education Association and TURN co-sponsored "The First Annual Summit: Shared Accountability and Leadership for Student Achievement." This was a response to a new Colorado law requiring districts to adopt multiple-measure teacher evaluation systems.

### **Summary**

Among all of the education reform initiatives that school districts in the U.S. are expected to undertake, turning around persistently low-performing schools may be the most challenging. While significant funds have become available to support district turnaround efforts through federal programs such as RTTT and SIG, the policy changes required by these programs—like replacing teachers, closing schools, adding hours to the school day, and evaluating and compensating teachers based on the academic performance of their students—present their own obstacles. Unless teacher unions and management are able to hammer out special agreements to accommodate the required policy changes, many turnaround initiatives will not get off the ground.

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<sup>8</sup>TURN satellites include Southwest TURN, Northeast TURN, CalTURN, Great Lakes TURN, and Mid Atlantic/Southeast TURN. TURN's website is located at [http://www.turnexchange.net/national\\_turn/whyturn.html](http://www.turnexchange.net/national_turn/whyturn.html)

Even after the requisite agreements are made, case study research has shown that districts can overcome many of the most difficult school turnaround challenges when local teacher unions and management agree to work as partners rather than adversaries. This research also demonstrates that a shift toward collaboration does not happen easily or quickly. Districts that have adopted a collaborative approach often rely on external assistance to cultivate that relationship between labor and management because it requires deliberate attention and often requires assistance from experienced practitioners. Many that have succeeded in cultivating labor–management partnerships have not only been able to meet the funding requirements of RTTT and SIG but also surpass them.

By helping to build state capacity for labor–management collaboration, SEAs can create an environment that is more conducive to trust, problem solving, and a shared focus on student outcomes—organizational characteristics that are necessary for any successful school reform effort and especially important for school turnarounds. In the next section, we offer several action principles that SEAs can use to build capacity for labor–management collaboration.

### **Action Principles**

#### **Build internal capacity to support labor–management collaboration**

- Learn about the organizations and districts that are early adopters of labor–management collaboration and assess the knowledge and attitudes of key state leaders toward this approach. These questions can guide the data gathering process:
  - What districts have participated in the two recent national conferences on labor–management collaboration? Did any of these districts make presentations?<sup>9</sup>
  - What are the attitudes of leaders from state teachers unions, policymakers, and administrator or school board organizations, and have they taken a stand on labor–management collaboration? Consider holding informal conversations with key leaders and reviewing organizations’ websites.
  - What universities, research institutes, and nonprofit organizations exist in the state or region that have expertise in this area, and what kind of technical support are they able to provide?
- SEA staff, particularly those involved in RTTT and SIG, should gather and disseminate knowledge to SEA colleagues about labor–management collaboration and participate in events on labor–management collaboration, including regional TURN conferences.
- SEAs that want to become credible advocates for collaboration in school

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<sup>9</sup>Information about these conferences and the districts that attended is available at <http://www.ed.gov/labor-management-collaboration>. The Department of Education’s website shows the districts that participated and presented.

districts will need to model effective collaborative practices. This can best be accomplished with the assistance of trained facilitators who can assess current organizational structures and practices and assist with activities that will strengthen collaboration.

### **Build state and LEA capacity for labor–management collaboration and school turnarounds**

- Facilitate the formation of education partnerships like MEP in Massachusetts and CEC in Illinois.
- Encourage state education organizations to learn about the impact of labor–management collaboration and to take a stand in support of this approach.
- Use websites, webinars, and other delivery methods to disseminate research findings, tools, promising practices, conferences, and trainings to LEAs.
- Convene exploratory meetings in which labor and management leaders can safely discuss their knowledge, interests, and concerns about labor–management collaboration.
- Encourage state and local education leaders to participate in regional TURN conferences.<sup>10</sup>
- Facilitate a state or regional conference on labor–management collaboration modeled after the ones held nationally in 2011 and 2012.<sup>11</sup>
- Facilitate “Study Tours,” which allow districts to see firsthand how other districts are using collaboration in service of their school turnaround efforts.
- Develop “communities of practice” among like-minded districts.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Contact information and conference dates for TURN can be found at [www.turnexchange.net](http://www.turnexchange.net)

<sup>11</sup>Information about these events is available at [http://www.ed.gov/labor–management-collaboration](http://www.ed.gov/labor-management-collaboration). An independent study of the 2011 conference in Denver includes recommendations for conference planners. This report, titled *Forward Together: Better Schools Through Labor–management Collaboration*, is available at [www.wested.org/lmc](http://www.wested.org/lmc). A toolkit for conducting labor–management conferences is available at [www.ed.gov/sites/default/files/lmc-conference-toolkit.pdf](http://www.ed.gov/sites/default/files/lmc-conference-toolkit.pdf)

<sup>12</sup>For more information on the benefits of this practice, see Unger et al. (2008). *How can state education agencies support district improvement: A conversation amongst educational leaders, researchers, and policy actors*. Providence, RI: The Education Alliance at Brown University. (p. 27)

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