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**National Study on Union-Management Partnerships and
Educator Collaboration in US Public Schools**

John E. McCarthy, Cornell University
jem543@cornell.edu

Saul A. Rubinstein, Rutgers University
saul.rubinstein@rutgers.edu

October 2017

**Collaborative School Leadership Initiative
Working Paper**

Introduction

Over the past 16 years, federal efforts to improve public education have focused on market reforms (charter schools and voucher programs). To date, there is little evidence that these reforms have produced the promised benefits. However, for the past 10 years, we have been studying a different approach to improving and reforming public education—one based on building strong relationships among teachers’ unions and school administrations, and developing collaborative institutions in schools and school districts focused on improving teaching and learning. This report briefly summarizes our published and unpublished research.

For the past three years, we have been conducting a national study on union-management partnerships and educator collaboration in public schools across the country. As of this writing, our database includes over 400 schools in 21 school districts in six states: California, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and New Jersey.

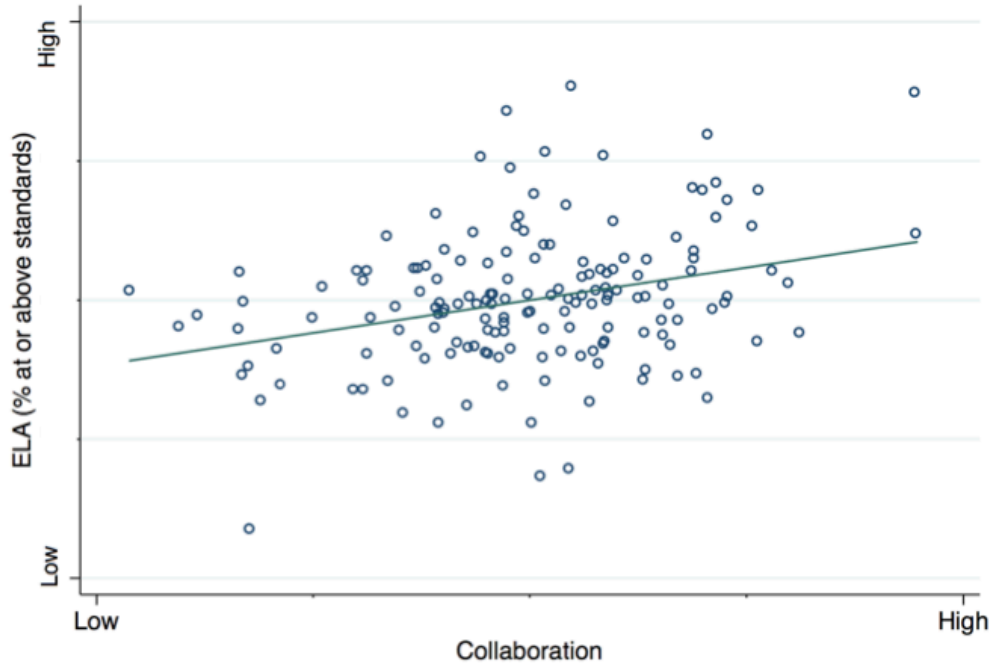
We focus on school and district decision-making and problem-solving, particularly as they apply to the relationship among administrators, teachers, and their unions. We are interested in how collaborative processes at the school level—specifically shared decision-making; goal alignment; and teacher discretion,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

Educator Collaboration and Student Achievement

In earlier published research (2014, 2016) on 30 schools in one district, we found a relationship between school-level collaboration and student achievement. In our national study, we were able to match math and language-arts performance data to 162 schools surveyed in the 2015–2016 academic year. The chart below shows school-level collaboration predicting the percentage of students performing at or above standards in English Language Arts (ELA), after we controlled for poverty (percentage of students on free or reduced-price lunch), teacher experience, and school type (elementary, middle, high school). The reported positive association is statistically significant and suggests that the highest level of collaboration corresponds to roughly 12.5% more students performing at or above standards, compared to the lowest level of collaboration. We found similar results when we examined the effect of collaboration on math scores, although not quite at the same magnitude. The impact of collaboration on math scores was statistically significant, as the highest level of collaboration corresponded to an additional 4.5% of students performing at or above standards, compared to the lowest level of collaboration.

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

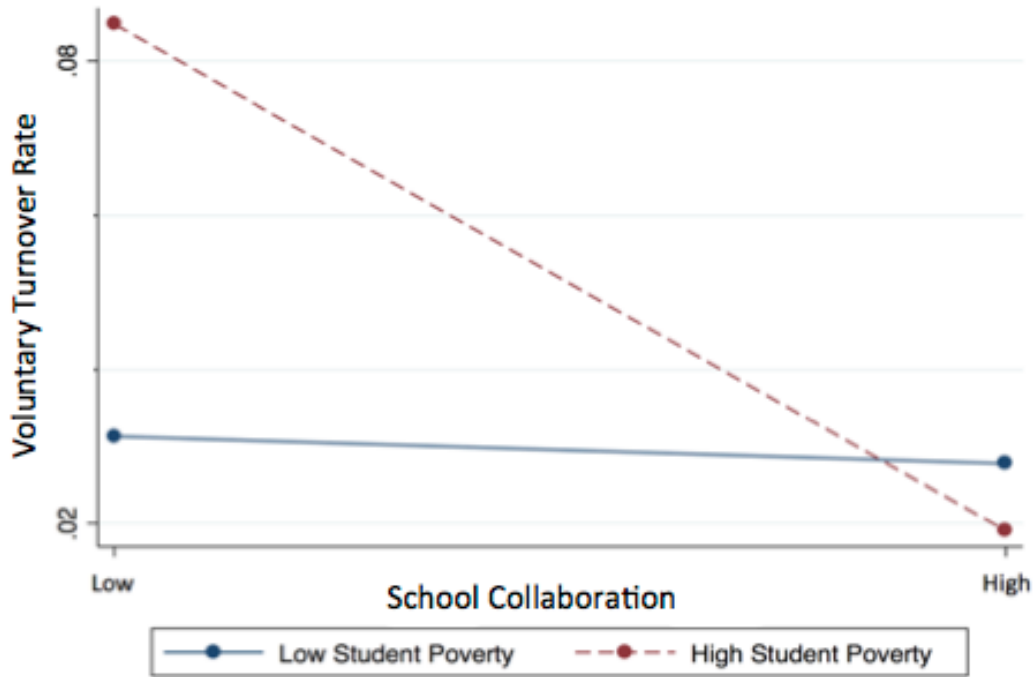
Collaboration and ELA Performance



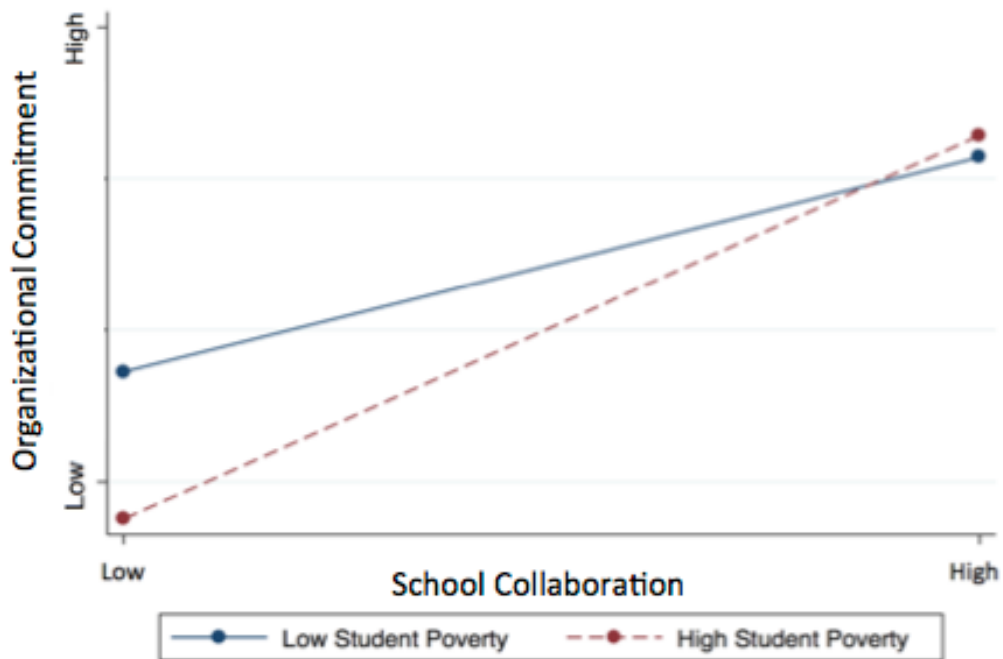
Collaboration, Teacher Turnover, and School Commitment

Some of our earlier research found a strong association between educator collaboration and reduced teacher turnover, and this effect was particularly pronounced in high-poverty schools (2018, forthcoming). Specifically, our work found that turnover in high-poverty schools was 3.5 times the rate of that in low-poverty schools when school-level educator collaboration was low. However, when collaboration was high, there was no statistical difference between turnover in high-poverty and low-poverty schools. Examining teachers' self-reported commitment to their current school, we find similar patterns in our current database. For example, we find that collaborative schools improve educators' commitment, particularly in schools serving low-income communities. As depicted in the figure below, the association between school collaboration and educators' attachment to their school is generally positive, but this positive effect is stronger in schools where student poverty is high. At the highest levels of collaboration, there was no statistical difference between teacher commitment in high-poverty and in wealthier schools.

Collaboration, Poverty and Turnover



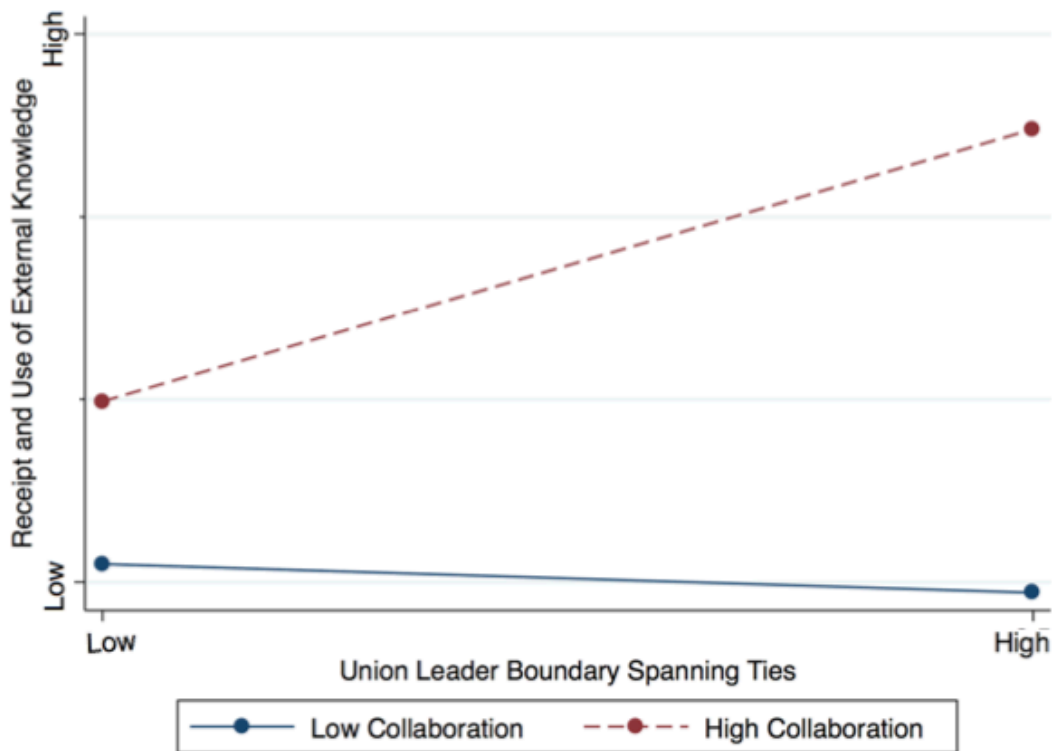
Collaboration, Poverty and Commitment



Union Networks, Partnerships, and Education Quality

Union-management partnership is defined by the extent to which union leaders and district administration work together to improve teaching and learning. One of our primary research interests is whether formal union-management partnerships can foster school-level processes that improve teaching quality and student learning. In a study of 30 schools in one district with a strong, long-standing partnership, we found that many school-level union leaders took on unique roles and responsibilities to improve teaching and student learning. Specifically, we found that these union leaders helped to foster denser, more productive school collaboration (2016). We also found that teachers in schools with stronger collaboration are more likely to know about and implement innovations from other schools, and that union representatives who have more ties to other union representatives facilitate this knowledge sharing (2018, forthcoming).

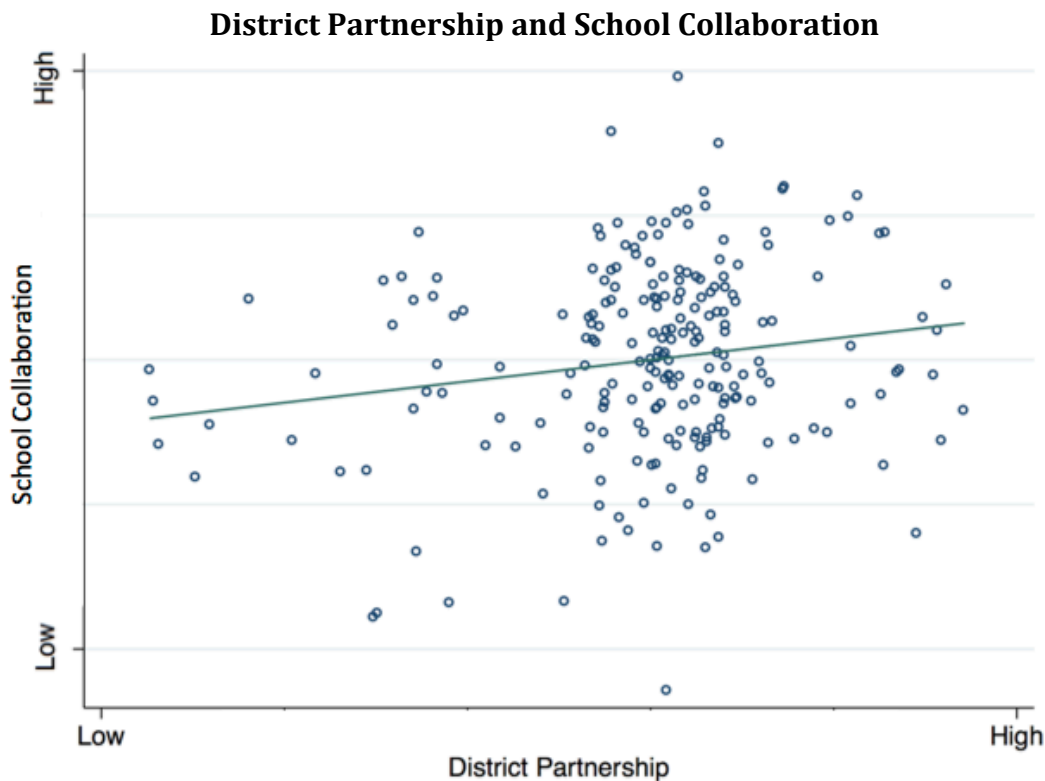
Union Leader Ties and Knowledge Sharing



District-Level Union-Management Partnerships as a Catalyst for School-Level Collaboration

In our national study, we also investigated the impact of formal union-management partnerships at the district level on educator collaboration at the school level. We found that district-level partnerships were a significant predictor of school-level educator collaboration. As the chart below depicts, school districts with strong partnerships tended to have more collaborative schools, and this result is statistically significant. Our data also suggested that school-level union representatives (school representatives) viewed their responsibilities differently in high-partnership than in low-partnership school

districts: in high-partnership school districts, school representatives were more likely to view collaboration-building as central to their responsibilities as union leaders. We conclude from this that formal district-level union-management partnerships can be an important antecedent of school-level collaboration.



Summary of Findings:

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

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

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