
PROFILES IN LABOR-MANAGEMENT COLLABORATION

Case Studies of Three California School Districts

SPRING 2016



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INTRODUCTION



In 2011, a diverse group of education leaders on State Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI) Tom Torlakson's transition team co-authored a report titled, A Blueprint for Great Schools. One of its recommendations was to "Launch an ongoing initiative to support union-management collaboration toward high-leverage reforms."¹ The following year a state task force focused on educator effectiveness produced Greatness By Design, a report that offered a similar recommendation:

*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.*²

Responding to these recommendations and a subsequent recommendation in the SPI's Blueprint 2.0, Californians Dedicated to Education (CDE) Foundation collaborated with the leaders of California's largest public education organizations and launched the California Labor-Management Initiative (CA LMI) in spring 2015 at a symposium in San Diego.³ Teams of superintendents, labor leaders, and school board members from 47 school districts across California participated in the symposium to learn about labor-management partnerships and their impact on student learning. An additional 50 district and county office teams attended similar regional events later that fall. In 2016, 42 of the 97 teams that attended these introductory meetings participated in a round of regional convenings that explored labor-management practices in greater depth.

To build on the state's knowledge base about how these partnerships work and their impact on school effectiveness, the CDE Foundation sponsored case studies of 3 California school districts that are engaged in labor-management collaboration and have participated in at least one of the CA LMI convenings.

METHODOLOGY

Ken Futernick, the principal investigator for these case studies, spent one day in each of the three districts conducting group interviews with superintendents, district administrators, board members, union leaders, principals, teachers, and staff. The interviews focused on these four questions:

1. What led labor and management to adopt a collaborative approach in your district?
2. How has labor-management collaboration translated into practice?
3. What impact has labor-management collaboration had on your district's programs, policies, professional relationships, and student outcomes?
4. What challenges have you faced and what lessons have you learned?

The findings in this report reflect the responses of the individuals from each district that participated in the interviews.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE PARTICIPATING DISTRICTS



Alhambra Unified, located 9 miles east of Los Angeles, serves nearly 18,000 students. The 2008 recession that led to severe cuts to school budgets throughout the nation also exacerbated the already strained relations between Alhambra’s management and its teacher and classified staff unions. But the district’s board of trustees took an unusual step—they decided to face their budget crisis and a host of other educational problems by working with their unions.

Alhambra’s unions representing teachers and classified staff welcomed the opportunity to collaborate and have since taken steps to work as partners rather than adversaries with board members and administrators. Alhambra’s evolving partnership has produced a number of significant changes that are benefiting students.

San Juan Unified near Sacramento serves nearly 40,000 students. This district’s shift to collaboration began 15 years ago after a near-strike by teachers led both sides to seek a better way to resolve their differences.

The partnership that has formed between San Juan’s board, its administration, and teachers unions has produced several nationally recognized innovations. Their Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program provides intensive assistance to struggling teachers. Teacher-administrator leadership teams at each school site collaborate on key decisions affecting teaching and learning. San Juan’s teachers union and administration recently launched a new System of Professional Growth (SPG) that replaces its teacher evaluation system with a comprehensive system of professional supports to ensure that all teachers have ample opportunity to improve their practice.

Because of San Juan’s extensive experience with labor-management collaboration, its leaders have played a key role with California’s LMI. In addition to serving on the CA LMI’s steering committee, a team from San Juan conducted a featured presentation at the CA LMI’s inaugural symposium in May 2015.

Pomona Unified, located in California’s Inland Empire, serves approximately 25,000 students. Collaboration between the administration and the Associated Pomona Teachers (APT) began after several years of contentious contract negotiations and layoffs of hundreds of teachers during the 2008 recession.

The change in relations accelerated in 2012 after Pomona received a grant from the National Education Association to collaborate with two neighboring districts on Common Core State Standards. The grant allowed these districts to receive assistance from the Consortium for Educational Change (CEC), an Illinois-based organization with a long, successful track record assisting districts engaged in labor-management collaboration.

New structures for collaboration and a climate of trust have emerged at the district level but also in several of the district’s 38 schools. Pomona’s leaders expect to see a significant expansion of labor-management partnerships in the years ahead.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CASE STUDY #1 :
ALHAMBRA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT



FACING THE ECONOMIC CRISIS TOGETHER

In the early 2000's, management and labor leaders in the Alhambra Unified School District acted as adversaries, not partners. They didn't trust each other, communications were strained, and they spent little time jointly solving problems affecting the district's nearly 18,000 students.

Tensions eased in 2006 when leaders experimented with a collaborative approach to contract negotiations called Interest Based Bargaining (IBB). The chances that a new collaborative spirit might take hold beyond the bargaining table were dashed when the recession hit in 2008. With dwindling state and federal funding and a union determined to fight for its members, the prospects for expanded collaboration and greater trust among district leaders were dim.

But Alhambra's board and its superintendent, Donna Perez, opted to work with its teachers and classified unions, rather than engage in the type of bitter battles that were playing out in districts across the country. "We decided to create a climate of trust and to work together for our students," board member Robert Gin said. "The work started with us. Our board needed to be more transparent with our unions. They needed to know how we were attempting to get through this difficult time, and we needed to set an example for the whole district in the way we communicate with our stakeholders. People needed to see that when we made mistakes we owned up to them," he said.

This new commitment to collaboration was evident in the 2012 hiring of Laura Tellez-Gagliano as the new superintendent. Tellez-Gagliano had served as the district's human resources director for the previous nine years and had earned a reputation as a collaborative leader who worked well with the district's unions. Roz Collier, president of the Alhambra Teachers Association, spoke admiringly about Tellez-Gagliano and her impact. "She is a big reason for the level of collaboration we now have in our district. We are really focused on common goals."

LEARNING TO COLLABORATE

In 2013, a team of labor and management leaders from Alhambra traveled across the country to attend a five-day Leadership Team Institute at the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) in Maryland. "After the visit to MCPS, our team said, 'This is it!' We realized then what collaboration could accomplish if we went beyond IBB and practiced it on a larger scale," Collier recalled.

About Alhambra Unified
www.ausd.us

Location: Alhambra, CA
(Los Angeles County)

Enrollment: 17,617

**Students eligible for
free reduced meals:** 68%

English learners: 28%

Teachers: 741

Classified staff: 566

K-8 Schools: 13

High Schools: 5

TANGIBLE BENEFITS

That trip solidified Alhambra’s shift to collaboration. District leaders have continued to participate in several learning opportunities to sharpen their collaborative skills, including CA LMI’s 2015 labor-management symposium and a subsequent 2016 regional convening. Alhambra’s leaders who attended these events said that being away from home, travelling together, and sharing meals—getting to know each other as people—helped to create the foundation of trust that has been vital to the district’s collaborative shift. They expressed a sense of accountability about their time away from the district attending these conferences. “We knew we had to come back and translate what we’d learned into action,” Gin said. “We did that by setting goals and sharing them with our colleagues when we returned home.”

Alhambra’s leaders believe collaboration between management and the district’s two unions, CSEA and ATA, has had a positive effect on school operations and instructional quality. They described six notable examples.

1. Formation of the Excellence in Educational Growth (EEG) Committee

Putting into practice what Alhambra’s leaders learned at MCPS, they formed the EEG committee, whose 15 members include the superintendent, school board members, leaders of the teachers and classified unions, and educators from several of the district’s schools. In its first year, the EEG committee focused on:

- Strengthening the district’s Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program that provides support to struggling teachers.
- Examining the district’s employee evaluation system and conducting evaluation workshops for certificated employees.
- Addressing negative school climate in some schools that has led to more union grievances.

2. Collaboration between unions

Until the district made a commitment to collaborate, CSEA and ATA had operated independently. “Now, rather than competing, we work closely for the benefit of our unions and our students,” said Craig Proffitt, CSEA’s local president. ATA’s president Roslyn Collier agreed. “We collaborate very well with CSEA now. We recently worked closely with them to get more aides in the classroom, and that has improved the support we want to provide to our students,” she said. “When we take the position that this is our territory and that’s yours, we get nowhere.”

3. Better communication

In the past, Alhambra’s management would withhold information about the district’s problems and then impose changes without any communication with its unions. This approach usually led to resentment and resistance and seldom produced the results management desired.

When Alhambra’s leaders attended ABC Unified’s West Coast Labor-Management Institute, they learned about the advantages of open communication and being proactive about the district’s problems. This advice proved useful, Collier said, when Alhambra’s board wanted to modify the employees’ benefits package. In the past any talk of meddling with benefits would have triggered a firestorm of resistance, but in this case, Collier explained, the administration first met with ATA leadership to help them understand that the proposed changes would save the district money but would not lead to a loss of employee benefits. “ATA worked closely with the administration to help teachers understand how the changes would effect them,” Collier said.

4. A foundation of trust

Boardmember Robert Gin cited the benefits of working as partners with their unions, but acknowledged that they had encountered many difficulties early on with this approach. “Making the transition to this way of doing business has been vital, but it wasn’t easy when trust did not exist,” he said. “Now, after several years, there’s a sense of family. We still disagree, but we don’t have the big fights like we did in the past.”

Collier also noted that her interactions with the board are not what they used to be. “I don’t play politics with them anymore. I relate to them as people.”

The board’s view about teachers and the local union has also changed. “We haven’t jumped on the anti-teacher bandwagon,” said Adele Andrade-Stadler, a current board member. “We know we have many brilliant teachers, but we also deal with those who are struggling.”

Tammy Scorgia, a 5th grade teacher and the union representative at Ynez Elementary School, pointed to another benefit of increased trust. “During my 18 years teaching in the district, many great teachers left because of the toxic environment. In years past, teachers were intimidated by district office administrators. With the current superintendent and board that’s all changed,” she said.

5. Fewer distractions

Prior to Alhambra’s shift toward collaboration, employees regularly filed formal grievances, and discussions about problems with management dominated union meetings at many school sites, according to Collier. Problems still come up, she said, but teachers and principals usually resolve them on their own.

“For us to be successful we had to get past the junk. We had to start communicating about what students need, not on what made us angry. Better communication has translated to better teaching. We are much more enthusiastic now, and it translates to our kids. Trust and respect is a good model for children,” Scorgia said.

6. Improved student learning

Alhambra’s leaders believe collaboration is making a difference for their students. “The fact that 3 of our high schools rank among the top 500 in the country is due, in large part, to the collaborative spirit that has permeated the district,” said Tellez-Gagliano.

“Collaboration has led to better district and school policies, better class schedules, and lower class sizes. All of these things are helping students learn,” said Henry Osborne, a social studies teacher and ATA site representative at one of the district’s high schools.

Duane Russell, a principal at Alhambra High School, has witnessed, first hand, the benefits of increased trust and cooperation at his school. “This climate is largely responsible for the spirit of sacrifice many teachers make with their students—helping them at lunch and after school, for example,” he said.

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

Educators in Alhambra Unified are building a strong foundation of trust and collaboration, a striking change from just a decade ago, an era marked by ineffective communication, low morale, and little time working together to strengthen the district's educational programs and practices.

Alhambra has elevated their collaborative efforts to the level that they now have a part time staff position and have hired the former teacher's union president, Rosalyn Collier. Several days each month time will be allocated for Rosalyn to coordinate the district's efforts in Labor-Management Collaboration. She will be directing the agenda of the Excellence in Education Committee (EEG) which is the LM oversight committee.

This transformation did not happen by chance. In 2012 the board hired a superintendent with a proven track record of stakeholder collaboration. Since then, union and management leaders jointly participated in five off-site events to learn how to work together as partners. The change in culture has already translated to more productive professional relationships and tangible improvements in the way the district educates its students. If the district's management and unions continue to build upon this foundation, the prospects for continued improvements in teaching and learning are bright.

CASE STUDY #2 :
SAN JUAN UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT



THERE MUST BE A BETTER WAY!

After two years of “hardball” contract negotiations in 1989, the San Juan Teachers Association (SJTA), the local union representing nearly 2,000 teachers, called for a strike vote. Battle-weary, management and labor leaders stood across from one another and finally found something they could agree on—there had to be a better way to resolve their differences.

A year later, San Juan’s union and district leaders attended a five-day training to learn how to work as partners rather than adversaries. That training, conducted by the Harvard Negotiation Project, helped each side better understand the differences in their respective organizations. “We went into that training for five days and the two parties wouldn’t sit in the same area of the room. By the time we came out, we had all of these commitments to really forge ahead,” said Tom Alves, President of SJTA at the time and now its executive director.⁴

This event catalyzed a collaborative relationship between the district’s union and management, which has endured for 25 years and produced several groundbreaking programs and policies. “It was a very, very difficult journey to sustain,” Alves said. One way the parties have maintained a productive working relationship, according to Alves, is to remain focused on their common goals. “That’s been essential because if you are at cross-purposes on anything it will not sustain itself and it will ultimately fail.”

BUILDING & SUSTAINING A CULTURE OF COLLABORATION

Over the years, labor and management have each played a role in creating a collaborative culture and cultivating their partnership. Early on, leaders of SJTA had to reflect on its role in this new relationship. “[Unions] would all like to change districts, but we had to change ourselves. We had to look internally as a union [and ask], What did we stand for?” Alves recalled.

Over time, San Juan Unified’s management has become equally committed to a partnership approach. But this shift in the way management viewed its role didn’t happen quickly or easily. “Fear of giving up control is always a challenge from an administrator perspective,” said Kent Kern, San Juan’s current superintendent. This fear came to a head when the district considered adopting a Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program. Some principals opposed PAR because teachers would be evaluating their peers, thus undercutting principals’ authority. But PAR is now widely embraced in San Juan because it has provided what all educators, including principals, want—high-quality support for struggling teachers.

Pam Costa, president of San Juan’s board of trustees, believes the single most important contribution her board has made in promoting collaboration is the hiring process it’s used to select superintendents. “It starts by collecting attributes from all of our labor groups and our community members about what they feel we need in a

About San Juan Unified

www.sanjuan.edu

Location: Sacramento, CA

Enrollment: 39,926

Students eligible for free reduced meals: 51%

English learners: 12%

Teachers: 2,237

Classified staff: 1,866

Elementary Schools: 41

Middle Schools: 8

High Schools: 9

superintendent,” she said. In 2014, the board selected Kern, an educator who had taught in San Juan and served in various administrator positions. “He was the strongest candidate for our district and could support those issues that we as a board thought were critical – collaboration being one of them,” Costa said.

San Juan’s board also strives to model the type of interactions and problem-solving they hope to see among educators throughout the district. “On the dais, we are modeling collaboration to show how we’re working together. We also talk with the community about the benefits of collaboration. Some people are skeptical, so it’s important to be able to talk as leaders about the difference it’s making in our schools and for our students,” Costa said.

To sustain healthy relations with the union, Costa and her fellow board members periodically meet one-on-one with SJTA leaders to fully appreciate their perspectives, a practice she believes is rarely seen in other districts. Kern agreed with Costa’s assessment. “If a major district initiative requires 10 steps to implement, districts usually think about getting the union involved at step 5,” he said. “At San Juan we strive to get all stakeholders, including the union, involved at step 2.”

Kern meets twice each month with Shannan Brown, president of the San Juan Teachers Association, to solve problems of the day but also to discuss initiatives that are in various stages of implementation. Kern and Brown don’t always agree, but the frequent communication ensures they understand their respective positions.

SUPPORT FOR STRUGGLING TEACHERS

After committing to work as partners in 1990, SJTA’s leaders studied Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) programs used in districts like Rochester, New York; Toledo, Ohio; and Poway, California that used consulting teachers to identify and then provide support to teachers whose instructional practices were suffering.

Researchers Dan Humphreys and Julia Koppich, who studied PAR programs in San Juan and in Poway, California found that it has yielded significant improvements in educator effectiveness. They also pointed to the important role labor-management partnerships have played in getting PAR off the ground and working in these districts.

In the PAR programs in Poway and San Juan, the promise of collaborative bargaining is fully realized. No weak demonstration of feel-good cooperation, the union-management bonds forged in PAR have created a culture of collaboration that enables the parties together to make important decisions on teacher performance and evaluation. ⁵

JOINT DECISION-MAKING AT SAN JUAN'S SCHOOL SITES

To extend collaboration beyond the district office, SJTA approached management in 2000 about giving teachers a stronger voice in programs and policies at their school sites. “The union position was that if management really believes teachers should be leading the reform process, why wouldn’t you codify it?” Alves recalled. After working through the details of a new school governance structure, the board and SJTA added Article 24 to its collective bargaining agreement in 2004, which created formal teacher/administrator leadership teams at each school. According to the Agreement’s Statement of Intent,

It is in the best interest of the San Juan Schools that the District and the Association cooperatively engage in activities and communication which demonstrate mutual respect for all stakeholders and result in the improvement of student achievement through the development of common goals, a cooperative, trusting environment, and teamwork.⁶

Leadership teams in many of San Juan’s schools have functioned well, according to Alves. They have focused on professional development, curriculum, budgets, schedules—virtually everything that impacts school quality. “These schools make better decisions and they get much more buy-in from teachers because their voice has been heard,” Alves said.

Despite good intentions on both sides, leadership teams at a few school sites have not functioned as well as hoped, Alves conceded. “Decisions are still being made the same way, without much voice from teachers,” he said. One contributing factor is the absence of ongoing training for leadership teams to operate well under the new decision-making structure. Costa believes this is a symptom of a larger problem. “We do a great job providing the initial training for our personnel on new initiatives, but then we move on to the next one. We forget that new people come along who don’t share the core beliefs or lack knowledge about how to work well in a given system. Without continuous training the original intent gets lost and systems drift back to the way they operated before,” she said. San Juan’s leaders expect school leadership teams to function more effectively because the district recently renewed its commitment to provide annual training for leaders at each site.

A SYSTEM OF PROFESSIONAL GROWTH FOR ALL TEACHERS

San Juan’s PAR program has functioned well for over 15 years, providing high-quality professional support to struggling teachers. The district’s Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) program also provides intensive support to novice teachers. But neither PAR nor BTSA helps the vast majority of other teachers improve their practice. “We had a system that was there for you in the beginning; it was there for you if you had challenges in your instruction; we had nothing in between,” high school teacher Dan DeJaeger said.

In 2014, SJTA and district leaders set out to build a new evaluation system that would enable all of its certificated personnel—teachers, nurses, librarians, and counselors—to continuously improve their practice. “We wanted a system that honors the fact that most educators are doing well and want to get better,” Brown said. Over the next two years, teachers and administrators co-developed and piloted a System of Professional Growth (SPG). Now, with widespread buy-in from district educators, San Juan will implement SPG district-wide in 2016-17.⁷

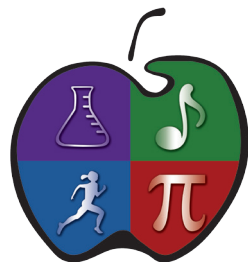
LESSONS LEARNED

For the past 15 years, San Juan’s labor-management partnership has attracted considerable attention. Its leaders have presented at numerous national and state education conferences, as well as at several CA LMI convenings. Researchers have published several studies on the district’s innovative programs.

But leaders on both sides are quick to point to the setbacks they have faced along the way and the constant effort that is required to sustain the partnership. “The system always wants to return to where it was,” Alves said. “In the early years, every time there was a misstep on either side many of us would revert to old, familiar ways. Now, when we face difficult challenges, we don’t stop working together on other projects. Before, everything would come to a halt until we resolved the issue.”

Alves believes the difference has been the high level of trust that has been built over the past five years. Costa agreed and said that trust was a product of improved communication. “Now we really listen to each other and we listen respectfully,” she said.

CASE STUDY #3 :
POMONA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT



CALIFORNIANS DEDICATED TO
E D U C A T I O N



FROM MASSIVE LAYOFFS & CONTENTIOUS NEGOTIATIONS TO COLLABORATION & SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

In 2007, Pomona Unified’s (PUSD) management made all of the key decisions about school operations, policy, curriculum, budget allocations, and schedules. The only issues management and the Associated Pomona’s Teachers (APT) addressed together pertained to what state law required them to negotiate in their collective bargaining agreement—wages, hours, and working conditions.

Relations between PUSD and APT grew increasingly antagonistic when the 2008 recession led to deep budget cuts. “This was a very dark time for educators in Pomona,” recalled Morgan Brown, APT’s president at the time. “The district laid off nearly 700 teachers and used temporary employees to save money. We fought hard to end that practice.”

About Pomona Unified
www.pusd.org

Location: Pomona, CA
Enrollment: 25,311
Students eligible for free reduced meals: 85%
English learners: 36%
Teachers: 1,730
Classified staff: 939
Elementary Schools: 27
Middle Schools: 4
High Schools: 7

A GLIMPSE AT SOMETHING DIFFERENT

During this acrimonious period, leaders from PUSD and APT attended a conference held by the California chapter of the Teachers Union Reform Network (CaTURN) to learn about labor-management collaboration. Inspired by what they heard from other districts, they began cultivating a different kind of working relationship—one that would allow them to solve their budget and personnel problems more amicably.

An opportunity to collaborate beyond the scope of the collective bargaining agreement came in 2013, when PUSD and two nearby school districts, Moreno Valley Unified and Corona-Norco Unified, received grants from the NEA Great Public Schools (GPS) Fund to implement Common Core State Standards (CCSS). With assistance from the Consortium for Educational Change (CEC), leaders from each of the three districts have met regularly and are learning to create structures that give teachers and classified staff a stronger voice, not just with CCSS, but with all matters related to teaching and learning.

COLLABORATION EMERGES IN POMONA'S SCHOOL SITES

Pomona's Garey High School nearly lost its accreditation in 2011 because of poor academic performance. Relations between the school's administration, its teachers, and its staff were strained. "We had no trust and everything we were doing to improve student learning was top-down," said Stacey Wilkins, Garey's principal. Realizing that something had to change, administrators, teachers, and APT site reps began meeting regularly to talk about their relationships and the school's decision-making process. Tensions slowly eased, trust developed, and structures for better communication emerged.

"After we started listening to each other, teachers, students, and parents became much more engaged," Wilkins said. Ion Puschila, one of APT's site reps at Garey, added, "We talk all of the time with Mr. Wilkins, and we can discuss virtually anything about the school."

These changes have led to significant changes in the past five years. In 2011, Garey's school climate index was at the 18th percentile compared to similar schools across the state. In 2015, that percentile had risen to 92, an increase of 74 points. In 2010-11, 20% of Garey's students were dropping out and only 22% of the school's graduates had met the state's higher education course requirements. In 2012-13 the dropout rate had fallen to 6.5% and 31.5% had met the state's higher education requirements. In 2015, Garey High was fully accredited and was one of 180 high schools in the state to receive a Gold Ribbon Schools Award by the State of California.

A similar story has unfolded at Fremont Middle School. In 2007, it was one of the state's lowest performing schools and became subject to state intervention. In 2008, the district converted Fremont to a 7-12 academy, and the school's administrators developed a comprehensive reform plan that called for Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to encourage professional collaboration among teachers.

Change was slow at first, in part because the reform plan was created without any involvement from teachers. "In the beginning, the governance structure for the school and the PLCs was very traditional," said Elizabeth Harper, Fremont's principal for the past 8 years. "The administration set the school's agenda, and the PLCs focused mostly on business, not on instruction." Over time, Fremont's administration, teachers, and APT site reps have worked to transform the school's governance structure. "We're building a process in which the instructional needs of students dictate the agenda," Harper said. School leaders have adopted new decision-making structures, and they've established norms to guide collaboration among teachers and administrators.

Fremont's students appear to be benefitting from the changes in the school's culture and decision-making structures. In 2015, the school's graduation rate was 95%, 14 points higher than the state average for high schools. Forty-three percent of its graduates met the UC and CSU requirements, which equaled the state average. In 2009-10, Fremont's dropout rate was 21%, but decreased to 11% in 2015.

Garey and Fremont are two of five PUSD schools participating in Phase I of the district's collaborative initiative to implement the Common Core standards. With positive reports emerging from these schools, 10 more of PUSD's 38 schools have signed up for Phase II, which begins in fall 2016.

PROGRESS AT THE TOP, DESPITE CHALLENGES

At the district level, the once prickly relationship between PUSD’s management and APT has improved significantly. With guidance from CEC, Pomona’s school board, administration, and unions are learning to work as partners to build the district’s professional capacity, to improve pedagogy in every school, and, ultimately, to empower students through better learning.

Leaders from both sides regularly attend CalTURN’s bi-annual conferences, and they participated in two events conducted by the California LMI. “We’re now focused on finding solutions to problems rather than simply pointing them out,” Brown said.

But the shift toward collaboration has generated some resistance from skeptics on both sides. Mike da Rosa, APT’s president, pointed to a challenge that he and Brown face with the teachers they represent. “Now that we’re trying to solve problems with management, some members probably don’t think we’re fighting hard enough for them,” he said. “We would typically get angry, speak out, and organize dramatic displays at school board meetings. Many teachers liked that, but it didn’t always accomplish what we wanted. I am not sure everyone gets that yet.”

On management’s side, some district administrators have been reluctant to include APT in discussions about educational matters because they believe management’s interactions with APT should be limited to issues within the scope of the collective bargaining agreement. Stephanie Baker, Pomona’s deputy superintendent for educational services had long been skeptical about APT’s willingness to work with administrators to improve classroom instruction. “When three of our low performing schools became eligible for federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) funds, we wanted to use some of the money to create Professional Learning Communities (PLCs),” Baker said. “But APT did not want the district to apply for SIG funds, even though the PLCs would have given teachers an opportunity to collaborate around instruction. This reinforced my view that APT was interested only in contractual issues.”

A critical turning point occurred in fall 2015 when APT invited Baker to attend a training event they had sponsored for their members on PLCs. Curious about APT’s new interest in this approach, Baker accepted the invitation and was so impressed by the quality of the presentation and the level of teacher engagement that she brought several of her district office colleagues to the second day of training. Rather than have them observe from the back of the room, Baker asked them to sit with teachers. “For the first time, we were learning along side teachers and, in some cases, from them,” Baker said.

For Baker, the PLC training demonstrated that Brown, da Rosa, and APT were serious about promoting better teaching and learning, not just filing grievances and protecting the contract. Brown and his union colleagues were impressed that Baker’s team participated with teachers, not as experts, but as colleagues and as fellow learners.

Reflecting on PUSD’s emerging partnership with APT, Baker said, “Collaboration is still not our default. It’s going to take some time, but we’re making great progress.” Baker will turn 64 soon and says she should be thinking about retirement. “I can’t do that right now,” she said, “because we’re in this perfect place. We’re poised to do great things.”

¹ Tom Torlakson, *A Blueprint for Great Schools*, (2011). Sacramento: California Department of Education.

² Task Force on Educator Effectiveness, *Greatness By Design—Supporting Outstanding Teaching to Sustain a Golden State*, (2012). Sacramento: California Department of Education. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/eo/in/documents/greatnessfinal.pdf#search=greatness%20by%20design&view=FiH&pagemode=none>

³ The California Labor-Management Initiative is supported by the Californians Dedicated to Education Foundation (CDEF), the Association for California School Administrators (ACSA), the California Teachers Association (CTA), the California School Employees Association (CSEA), the California School Boards Association (CSBA), the California Federation of Teachers (CFT), the California Department of Education (CDE), and California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSSEA).

⁴ Alves made these comments at the California Labor-Management Initiative symposium in San Diego on May 8, 2015. <http://cdefoundation.org/lmi/spring-2015-symposium/>

⁵ Daniel C. Humphrey, et al., (2011). "Peer Review: Getting Serious About Teacher Evaluation." Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

⁶ "Collective Bargaining Contract Between San Juan Unified School District and San Juan Teachers Association," Article 24.01. <http://www.sanjuanteachersassociation.org/docs/SJTA-COLLECTIVE-BARGAINING-CONTRACT-2014-16-Revised.pdf>

⁷ Daniel C. Humphrey, Julia E. Koppich, & Juliet Tiffany-Morales, (2016). "Replacing Teacher Evaluation Systems with Systems of Professional Growth: Lessons from Three California School Districts and Their Teachers' Unions." Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.