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FOSTERING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE THROUGH A SOLUTIONS-DRIVEN CULTURE OF COLLABORATION: A CASE STUDY OF A TEACHERS’ UNION IN THE MID-ATLANTIC REGION

Terence Che Ngwa
Southeastern University - Lakeland

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By

TERENCE CHE NGWA

A doctoral dissertation submitted to the College of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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by

TERENCE CHE NGWA

Dissertation Approved:

[Signatures]

Sherrie Johnson, Ed.D., Dissertation Chair

Janet Deck, Ed.D., Committee Member

Leroy VanWhy, Ph.D., Committee Member

James Anderson, Dean, Ph.D., Dean, College of Education
DEDICATION

I am particularly grateful to my aunt (mother), Mary Bi Che, whom I credit for initiating my early learning. Without her moral and material support, I would not be where I am today. I will be forever indebted to her.

I also want to acknowledge the sacrifices that my wife, children, and mother made throughout these three intense years. They felt my absence not only when I was unavailable to read at bedtime, but also on weekends when I was away from home to work on this dissertation. The decision to obtain a terminal degree did not come without a struggle in decision-making, but those who believed and continued to believe in me encouraged me to enroll in the program. My wife, in particular, was a personal motivator throughout the process, providing daily moral support when I felt discouraged.
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To my classmates of cohort C, our joint prayers, group projects, and jokes made a difference, and today we have a story to tell. Thank you all for being your brother’s keeper.
ABSTRACT

This case study explored how the teachers’ union in a mid-Atlantic urban school district used collaboration with the school district to foster a change in its organizational culture that was previously characterized by adversarial relationships. The change in the union culture presented a unique opportunity that led both sides to believe that there was value to short-term and long-term collaborative partnerships. The researcher framed the study on an open systems theory of organizations and an evolutionary-change theory using evidence collected from published and unpublished data, field observations, a focus group discussion, and participant interviews.

Overall, the researcher held one focus group discussion with three teachers and one-on-one interviews with three teachers from elementary and high schools, three school administrators from elementary, middle, and high school, two school district administrators, and two union leaders. The findings revealed that both the teachers’ union and the school district believed in collaboration, especially in closing the achievement gap between minority students and their White counterparts. Even though both parties expressed a willingness to work together, the school district, especially school administrators, may consider involving union members more in decision-making. Making collaboration an ongoing process among stakeholders will improve relations between the union and the school district. Further research needs to be completed to determine the effects of collaboration, or the absence thereof, on the academic outcomes of students in the school district.

Keywords: collaboration, organizational change, teachers’ union, union-management, collective bargaining, teacher voice, school improvement
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I. INTRODUCTION

Relations between teachers’ unions and school districts in the United States have historically been adversarial, typically characterized by strikes (Rubinstein, McCarthy, & Center for American Progress, 2011). Union leaders who violated anti-strike injunctions were sent to jail for doing so (Shelton, 2014; Sustar, 2013). These adversarial relations were not peculiar to unions and management only, but a general animosity and hostility prevailed toward labor unions, especially from right-leaning state governments (Coulson, 2010; Mirer, 2013). The passing of legislation such as the Right To Work (RTW)(Coulson, 2010) and counter protests and strikes by labor groups (Miler, 2013) exacerbated the adversarial relations over time. The inability of labor and management to reach common ground on issues and on collaborative practices made their relations over time untenable in some instances. In the case of teachers’ unions, the ultimate victims were students and their families when teachers went on strike, forcing schools to close down (Brogan, 2013). The political leaning of teachers’ unions and their support for liberal agendas came under scrutiny by anti-union states and groups (Coulson, 2010). Like all unions around the country, the mid-Atlantic region teachers’ union that was the focus of this case study was not immune to adversarial relationships with the school district (Simon, 2012).

The mayoral takeover of public schools from an elected school board in 2007 ushered in a new era of adversarial relationships between teachers and the mayor’s appointee for chancellor. Top-down leadership (Sims, 2015), characterized by the non-involvement of the teachers’ union in new initiatives such as teacher evaluation, professional development, and the choice of Curriculum, provoked a call for more collaboration between the two entities with the goal of
benefitting students (Simon, 2012).

In the 1960s and 1970s, working conditions were the most contentious issues that led to severe strikes (Shaffer, 2011). In recent years, teacher evaluation, as Simon (2012) underscored, took center stage as the school district sought to meet school reform exigencies. Simon (2012) argued that teachers will continue to doubt the credibility of the evaluation system and other initiatives based on a hierarchical system if the school district continues unilaterally to make decisions.

**Demographics of the School District**

The study was conducted in a diverse urban public school district in the mid-Atlantic region. In the 2017-2018 academic year, the district served 48,144 students in 115 schools. Regarding racial diversity, 60% of students were Black, 20% Hispanic, 15% White, and 4% Asian or multiracial. They were also classified as 77% economically disadvantaged, 14% English Learners, and 14% recipients of special education services. The latest student attendance data available was for the 2016-2017 academic year. The average rate for the year was 88.9%; the average student satisfaction rate was 84%.

Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), otherwise known as the nation’s report card, identified the school district as one of the struggling school districts in 4th and 8th-grade mathematics and reading nationwide (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013a, 2013b).

Even though the school district indicated that student achievement on the 2015 Trial Urban District Assessment grew at a faster rate than in other large districts, achievement gaps for African-American and Hispanic students remained a pervasive problem (Urban School District; Office of the State Superintendent of Education, n.d.).
Questions abound as to whether the lack of collaboration between the teachers’ union and the district on academic achievement, the socio-emotional needs of students, and disparities in the allocation of resources adversely affected students over time (Simon, 2012).

**Background and Review of Relevant Literature**

Educational reform in the United States of America came into the spotlight in the 1980s with the landmark study *Nation at Risk* (Eberts, 2007). Since then, teachers and their unions have come under persistent scrutiny and attack by proponents of the education reform movement and policymakers. Previous research identified accusations directed toward teachers’ unions that included slowing down school reform, protecting union interests, protecting incompetent teachers, and preoccupying union agendas with job security rather than student performance (Eberts, 2007; Kirp, 2014; Tucker, 2012). These accusations exacerbated historically adversarial relationships between labor unions and management, and specifically, the “us-versus-them” (Sims, 2015, p. 645) mentality between unions and school districts, where both sides failed to work together to improve student outcomes.

The unions, in turn, sought to undercut that narrative with a change in culture. “Culture is the most difficult element to change in an organization, and it is much more challenging to alter culture in mature organizations” (Hickman, 2016, p. 565), but a change in the culture that favors advocacy for students can, of course, stand the test of time. The American Federation of Teachers’ (AFT) *Reclaim the Promise* campaign (Vachon & Ma, 2015) was one of the major shifts that reversed the trend. The arguments on both sides presented a unique opportunity to determine if there was any value to short-term and long-term collaborative partnerships between the two organizations, or between teachers and school administrators. Studies (Rubinstein, 2014; Rubinstein & McCarthy, 2016) on collaborative partnerships have focused on accountability
measures, system-wide collaboration (first-order change), and school-level collaboration (second-order change).

This study will add to existing literature on labor-management collaboration and the sociological literature on teacher unionism and organizational change. The researcher framed the study on two theories: the open-system theory of organizations and evolutionary-change theory. “An organization is open because of its dependence on and continual interaction with the environment in which it resides” (Burke, 2014, p. 54). A change of culture within the teachers’ union is evolutionary (transactional) change. Evolutionary change seeks to implement improvements at incremental steps to change a part of a larger system (Burke, 2014). In this case study, the focus on change was evolutionary because the teachers’ union gradually ceased from being an antagonistic organization to one that publicly expressed the desire to be involved in student achievement.

Teacher Accountability

The body of literature on teacher accountability addresses teacher quality and retention, teacher evaluation, and student performance. Teacher accountability relates to the student educational outcomes for which teachers are held responsible and have several measurement variables. Top-down bureaucratic mandates typically accompany these accountability measures to which teachers must adhere. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002 (Civic Impulse, 2017a) and the Race to the Top Act (RTTT) of 2011 (Civic Impulse, 2017b) exerted extra pressure on states to impose harsher accountability measures on their educators through teacher evaluation and high-stakes testing (Rubinstein & McCarthy, 2016).

Sims (2015) argued that such top-down policies imposed by unilaterally developed and implemented evaluation systems, even though intended to improve student academic outcomes,
negatively impacted teacher morale. The school district in the mid-Atlantic region was an
example of a district where the unilaterally imposed teacher evaluation system by the schools’
chancellor had demoralizing effects on teachers, resulting in high attrition. Although Article
15.1 of the contractual bargaining agreement (CBA) between the district and the union cited the
city’s Code § 1-617.18 that identified teacher evaluation as a non-negotiable item, RTTT
required evaluation systems to be designed and developed with teacher and principal
involvement (Civic Impulse, 2017).

Vachon and Ma (2015) contended that district-mandated professional development had
demoralizing effects due to teacher exclusion and was typically not reflective of the realities in
the classroom. Other imposed mandates on teachers emanated from legislation passed by
conservative lawmakers in states that outlawed collective bargaining and replaced by RTW laws
(Coulson, 2010; Mirer, 2013). In such states, critics of collective bargaining increased claims
that banning or weakening teachers’ unions was the only way of improving the U.S. public
school system (Sims, 2015). The non-involvement of teachers and their unions in decisions
affecting them and their students’ lives created a lot of strife and disagreement over time (Simon,
2012).

System-wide Collaboration

Rubinstein and McCarthy (2016) argued, “Union-management partnerships are
institutional arrangements that provide opportunities for union leaders, administrators, and
teachers to work together, identifying and solving problems, planning, and making decisions” (p.
115). As Sustar (2013) postulated, these partnerships have come to define the new form of
unionism known as “solutions-driven unionism” (p. 63) as opposed to the social-movement
unionism of the 1960s and 1970s that was more radical and adversarial (Shaffer, 2011).
Collaboration between unions and districts is not a recent phenomenon. This historical phenomenon developed from rancorous strikes starting in 1968 with the Hillsborough County, Florida, Public School (HCPS) strike, through 1993 with the ABC Unified School District (ABCUSD), California’s eight days’ strike (Rubinstein et al., 2011). These strikes developed into future collaborations, notably in HCPS in 1970, where the district and its teachers jointly developed a new curriculum in all core subjects. Other strikes occurred in Toledo, Ohio, where a joint labor-management evaluation and professional-support plan debuted in 1981, and Los Angeles County, California, where ABCUSD and the teachers’ union established a formal partnership in 1999 following the 1993 strike (Sawchuk, 2011b). Other calls for greater collaboration came from leaders of the National Education Association (NEA) and the AFT.

The openness of the unions to embrace the “new unionism” (Sawchuk, 2011b, p. S4) inspired President Barack Obama’s secretary of education, Arne Duncan, to meet with the presidents of the NEA and AFT in Hillsborough County, Florida, in October 2010 to announce a planned labor-management conference (Klein, 2010). The choice of the venue emanated from a prior collaboration agreement between the teachers’ union and the school district in that county. Even though the announcement came at a time characterized by negative portrayals of unions, the release of the documentary Waiting for Superman and the National Broadcasting Company’s (NBC) Education Nation Summit, all factors that combined to paint unions as obstacles to school improvement, the conference proceeded to take place in 2011. Attendees at the conference committed to building relationships of trust between management and unions, and the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) pledged to provide federal mediation and conciliation support to districts seeking to establish collaborative relationships and to those experiencing difficulties in contract negotiations (Sawchuk, 2011a).
Jefferson County Public Schools, Colorado, immediately implemented the commitments of the conference. The superintendent and the union president collaborated in a budget process that involved all stakeholders reaching an agreement that cut 200 positions through attrition, instituted two furlough days, eliminated four professional development days, set a 3% wage reduction for teachers, closed two schools, and imposed new transportation fees for parents (Sawchuk, 2013).

A more recent collaboration that resulted in enormous success since inception in 2000 was that between the Montgomery County, Maryland, Education Association (MCEA) and Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) (Sullivan, 2012). The partnership known as Peer Assisted Review (PAR) enabled members of the bargaining unit and school administrators to work as colleagues and not adversaries. It ended decades of a top-down punitive teacher evaluation mechanism in favor of one that supported teacher growth and improvement. Other union-management partnerships lead to growth in student performance and school improvement (Rubinstein & McCarthy, 2016; Weingarten, 2011). In a show of support for collaboration, Cunningham (2014) argued that:

Reasonable people on all sides of the education debate understand that, even if we don't always agree on the path forward, we mostly want the same thing: more young people with the education they need, more schools and teachers with the resources and respect they need and deserve, and greater public confidence in education. When we reach that end zone, we can all dance together. (p. 3)

School-level Collaboration

While the literature on school-level collaboration cannot be isolated, collaboration between unions and school districts translates into what happens at individual schools where
teachers are assigned. A gap, however, exists in the literature on how the local school level implements system-wide partnerships. Collaboration at the school level was found to significantly improve educational outcomes for students (Rubinstein & McCarthy, 2016). In a study conducted in ABCUSD, Rubinstein and McCarthy (2016) found that contrary to published findings by Hoxby (1996) suggesting that the presence of unions was an obstacle to student achievement, they associated school-level labor-management partnerships with greater growth in student performance over time. Weingarten (2011) also made the case that “listening to and collaborating with teachers leads to better teaching, school improvement, and higher education” (p. 43). Typically, partnership agreements have been between unions and district leadership, but in the case of ABCUSD, as Honawar (2007) revealed in an Education Week article, the collaboration targeted an individual school where teachers collaborated with leadership to turn around the school.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this case study was to examine how a teachers’ union in an urban school district used collaboration with the school district and other stakeholders to foster a change in its organizational culture. Experts in a review of literature defined collaboration as formal and informal agreements between the teachers’ union and the school district, with the intention of the two entities working together toward a common goal. The research considered factors that facilitated working relationships between the two groups and the results they were likely to produce that could benefit not only the members of each entity but also the student population and their families. The current study examined how changing attitudes might yield better outcomes for all stakeholders.
Research Questions

The following research questions shaped the way in which the study was conducted, especially in the formulation of one-on-one interview questions and the focus group discussion.

- How does union-management collaboration influence district policies?
- How is collaboration beneficial to collective bargaining negotiations?
- What is the influence of collaboration on school improvement, teacher satisfaction and retention, and student academic achievement?

Methods

The purpose of this case study was to examine how a teachers’ union in an urban school district used collaboration with the school district and other stakeholders to foster a change in its organizational culture. Case study research was used to study the phenomenon.

Case study research focuses on a unit of study known as a bounded system (Gay, Miller, and Airasian, 2012). In this case, the bounded system was an organization—the teachers’ union. The case study involved an investigation of a phenomenon such as the collaboration between two organizations and between the constituents affiliated with each of the organizations. The nature of the study called for data collection that involved participant observation, interviews, a focus group discussion, and a review of published and unpublished sources of data. These data collection approaches were essential to guaranteeing validity.

Since the goal was to explore and gain an insight into the case under study, the researcher selected participants through purposive sampling. The benefit of this approach to sampling, as Gay et al. (2012) contend, was “the purposeful selection of cases that are ‘information-rich’ or those from which the researcher can learn a great deal about the research problem” (pp. 448-449).
At the start of the study, published and unpublished data about the historical and current relationships between labor groups and the district government and those between the teachers’ union and the school district were collected and reviewed to obtain a vivid background of how these organizations have co-existed. Targeted data included past and current collective bargaining agreements (see Appendix A), newspaper articles, memoranda of understanding (MoU), legislative ordinances, conference agendas, meeting notes, press releases, and email communications.

Some participants were screened ahead of time to avert and preempt any potential problems about the choice of a participant and to ascertain their willingness to participate in the study, as well as to ensure that they were knowledgeable about the issue under investigation. For some participants, informal interviews were conducted to determine their willingness to participate in the study and to obtain a full commitment to their participation.

As Creswell (2013) contends, a study of this nature requires the researcher to find the following as participants: “…one or more individuals to study, individuals who are accessible, willing to provide information, and distinctive for their accomplishments and ordinariness, or who shed light on a specific phenomenon or issue being explored” (p. 147). The key subjects that fit this description and who possessed the richest information for the study were at the leadership of the teachers’ union and the school district.

Interviews were conducted with participants to obtain their perceptions on collaboration between the two organizations and the potential outcome of such collaboration. Interviews were recorded using a digital recording device and saved on a password-protected computer accessible only to the researcher for transcription. An interview protocol (see Appendices B to G) with open-ended questions was designed using Creswell’s (2013) sample. The author also conducted
observations in settings where the members of the leadership teams of both organizations were participants to determine if there were items of common interest that could foster a partnership between the two. Other observations included collaborative sessions between the teachers’ union with other community stakeholders. While the researcher was generally an observer in such sessions, he was a participant-observer in some meetings and workshops by his role as an executive board member of the union.

A focus group discussion was conducted with teachers to understand their perceptions of union-district collaboration regarding school improvement, teacher satisfaction and retention, and student achievement. These participants were individuals who had a reputation for their leadership both at the organization and school levels and possessed a wealth of information that was beneficial to the study. These participants came from the executive board and local schools. The group was made up of teachers from the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The focus group held one session in the conference room of the teachers’ union office that was conveniently accessible to the researcher and the participants. The focus group session was recorded with a digital device and saved on a password-protected computer accessible only to the researcher. Finally, one-on-one interviews were conducted with school administrators at the elementary, middle, and high schools to obtain their perspectives on school-level collaboration and to triangulate the data from previous interviews and the focus group discussion. The researcher obtained contact information for each principal from the school profiles on the school district website.

Data Analysis

Multiple sources of data were used to obtain diverse perspectives on the case under study. The study covered a period of four months (one semester) and took place at multiple sites. The
data collected included document reviews, site observations, interviews, and a focus group discussion. Creswell’s (2013) Data Analysis Spiral, a process of moving in analytic circles) formed the basis of the organization and analysis of the data. All collected data, field observations, interviews, and documents were organized into computer files, coded, and classified by theme prior to interpretation. The codes determined the number of themes that the researcher used in the discussion of the case. Interviewees received interview transcriptions for verification and approval to guarantee their validity and accuracy.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

Researchers typically collected most previous research on labor-management collaboration in multiple school districts or schools, but this study was limited in scope. The research focus was exclusively on one school district. This limitation notwithstanding, the findings can still be generalized to urban school districts with the same characteristics.

Furthermore, even though the study focused on collaborative initiatives between the school district and the teachers’ union, it excluded public charter schools which, like the public schools, are operated by the city but are non-unionized. As public charter schools are making attempts to unionize, future research will be necessary to obtain more inclusive data which investigates the nature of collaboration and outcomes in these entities.

This study was not in any way used to assess the internal operations of the school district and the teachers’ union, neither did it justify or question the modus operandi of the latter.

Neither gender nor age was a determining factor in the recruitment of participants for the study. The researcher chose participants due to their knowledge of both organizations and, for union members, their level of involvement in union activities.
Definitions of Key Terms

*Defined system:* A unit of study in case study research that may include an individual, a group of individuals, or an organization within a given time (Gay et al., 2012).

*Chancellor:* The chief executive officer of the school district (Collective Bargaining Agreement, 2016).

*Collaboration:* Institutional arrangements that provide opportunities for union leaders, administrators, teachers, and all stakeholders to work together, identifying and solving problems, planning, and making decisions regarding education in the school district (Rubinstein & McCarthy, 2016).

*Collective bargaining:* An agreement between labor and management that determines salary and wage scales, working hours, credentialing, class sizes, teacher autonomy, due process, and fringe benefits among other things (Vachon & Ma, 2015).

*Education reform:* The name given to efforts to change public education to make it more accessible to all students and to improve student outcomes (Malin, 2014).

*Evolutionary Change:* Change that consists of improvements and incremental steps to fix a problem that affects a larger system (Burke, 2014).

*First-order change:* Change that occurs within a subsystem of an organization, usually top management, whose consequences affect the larger system (Burke, 2014).

*Interest-based bargaining:* Bargaining where the focus is on interests, not positions (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991).

*New Unionism:* A more progressive approach to union organizing that diverges from the industrial model but seeks a more collaborative approach with management (Sawchuk, 2011b; Vachon & Ma, 2015).
Peer Assistance Review: A teacher evaluation program in which teachers, through a collaboration agreement between the teachers’ union and management, partner with school administrators to support and evaluate their peers (Qazilbash, 2009).

Right-to-work state: A state where collective bargaining between labor unions and employees is prohibited (Coulson, 2010).

Second-order change: Change that takes place within a subsystem and is usually influenced by the successes of the initial change focus (Burke, 2014).
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The animosity that existed between teachers’ unions and school districts in the 1960s and 1970s hampered collaboration tremendously (Rubinstein et al., 2011). During a period characterized by strikes and anti-union rhetoric (Coulson, 2010; Mirer, 2013), working together on any issues seemed far-fetched. Some groups accused teachers’ unions of being selfish entities that only defended the interests of their members, including ineffective ones (Eberts, 2007; Kirp, 2014; Tucker, 2012). Recent media hostility (Marianno, 2015) and right-leaning states forced unions to adopt a change in culture, with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) championing collaboration (Sawchuk, 2011b).

Rubinstein and McCarthy (2016) defined union-management partnerships as “institutional arrangements that provide opportunities for union leaders, administrators, and teachers to work together identifying and solving problems, planning, and making decisions” (p. 115). Sustar (2013) contended that these partnerships came to define the new form of unionism known as “solutions-driven unionism” (p. 63) as opposed to the social-movement unionism of the 1960s and 1970s that was more radical and adversarial (Shaffer, 2011). Collaboration between unions and districts has been in the works since the 1960s (Rubinstein et al., 2011) but only reached fruition in subsequent decades. In the majority of the cases, strike actions served as a prelude or served as a motivation for entities to want to collaborate (Sawchuk, 2011b).

The literature that laid the foundation for the current study had six themes: teacher quality, student achievement, collective bargaining, learning organization, school-level collaboration, and community engagement.
Teacher Quality

The body of literature on teacher quality focuses, in large part, on teacher performance. Under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, teacher quality also included credentialing, specifically requiring practitioners to major in and obtain a license in the content area to which they are assigned (Civic Impulse, 2017). Some of the divisions between teachers’ unions and districts in the early days of education reform concerned the evaluation and retention of teachers. The impetus to force teacher quality into the spotlight was inspired mostly by a push from the federal government for school districts to compete for federal funds through reform of their practices (Civic Impulse, 2017). Race to the Top (RTTT) and other federal policies incentivized states to revamp their teacher evaluation systems, typically tying pay to high teacher performance ratings or student outcomes (Marianno, 2015; Paige, 2013). Several joint initiatives by districts and unions to revamp their teacher and principal evaluation systems inspired President Obama’s education secretary, Arne Duncan, to travel to Hillsborough County, Florida, on October 14, 2010, in the company of AFT and National Education Association (NEA) presidents to announce a labor-management conference (Klein, 2010). The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) labor-management conference in 2011 sought to establish trust between management and unions (Sawchuk, 2011a). The USDOE’s pledge to provide support to districts seeking to establish collaborative relations served as a motivation for attendees. Despite the promised support for the initiative, some school districts such as the District of Columbia and New York City that had planned to attend were reported absent due to disagreements over teacher evaluation and layoff policies.

There is a plethora of literature around collaboration on teacher quality as unions evolved from the industrial model of teacher unionism (Rubinstein et al., 2011) to a more solutions-
oriented model that favored education reform. Union parent organizations, the AFT, and the NEA espoused the latter model. In 1997, NEA president, Bob Chase urged affiliates to embrace what he termed the “new unionism” (Sawchuk, 2011b; Vachon & Ma, 2015). Both parent organizations saw collaboration on teacher quality in particular as a way to “move in the same direction, and the direction is about kids, the education of students, creating the right environment to educate students” (Sawchuk & Heitin, 2014, p. 12). The leaders of both education organizations, however, created controversy with the paradox in their positions over standardized testing as a measure of teacher quality. Notably, the president of the AFT was instrumental in the development of the labor-management collaboration in Baltimore, Maryland; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and New Haven, Connecticut, in which each district reached a contract agreement experimenting with new systems of teacher evaluation and pay based on measures of testing. This same president later criticized the same teacher evaluation system that she had endorsed (Sawchuk & Heitin, 2014).

In examining the outcomes produced by labor-union collaboration in the current literature, the researcher noticed conspicuous discrepancies. Notably, merit pay and value-added measures of student achievement were used to evaluate teachers in some school districts such as Hillsborough, Florida; New Haven, Connecticut; and Winston-Salem/Forsyth, North Carolina. Other studies used peer evaluations instead of student test scores such as in the ABC Unified School District (ABCUSD), California, and school districts in Douglas County, Colorado; Montgomery County, Maryland; Plattsburgh, New York; and St. Francis, Minnesota (Eckert et al., 2011).

**Teacher Evaluation**

Teacher evaluation is one of the measures used to improve teacher quality. In fact, the
U.S. Department of Education’s RTTT initiative encouraged collaboration between school districts and unions on teacher evaluation because it deemed teacher evaluation a necessary reform initiative (Paige, 2013). Even though collective bargaining clauses in some districts did not require union involvement in the development of teacher evaluations, RTTT required that evaluation systems be “designed and developed with teacher and principal involvement” (Sims, 2015, p. 637). Teachers’ unions agreed that teacher evaluations were about improving the quality of teaching, not just rating teachers, leading hardline leaders who had been opposed to any teacher evaluation reform to soften their positions (Sims, 2015).

The Chicago Teachers’ Union (CTU) made news with an effective strike action in recent years (Bruno, 2015), but its collaboration with the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to develop a joint committee to develop the evaluation system was a laudable effort within the education reform community (Sporte, Jiang and Luppescu, 2014). A quantitative study of teacher evaluation investigated evaluator reliability, teacher perceptions of evaluators, and the process by which labor and management collaborated to develop teacher outcomes (Sporte et al., 2014). The researcher obtained the observation data for the study from 123 independent joint observations conducted with CPS principals during the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 academic years. The survey data used were obtained from CPS’s annual school survey administered to all teachers, principals, and assistant principals during the same academic years. The findings revealed that in the first year of implementation, teachers were generally positive about the accuracy of the process and of the ratings that they received. However, the systematic discrepancies in the performances of the evaluators, who were either too lenient or too extreme in their ratings, diminished the teachers’ positive perception. Providing a balance between the evaluators’ and teachers’ perceptions as well as using data from actual evaluations provided a
generalizable sample that captured the strengths and flaws of the evaluation system.

**Joint Responsibility**

In recent decades, unions have pushed for joint responsibility with school districts on teacher evaluation (Crabtree, 2016). The mechanism used to advocate such a change is Peer Assisted Review (PAR), in which teachers take ownership of the quality of teaching through collaboration with administrators. The most compelling case for collaboration on teacher quality was the adoption of PAR by at least six school districts and their unions (Rubinstein et al., 2011). Under PAR, districts and unions shared the responsibility of evaluating and supporting teachers. To ensure inter-rater reliability, when an administrator determined that a teacher was not performing well, a consulting teacher, who was a member of the teachers’ union conducted a separate observation to make his or her own determination. If the consulting teacher made the same determination of the teacher’s ineffectiveness, only then would the teacher move to the next step of the process, which was support.

Even though there is a dearth of empirical research on PAR, a cross-site study on this method of evaluation examined seven school districts (Toledo, Ohio; Cincinnati, Ohio; Montgomery County, Maryland; Rochester, New York; San Juan, California; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Syracuse, New York) that use the evaluation tool (Qazilbash, 2009). The author gathered contextual data from document reviews and a total of 155 interviews of administrators and consulting teachers at all the sites. Although the study purposefully excluded some early cases of successful PAR partnerships, the findings from the seven examined districts revealed that there was consistency across school districts, especially regarding equal representation between the district and the union. That notwithstanding, there were some insignificant discrepancies in the composition of the PAR, such as principals being part of the panel in some
districts but not in others. As Qazilbash (2009) contended, while some districts believed that principals brought a unique perspective to the panel, others thought that including principals on the panels could potentially increase adversarial relationships with the union, especially regarding decisions about a teacher’s employment.

Historically, unions have focused on the industrial model of protecting their members’ due process rights and compensation, especially with prevalent animosity and hostility toward them (Coulson, 2010; Mirer, 2013), and members in some of the examined unions had feared an erosion of those protections. Across the board, PAR guaranteed those protections even though the protections did not shield marginal teachers from termination. The termination of ineffective teachers made a good case against opponents of teachers’ unions who have traditionally accused the latter of protecting incompetent teachers and caring more about themselves than student performance (Eberts, 2007; Kirp, 2014; Tucker, 2012).

Rubinstein et al. (2011) used a case study of six school districts with effective collaboration in adopting joint responsibility regarding teacher evaluation and support. ABCUSD in California came to champion a new peer-assistance mentoring, support, and evaluation program known as Peer Assistance Support System (PASS). In Hillsborough County, Florida, Public Schools, even though the lack of funding thwarted earlier discussions in the 1990s, the district came together with the union to establish an extensive range of mentoring, PAR, and training opportunities for teachers and principals. These collaborative efforts of the district were rewarded by a multimillion dollar “Intensive Partnership” grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to improve effective teaching. Norfolk School District, Virginia; Plattsburgh City Public School District, New York; St. Francis Independent School District, Minnesota; and Toledo City School District in Ohio established similar systems that set up joint
responsibility between the union and the school district. The collaboration in Norfolk stood out because Virginia is a right-to-work (RTW) state which, like others, is not union-friendly. St. Francis involved three entities: the union, the management, and the school board. The Student Improvement Performance Program (SIPP) in St. Francis included a peer-review component, a new teacher-induction program, and mentoring.

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), Maryland, came to be considered one of the models in the country to emulate. The partnership epitomized a reliable and effective labor-management collaboration on teacher evaluation that was rare to come by at the dawn of the century. PAR was instituted in 2000 and led to improved relations between the teachers’ union and the school system based on mutual trust (Sullivan, 2012). The study on PAR in Montgomery County, involved the review of archival data from educational organizations in the county and described three decades of collaboration between the school district and the Montgomery County Education Association (MCEA) over teacher evaluations. Like most success stories of collaboration, the Montgomery County collaboration emanated from historical adversarial relationships similar to those in New York’s Plattsburgh City Public School District in 1975 (Rubinstein et al., 2011). During the 1970s and 1980s, MCEA used the industrial unions’ approach to secure gains for teachers, notably through an eight-day strike. “The association which had been a docile and largely irrelevant body before the 1960s had become radicalized and developed into a forceful advocate for teacher needs and concerns” (Sullivan, 2012, p. 146). As the union developed in strength, it soon realized that it had a vision far beyond that of a trade union protecting its members. “The vision of teachers and administrators working as professional colleagues engaged in the task of improving education in the public schools remained alive in the minds of some teachers” (p. 146). Consequently, the union sought to join
the Teacher Union Reform Network (TURN), whose goal was to transform teachers’ unions into agents of reform. That mindset developed into panels and committees co-chaired by MCPS and MCEA that met for two years to create PAR. The fact that under the program teachers and administrators were recognized as equal partners in assessing teacher effectiveness was a major milestone in labor-management relations. The partnership allowed for joint training between principals and consulting teachers to prepare them to conduct evaluations.

The Pittsburgh Public School (PPS) District story, where the partnership with the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers (PFT) evolved to the establishment of a strong bond between two members of the leadership team, was even more compelling (Hamill, 2011). Encouraged by the outcomes of their prior collaboration on professional development, the district’s chief academic officer convinced her counterpart within the union not to retire so they could revamp the teacher evaluation system. The recognition that there would be a greater buy-in with the involvement of teachers in the process was a welcome move in the history of labor-management relations. The involvement of all upper-level administrators from the central office, the union, school administrators, and classroom teachers was a divergence from the common practice of top-down imposition by district leadership and led to greater trust, especially within union rank and file.

The ground-breaking collaboration between PPS and PFT inspired twenty-eight schools to volunteer to pilot the program that became known as the Research-Based Inclusion System of Evaluation (RISE) upon final adoption. The Pittsburgh partnership evidenced the value in collaboration, especially when practitioners believe that their voices are heard and can influence district policy. Furthermore, those informal relationships of trust where a superintendent publicly declares that “I don’t go many days without talking to John (union president)” (Hamill,
2011, p. 34) is a testament to the value of working together on an issue as sensitive to teachers as evaluation.

Taking joint responsibility for teacher quality has been hailed not only by beneficiaries but also, by education activists. AFT president Randi Weingarten argued that what mattered in education was not so much how the schools were managed but how much teachers were supported and provided a seat at the table to voice their opinions on education policy (Weingarten, 2011). She strongly advocated for PAR. Similarly, Adam Urbanski, the co-founder of TURN, continues to advocate for the recognition of accomplished teachers to support struggling teachers with the goal of achieving quality in the profession (Urbanski, Alves, & Bernstein, 2017).

**Positive Outcomes**

In terms of support, the outcomes of sharing a common vision and having joint responsibility on teacher evaluation benefitted both novice and veteran teachers over time (Eberts, 2007; Qazilbash, 2009; Sullivan, 2012). The collaboration on teacher evaluation reduced the number of terminations due to ineffectiveness. Under PAR, for example, first-year teachers and ineffective veteran teachers received intensive support and evaluation through the collaboration between school administrators and consulting teachers. Referral for termination was a last resort in the PAR programs studied (Qazilbash, 2009). In Toledo, performance on standardized tests rose slightly as a result of the collaboration between the school district and the teachers’ union on teacher quality (Eberts, 2007; Malin, 2014). Toledo ranked highest on state performance indices for grades 3 to 6 and boasted the highest graduation rate in the state as of 2013. According to Malin (2014), “A key driver of Toledo’s success has been its use of peer review in place of traditional methods of evaluating teacher performance for more than three
decades” (p. 531). The positive results of the PAR program in Toledo encouraged other school
districts in the state to adopt it.

The effectiveness of the Montgomery County Peer Review program in establishing an
equal partnership in the development and implementation of an evaluation system was seen by
both teachers and management as a positive step toward improving not only teacher quality, but
also student learning. The collaboration in this study stood in stark contrast to the evaluation
system in the neighboring District of Columbia Public Schools, where the schools’ chancellor
developed the system behind closed doors without teacher input (Simon, 2012). In the District
of Columbia case, the lack of teacher input and the punitive effects of the evaluation system
resulted in low teacher morale and a lack of buy-in (Sims, 2015). In fact, the union president in a
2009 interview stated that the chancellor’s “out to get you culture…created an environment
where the morale is low. It would be very difficult to have folks truly buy in to where you want
to go” (Sims, 2015, p. 637).

The details provided in describing the Montgomery County program made a compelling
case in favor of collaborative partnerships between school districts and teachers’ unions due to
the positive outcomes. Montgomery County Public Schools teachers had a vision that was far
beyond that of a trade union protecting its members from compensation and benefits issues.
Sims (2015) posited that “the vision of teachers and administrators working as professional
colleagues engaged in the task of improving education in the public schools remained alive in the
minds of some teachers” (p. 146).

That the evaluation system was based on core principles including but not limited to a
commitment to student learning, knowledge of subject matter, effective management of student
learning, and efficient monitoring of student progress was a sign that the collaboration already
anticipated outcomes that surpassed benefits to union members. The continuous support that both novice and veteran teachers received benefitted teacher satisfaction and retention. These stated benefits provided a direct link to one of the research questions in the current study that addresses how collaboration affects school improvement, teacher satisfaction and retention, and student academic achievement.

Increases in student achievement also provided Toledo City School District and the Toledo Federation of Teachers a reason to celebrate their collaborative partnership (Malin, 2014). In the eyes of the union, it was more pertinent to defend the academic standards that it participated in developing than protecting its members. Per Malin (2014), “Under peer review, the union is transformed from a protector of the irremediably incompetent to a defender of the professional standards that it participated in creating and administering” (p. 532). Furthermore, like other peer-review systems around the country, the attrition rate for poor performers was higher than under traditional evaluation systems.

Indications are that the collaboration between school districts and teachers’ unions on teacher quality ushered in an era where teacher effectiveness and student performance became non-negotiables to the extent that nine states included student performance as a criterion for tenure, and teacher ineffectiveness became grounds for dismissal in twenty states (Cowen & Strunk, 2015). Some collaborations resulted in a restricted teacher labor market based on a credentialed pool of teachers who had gone through a standard license process, which had potential positive outcomes on student learning (Vachon & Ma, 2015).

However, RTW laws dampened the momentum garnered by successes in collaborative partnerships to ensure better teacher quality (Sawchuk, 2011b). The lessening of momentum occurred in states such as California and Michigan, where locals resisted the idea of
collaborative partnerships, and Wisconsin and Idaho, where legislative changes altered the
dynamics and created more adversarial relationships with unions. In addition to Michigan and
Wisconsin, Florida also prohibited bargaining on teacher evaluations.

Sims (2015) argued that unilaterally developed and implemented or imposed teacher
evaluations systems negatively impact teacher morale over time. Sims also cited the
demoralizing effects that the unilateral imposition of the IMPACT evaluation system by
management had on the teachers of the District of Columbia. Even though the chancellor acted
in compliance with a 1996 act of Congress that restricted teacher evaluation from collective
bargaining (Simon, 2012), seeking the positive contributions of teachers similar to those in New
Hampshire (Paige, 2013) could have averted some of the backlash.

Researchers who favored the involvement of teachers’ unions in crafting evaluation
systems argued that districts stood to lose more when they unilaterally initiated and implemented
this kind of reform (Paige, 2013). Paige believed that unions not involved in reforming
evaluation systems would devote their resources to disrupting the change rather than supporting
it. Moreover, after analyzing collective bargaining rights and teacher evaluation reform from
four states, the author found that 73% of administrators failed to recommendations for
improvement, and even among those who made such recommendations, only 45 % were useful.
These findings supported the AFT’s 2008 resolution urging its affiliates to consider PAR that
involved teachers and administrators working together to support quality teaching (Sawchuk,
2011b) as opposed to one-sided evaluations that tended to be retaliatory in some cases (Paige,
2013; Sustar, 2013).

**Student Achievement**

The research on collaboration between teachers’ unions and school districts mainly
revolves around student achievement. The literature in this section is intended to demonstrate that, when it comes to student outcomes, past studies revealed that more gains would be made with the participation of both labor and management than with only top-down management mandates. In fact, Cunningham (2014) made the case that:

Reasonable people on all sides of the education debate understand that, even if we don't always agree on the path forward, we mostly want the same thing: more young people with the education they need, more schools and teachers with the resources and respect they need and deserve, and greater public confidence in education. When we reach that end zone, we can all dance. together (p. 3)

In the history of education reform, the 2002 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation and the 2009 RTTT initiative made student achievement the cornerstone of what schools and school districts were to achieve (Civic Impulse, 2017). The threat of closing failing schools under NCLB forced both labor and management to engage in meaningful partnership with the goal of reaching adequate yearly progress (AYP). The quest for more funding under RTTT incentivized districts and states to engage in meaningful reform to increase student achievement. It was not uncommon to hear education commentators state that “if there is something good coming out of NCLB, it is more union-management collaboration on student achievement” (Honawar, 2007, p. 15). Empirical evidence obtained from Indiana Public School Districts supported the opinions of these commentators (Downs, 2012). In a quantitative study involving fifty schools’ superintendents in Indiana, the author used a survey instrument to determine how the stress of punitive consequences impacted the relationship between the superintendents and teachers. One of the survey questions specifically asked for the superintendents’ perceptions of perceived change in cooperation in their relationships with their teachers’ unions. The
researchers determined in their findings that there was collaboration to improve student outcomes, especially in failing schools, and accountability laws mandated by NCLB influenced this.

In an Education Week article, Honawar (2007) identified accords that sought to turn around failing schools under NCLB. The unusual collaboration between the teachers’ union and Annapolis High School in Maryland stood out in the commentary. Under the terms of the agreement, the teachers’ union and the district committed to working together to raise student achievement, tying bonuses to the anticipated achievement and the teachers committing to work at the school for at least three additional years.

Similar partnership agreements were reached in Cleveland to raise the test scores of third graders within three years. In the Miami Dade area, the two stakeholders worked on school improvement plans for the thirty-nine lowest-performing schools. In Chicago, the collaboration, known as the “Fresh Start Program” was enacted in 2005 to help revamp eight schools that NCLB identified as failing. The role played by Chicago teachers in decision-making helped in changing the mindsets within the union rank and file and resulted in four of the schools removed from the probation list.

The USDOE more than ever saw itself highlighting greater collaboration geared at improving student achievement (Cavanagh, 2011). The department also organized conferences aimed at building relationships of trust between management and unions with the goal that such trust would lead to better student outcomes (Sawchuk, 2011a). At such conferences, teams made up of superintendents, school boards, and unions found themselves in the same room working toward the same goals and backed not only by the USDOE but also private foundations that might not have been union allies.
In a mixed study, Rubinstein and McCarthy (2016) offered strong evidence that both institutional partnerships and school-level collaboration led to significant gains in student performance. Using data from surveys, interviews, and student performance from a sample of twenty-seven schools in the ABCUSD, the authors found that schools with stronger partnerships scored significantly higher on the California standardized achievement test. The authors intimated that despite the high poverty levels of the schools sampled, the students produced high results, which they attributed to collaborative partnerships. These findings contradicted scholars who suggested that the presence of unions was an obstacle to student achievement (Lott & Kenny, 2013).

In a quantitative study of 721 school districts in forty-two states, Lott and Kenny (2013) examined the impact of contributions made by state teachers’ unions on student test scores. The researchers performed an analysis of financial data from large school districts in forty-two states to conclude that unions were stronger in states with high union dues and spending. Consequently, the unions in these states negotiated contracts that provided protections for inept teachers. These contracts, they argued, negatively impacted student achievement in math and reading. However, the researchers did not provide any findings to support the assumption that labor-management collaboration negatively impacted student achievement; neither did they cite any existing literature to corroborate this school of thought.

Even though Cowen and Strunk (2015) suggested that stronger collective bargaining agreements (CBA) and unions resulted in lower student achievement and lower graduation rates, they also found that students in unionized school districts performed better than their peers in non-unionized school districts. The mixed findings made it difficult to corroborate Lott and Kenny’s (2013) findings on student achievement. Further rebuttal to the impact of unions was
advanced by Bangs and MacBeath (2012), who made the case for an ongoing accord between management and unions concerning student achievement despite a history of conflict between the two. The authors went further to contend that countries like Finland, with the highest student performance, also had strong teachers’ unions whose members were treated as partners with management to achieve better student outcomes.

Lamagna (2010) conducted a single case study on labor-management relations that sought to explore the factors promoting and hindering collaboration. Even though the findings of the study characterized those relations as evolving, the strongest conclusion supporting collaboration concerned student achievement. Half of the labor participants and one-third of management participants agreed that focusing on students would increase collaboration. The key ingredients that would change the culture in both organizations would be trust, open communication, and mutual respect.

The literature on student achievement links closely to that on teacher quality. The goals regarding teacher quality and student outcomes are usually jointly referred to as teaching and learning. The research on PAR all pointed to student achievement as an ultimate outcome. Evidence from existing literature revealed that many of the evaluation systems that were jointly developed by districts and unions used students’ test scores as a measure of teacher quality and student success (Cowen & Strunk, 2015; Eberts, 2007).

Rubinstein et al. (2011), in a comprehensive report on union-management, concluded that collaboration among education stakeholders was a necessary tool for any successful, meaningful, and sustainable school reform. That sustainability was grounded in the core principles guiding the partnership between ABCUSD and the ABC Federation of Teachers (ABCFT), in which both parties committed to working together to guarantee student success and to not let each other fail.
Even though each of the six school districts in the study—ABCUSD, California; Hillsborough County Public Schools, Florida; Norfolk Public School District, Virginia; Toledo School District, Ohio; Plattsburgh City School District, New York; and St. Francis Independent School District, Minnesota—was unique in its approach, the findings could be generalized due to the common patterns embedded in the experiences.

However, including other school districts where labor-union partnerships were nonexistent could have been beneficial in establishing significant differences and drawing more definite conclusions on student outcomes. The distinctive feature in the ABCUSD and the ABCFT collaborative was its targeted focus on low-performing students benefiting from free and reduced lunch and English language learning services. From the findings, the collaboration was purposeful, targeted, and intentional to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The stakeholders’ commitment to working together was unprecedented, especially as certain responsibilities have traditionally been those of school districts. They jointly worked to recruit, hire, compensate, and retain highly qualified teachers, as well as improve curricular and instructional practices.

Over time, the ABCUSD and the ABCFT collaborated on textbook selection, choice of curriculum, and processes for data-based decision-making regarding student performance. The union appointed members to several committees at the district level such as the Strategic Planning Committee, Closing the Achievement Gap Committee, and the Special Education Committee. The partnership in Norfolk was unusual because Virginia is an RTW state, but what it also revealed was that student achievement remains a common goal within the education-reform movement.

Teachers’ unions, some researchers believed, have been scapegoats in education reform
efforts as targeted attacks accused them of protecting incompetent teachers and ignoring student performance (Eberts, 2007; Kirp, 2014; Tucker, 2012). The disputes emanating from such accusations jeopardized teachers’ jobs and triggered grievances against school districts. The Federal Mediation and Conciliation Services (FMCS) played an important role in arbitrating disputes between the parties and established a partnership that transformed the failing Charlotte County Public School District, Florida, into a successful one (Cohen, 2012). The involvement of the FMCS in the establishment of a labor-management council was one more piece of evidence that educational partnerships lead to improved student performance. The dispute between the Charlotte County School District and the Charlotte Education Association resulted in a partnership agreement that drastically transformed a failing school system into one marked by strong student gains.

Since 2002, the graduation rate in Charlotte County Public Schools has increased from 68% to 85% last year. Advanced Placement Test scores rose from twelfth place in Florida in 2004 to first in the state in recent results. Equally impressive, Scholastic Aptitude Test scores in reading, math, and writing for Charlotte County students have shown a 21% increase since 2004. (Cohen, 2012, p. 473)

Similar efforts in Central Falls School District, Rhode Island, that were mediated by the FMCS spared seventy-seven teachers from being dismissed and led to a labor-management agreement that planned to work on student achievement.

The push for giving teachers a voice to bring about improvements in learning has been at the forefront of unions’ messaging in recent years (Anrig, 2014; Urbanski et al., 2017; Weingarten, 2011). There is mounting evidence that partnerships between unions and school districts on student achievement can produce positive results. The Pittsburgh Public Schools and
the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers’ collaboration was known to have succeeded in part because it addressed student achievement (Hamill, 2011). The Promise-Ready initiative, as the collaboration was known, fostered a teaching and learning culture in every classroom for students and teachers, the focus being on keeping teachers with their students from one grade level to the next (9th grade to 10th grade, for example). In the San Juan, California, Unified School district partnership, both parties used a book study, a joint Common Core committee, and a PAR initiative to foster student achievement (Spector, 2013).

Rubinstein (2014) found a correlation between labor-management collaboration and student achievement from a qualitative study involving the ABCUSD and the ABCFT. Researchers collected data from the district’s thirty schools and its more than 900 teachers. The researcher used partnership attitude and climate surveys, data from the California Academic Performance Index (API), and social network analysis to reach the conclusions. The findings revealed that formal partnerships between administration, unions, and teachers at the school level had a significant positive impact on student performance. For example, “a 1-point increase in partnership quality in 2011, based on a survey with a scale of 1 to 4, corresponded with more than a 25-point gain in API scores in the 2011-2012 school year” (Rubinstein, 2014, p. 27).

Some states on the east coast of the United States found success with collaboration between teachers’ unions and school districts. The Norfolk School District in Virginia braved state hostility toward labor unions to collaborate with its teachers’ union, resulting in significant gains in student achievement (Malin, 2014). The student achievement gains earned the district the Broad Prize for Urban Education in 2005. Similar collaboration on student achievement turned around failing schools in Providence, Rhode Island, where the parties reached a deal to create a non-profit called United Providence with the goal of turning around its schools. In
neighboring New Haven, Connecticut, the union and the district agreed to provide the latter flexibility in hiring, staff development, work rules, length of school day, and pedagogy in the lowest-performing schools, all with the goal of turning around those schools (Malin, 2014).

As much of the literature in this section suggests, some level of conflict or failure that brought parties together in a unified front to address the urgent needs of their district has historically preceded successful labor-management partnerships. In 2004, when the state of Massachusetts took over the Springfield School District because of bankruptcy, the independent think tank that was formed to improve the city’s schools encouraged the creation of a joint labor-management team. The ensuing culture of collaboration resulted in gains in students’ test scores in 2008 with an expectation for more growth in subsequent years (Anrig, 2014). In the words of the article’s author, “the most promising path to transforming American education is student-centered labor-management collaboration” (p. 5).

**Collective Bargaining**

Collective bargaining traditionally focuses on teachers’ working conditions and compensation, better known to members as “bread and butter issues” (Sullivan, 2009, p. ii). A new era in collective bargaining came about as a result of national unions advocating for a different type of unionism, called “new unionism” (Eberts, 2007) or “solutions-driven unionism,” as an alternative to social-movement unionism that tended to be more radical (Sustar, 2013). Today there is general agreement in the education community, including among union leadership, that the conversation needs to revolve around student achievement first and foremost. Progressive union leaders are constantly pushing for teachers’ voices to be part of the reform process (Crabtree, 2016; Urbanski et al., 2017). Collaboration on teacher quality and student achievement, therefore, cannot be achieved without their explicit inclusion in a CBA).
Researchers have conducted several studies on collaborative collective bargaining, but perhaps even more relevant from its title is Noggle's 2009 qualitative study: “Win-Win: A Case Study of Collaborative Structures Between Labor and Management.” The study sought to identify the events that led to the formation of collaborative structures in four school districts, all members of TURN. The researcher obtained diverse perspectives on the existence of collaborative structures in the four school districts in the case study through personal interviews with seventeen participants. The findings revealed consensus among labor and management participants that collaboration was an important factor in their collaborative bargaining negotiations, especially around teacher quality and student achievement, as well as the improvement of labor-management relations. The study corroborated the findings of Koza (2009) that there was a positive relationship between collective bargaining items such as instructional/pupil contact time, length of the school day, and to an extent, allocated in-service days. Negotiated increased instructional time and a longer school day were associated with higher student achievement, as evidenced by student test scores.

There was evidence that districts that embraced the collaborative-bargaining approach tended to spend less time on their collective bargaining negotiations (Noggle, 2010). In the few school districts where the collective-bargaining process evolved beyond teachers’ economic interests, job security, and due process rights, collective bargaining was an ongoing process (Eckert et al., 2011; Hamill, 2011; Noggle, 2010). Eckert et al. (2011), in their findings from the U.S. Department of Education’s Labor Management Conference held in in 2011, featured twelve school districts where collaboration between labor and management helped tremendously in the collective-bargaining process. The superintendents and union leaders featured in the study used the collective-bargaining process as a platform to explicitly make commitments for shared
decision-making in teaching and learning. Part of the commitment was moving from the traditionally adversarial process to a more collaborative one with the overall goal of improving student outcomes. The following excerpts from the report were relevant to demonstrating the importance of collaborative collective-bargaining:

Collective bargaining is viewed as a vehicle to improve student outcomes. For example, Green Dot negotiated a contract that does not structure the teacher workday around set hours. Teachers operate around a professional day. Their hours are not defined by the time of the day. Instead, teachers optimize their work schedule to best meet the needs of the students on a site-by-site basis…. For many collaborating districts, this work began with developing new knowledge and skills to conduct contract negotiations. Of several districts, Montgomery County is the most vocal champion of an “interest-based model,” an approach to negotiation that encourages local leaders to set aside traditional positional behavior and replace it with negotiation based on shared understanding of the goals and rationale each party brings to the table (Eckert et al., 2011, p. 5).

The seriousness of the USDOE labor-management conference was demonstrated two years later in Jefferson County Public Schools, Colorado, where both sides were forced to embark on collaboration because of a budgetary crisis (Sawchuk, 2013). The openness and transparency of the district won it the trust of the union, and both sides collaboratively negotiated in good faith to address the crisis. Sims (2015) posited that putting aside differences and working together yielded benefits. He argued, “If both sides are willing to move past an ‘us-versus-them’ mentality and use the contract to forge a true partnership, a CBA can directly improve employee engagement” (p. 645).

In a collaborative collective-bargaining process, both sides typically ignore the notion of
scoring wins for themselves and their constituents, but instead winning is mutual (Noggle, 2010), and both sides are willing to make concessions. Jefferson County Public Schools and its union made tough decisions to cut 200 positions, mostly through attrition. They instituted two furlough days, eliminated four professional development days, traded a 3% wage reduction for teachers for a shorter school year, and closed two schools. Even though Sustar, (2013) considered this type of bargaining an act of granting concessions and mostly resulted in financial losses to union members, the researcher nevertheless agreed that it was better to lead and propose than to wait and oppose. The fact that under collaborative bargaining teacher quality items, such as PAR, could be negotiated in the contract (Fiarman, 2009) was a big step in the right direction. In a qualitative study involving thirty union presidents, Johnson, Donaldson, Munger, Papay, and Qazilbash (2009) concluded that industrial-styled unionism was unable to resolve the burning challenges in education. Rather, the findings from the interviews conducted by the researchers revealed that districts where unions embraced collaborative collective bargaining practices were more likely to influence reform initiatives.

The practice in Cincinnati, Ohio, endorsed Weingarten's collective bargaining collaboration as a means of enhancing the teaching profession. As a result of a collaborative CBA, teachers received a high stake in decision-making (Anrig, 2014). Giving teachers such a seat at the education-reform table had been espoused in the previous year by Paige (2013), who recommended that legislatures develop a legal framework that included union involvement. Such a move, he argued, would build relationships and collaboration and attract union buy-in rather than push-back. These recommendations stood in stark contrast to those of collective bargaining opponents who always considered it harmful to students and passed anti-collective bargaining laws in some parts of the country (Marianno, 2015). These opponents’ school of
thought stood contrary to the findings of robust studies such as that on collective bargaining and student achievement conducted by Carini (2008). The study on the impact of collective bargaining on student achievement used data from the National Education Longitudinal Study that included samples from more than 10,000 students in eighth and tenth grades. Carini (2008) found that collective bargaining did not negatively impact student achievement. On the contrary, the findings of the study determined that teachers’ unions were more likely to embrace education reform involving student learning, and they provided support to their members to improve teaching and learning.

**Learning Organization**

Organizational change theory characterizes the learning organization as one that is open to continuous learning and improvement, where both individuals and teams engage in attitudes that lead to their professional growth, and where top management is supportive of these initiatives (Antonoaie & Antonoaie, 2014). Kotter (2012) underscored that learning needed to be a life-long process, and for it to happen, one needed to “keep learning at a rate we normally associate with children and young adults” (p. 185). The author continued by intimating that “in a static world we learn virtually everything we need to know in life by the time we are fifteen. In an ever-changing world, we can never learn it all” (p. 186). Such a school of thought supports Heorhiadi, La Venture, and Conbere (2014), who suggested that there was more to learning within an organization than the amount of training that people could take from their employer.

Within educational circles, organizational learning is usually limited to top-down mandated professional development, which is contrary to the recommendations of Heorhiadi et al. (2014). Under collaborative partnerships, everyone in the organization routinely receives joint training. In a mixed-methods study of superintendents and local teachers’ union presidents,
Howard (2013) found that both parties routinely held joint training to create a common language and consistent communication. Howard surveyed ten public school superintendents and respective union presidents in California for the study. Based on the survey data, five superintendents received follow-up interviews as a means of adding validity to the study. This collaboration at the leadership level subsequently spread to committees comprised of district and union leadership working together to foster joint decision-making.

Similarly, Noggle (2009) explored four school districts whose collaborative relationships with their unions led them to joint training on negotiating and on the implementing of PAR in Green Valley School District, Pennsylvania, specifically. This joint training between administrators and consulting teachers on PAR significantly improved labor-management relations not only in the latter school district but also in seven school districts where PAR was successful: Montgomery County Public Schools, Maryland; Minneapolis Public Schools, Minnesota; Syracuse City School District, New York; Rochester City School District, New York; Toledo Public Schools, Ohio; Cincinnati Public Schools, Ohio; and San Juan Unified School District, California (Fiarman, 2009).

The AFT has provided joint learning opportunities for administrators, teachers, and union leaders to foster their learning and partnerships. Training provided by the Center for School Improvement (CSI), the Union leadership Institute, the biannual QuEST conferences, the TEACH conference, and the Partnership with Administration and Labor (PAL) have served as opportunities for joint learning (Rubinstein et al., 2011). Through this joint training, regular attendees such as ABCUSD and ABCFT have strengthened relations with each other and increased communication between the two (Rubinstein, 2014). Even in an RTW state such as Virginia, the researchers contended that Norfolk Public Schools and its teachers’ union received
extensive joint training on student data analysis, leadership, and the implementation of the Walkthrough Protocol. Other success stories of collaboration identified by Rubinstein et al. (2011) included that of HCPS, Florida, through the Center for Technology and Education, joint union-management training on decision-making, and meeting skills; PAR in Plattsburgh City Public Schools, New York; the Teacher Academy in St. Francis School District, Minnesota; and the summer professional development institute in Toledo City School District, Ohio. These joint learning experiences proved to have yielded very positive results from the leaders’ perspectives.

Researchers reported that:

The leaders point out that the shared learning experiences are as much about leveling the playing field as they are about developing specific shared knowledge. The informal value is that teacher and administration leaders become learners together as they explore the new ideas. (Eckert et al., 2011, pp. 5-6)

Rubinstein, (2014) attested that at this joint training, both labor and management heard the same messages, and obtained the same information with the overall goal of improving teaching and learning.

**School-level Collaboration**

School-level collaboration refers to partnerships and interactions between school administrators and teachers at the school or building level. The literature on school-level collaboration cannot be isolated from what occurs at the union and district-leadership levels, as the latter dictates what constituents at this level do. This level of collaboration aligns with second-order change (Burke, 2014), where the change in a subsystem is dependent on an initial change focus at the broader level (first-order change).

Even though the literature on collaboration at this level is sparse, there is some evidence
that administrators and union leaders working together produce positive outcomes. Coddett (2014) examined the role of building-level union leaders in collaborating with principals to affect much-needed reform and student achievement. Purposeful sampling was used to conduct interviews and to administer questionnaires, as well as to review school district report cards of six building-level union representatives working in elementary, middle, and high schools in the New York State metropolitan area. The results demonstrated that the union leader’s role at the local school level was limited. Although teachers were included in school committees, served as mentors, and assumed other leadership roles, their roles did not amount to a full or equal partnership. Codett noted that administrators viewed the building representative more as an advocate for teachers in conflict situations with the administration and as an enforcer of the contract.

More collaborative relationships were conspicuously evident at the local school level in ABCUSD where principals and union building representatives met weekly on collaborative leadership teams “to discuss school issues, solve problems, and engage in site-based decision-making including textbook adoption, school schedules, and the hiring process for each school” (Rubinstein et al., 2011, p. 7). As in other collaborative initiatives, the AFT’s role made a difference through the AFT Innovation Fund, which went a long way to help with organizational learning. Site-based administrators and union leaders were trained on specific projects to enhance teaching quality and student performance. The NEA and the Gates Foundation supported school-level collaborative efforts by providing $550,000 in 2012 for ongoing efforts and professional development (Anrig, 2014). Institutionalized union and management collaboration between administrators and teachers around teaching and learning and other measures fostered school improvement efforts (Rubinstein, 2014).
Collaboration at the local-school level also emphasized the role of teachers working together to realize positive student outcomes. Such collaboration not only empowered teachers (Coddett, 2014), but also guaranteed less variability in what they taught (Anrig, 2014). Under such arrangements, student performance on the state test in Union City, New Jersey increased as a result of teachers working together (Kirp, 2014). Kirp described the culture of the school as a close relationship between the principal and teachers, among teachers, and between the school and families.

In spite of the positivity around such collaboration at the local-school level, some unions have remained skeptical of the assignment of more leadership responsibilities to their members, arguing that the focus on members’ interests might erode such collaboration (Wells, 2012). In a survey distributed to forty superintendents attending a national conference in 2009, the researcher sought to obtain the superintendents’ perceptions of teacher leadership in their school districts. Wells (2012) used descriptive statistics to reveal that superintendents were more willing to develop teacher leaders, but they believed that the unions acted as obstructionists to such role-sharing.

**Community Engagement**

Public schools in the United States are tax-payer funded, and it would be unfair for any meaningful reform to take place without the involvement of parents (Weingarten, 2011). The active roles on boards of education demonstrate the influence that parents and the community at-large wield in public schools (Rubinstein et al., 2011). In recent years, both teachers’ unions and school districts have solicited collaborative relationships far beyond just membership on school boards (Rubinstein et al., 2011).

Teachers’ unions have formed alliances with parents to promote their agendas, but that
has mostly been done by placing student welfare at the forefront (Rubinstein et al., 2011; Sustar, 2013). Sustar (2013) explained that the CTU strike of 2012 was partly successful because the union engaged parents by advocating for the non-closure of their neighborhood schools. In fact, Brogan (2016) in a review essay noted that the 2012 CTU strike was an attempt by a group of union activists to build capacity with the community using social-justice unionism to fight corporate power and austerity policies in education. In some cases, unions have used their political capital to help elect school board members who were union-friendly. An example of where the union used political capital was in Plattsburgh Public School District, New York, (Sustar, 2013) and ABCUSD, where the union influenced school board elections by backing members who were more supportive and sympathetic to their causes (Rubinstein, 2014).

Collaboration between unions and parents in several school districts focused on student achievement (Rubinstein et al., 2011). AFT president Randi Weingarten, in an *Education Review* commentary underscored the importance of all stakeholders, from students, to teachers, to parents, and politicians in determining what happens in public schools (Weingarten, 2011). Rubinstein et al. (2011) investigated such collaboration in a study of multiple school districts. In Norfolk, Virginia, parents and community leaders were involved in the development of a Comprehensive Accountability Plan for each school, while in Toledo, Ohio, the public school district partnered with the University of Toledo to help align curricula and instructional materials used by the university with the district’s specific needs. The Toledo Technology Academy received support from local businesses to provide internships and mentoring to students. In Evansville, Indiana, Malin (2014) determined that the union-management partnership led to the development of two initiatives, one of which was known as Equity Schools, which put parents and teachers together to improve student performance.
Similar to the community involvement in Toledo, the Cincinnati School District collaborated with community service providers to accord students academic, medical, and social-emotional help outside of the classroom. Local social service providers were brought in to offer students medical, dental, and vision care; tutoring and mentoring support; and, sports and arts programs through community learning centers (Anrig, 2014). These benefits to students and their families were only possible because of the trusting relationships that existed between school administrators and the teachers’ union in bringing in these outside support organizations.

Conclusion

The literature on labor-management collaboration in public schools demonstrated that teachers’ unions were capable of being part of education reform initiatives rather than focusing on their traditional economic items. Additionally, no matter the level of collaboration, the end goal was always about positive student outcomes. The involvement of teachers’ unions in reform initiatives was consistent with the organizational change theory and the evolution of organizations, which in many cases was prompted by a crisis or other conditions. The collaborative partnerships also supported the open-system theory of organizations where the organizations are open because of their continual interaction with the environment in which they reside (Burke, 2014). The overarching goal of each level of collaboration was student achievement, which served as an impetus for unlikely partnerships to develop.

There was, however, a gap in the literature in determining whether collaboration failed to produce positive outcomes. Nevertheless, a qualitative doctoral dissertation by Qazilbash (2009), which examined the implementation of PAR in seven school districts, identified two that had dissenting views on the role of principals on the PAR panel. In Toledo, Ohio, for example, the president of the teachers’ union believed that including the position of a principal on the PAR
panel would compromise the integrity of the program. That feeling was echoed by some teachers’ union members in Rochester, New York, who held that the presence of principals on PAR had the potential of bringing back industrial-model unionism characterized by adversarial relationships, especially when involving a decision about a teachers’ employment. That notwithstanding, there was no evidence of negative outcomes as a result of the disagreement; neither was there any evidence that collaboration between those two school districts and their teachers’ unions failed to yield the anticipated outcomes. Rather, Montgomery County, Maryland’s PAR panel was made up of only principals on the management side and was one of the districts where the program’s implementation yielded positive outcomes (Qazilbash, 2009; Sullivan, 2012).
III. METHODOLOGY

General Perspective

The purpose of this case study was to examine how a teachers’ union in the mid-Atlantic region used collaboration with the school district and other stakeholders to foster a change in its organizational culture. Relations between the teachers’ union and the school district were traditionally adversarial, a pattern typical of similar labor unions in the United States. Disagreements often arose over compensation and the working conditions of members. The advent of education reform and the accompanying accountability ushered in a new era in the approach taken by the teachers’ union. The latter sought to regain its credibility through a change in its organizational culture by actively seeking to collaborate with the school district and to foster alliances with parents, the community, and policymakers.

The qualitative approach guided this study. Specifically, case study research was the most appropriate method used to examine the way the union used collaboration to foster a change in its earlier culture of dissension. This qualitative method was useful in obtaining the perceptions of the central office and local school administrators of the school system, as well as those of leaders of the teachers’ union at the organizational and local-school levels with documented success in their union roles.

Research Context

The study took place in an urban school district in the mid-Atlantic region and focused on its teachers’ union. The teachers’ union represents about 5,000 teachers, service providers, and paraprofessionals in the district’s 115 schools. At the time of the study, even though all teachers had a right to union representation, some schools did not have elected union structures.
Two categories of membership were available to teachers: full dues-paying members and agency fees-paying members. The level of membership determined what level of benefits the members received, especially in holding leadership roles and becoming involved in other key decisions. The union was very active and exerted much influence on both the education and labor communities. Ongoing union activities included professional development, support to members at each school through field representatives, participation in local and regional labor activities, endorsement of local candidates for office, monthly membership meetings, and annual conferences.

In addition to these activities, the union regularly interacted with the school district through the collective-bargaining process, the grievance and arbitration process, and on committees that represented both. The leadership team of the union contained a president, a general vice president, six vice presidents representing different schools, a treasurer, a recording secretary, and board members elected to serve a three-year term. The leadership team at the local school level was made up of the building representative and the alternate, a School Chapter Advisory Committee (SCAC), a personnel committee, a Local School Advisory Team (LSAT), and representative assembly delegates.

**Research Design**

The qualitative case study approach was the most appropriate method for this study, given the ability of the researcher to be immersed in a natural setting where behaviors were easily observable and participants were easily accessible (Creswell, 2013). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) explained that the qualitative researcher studied things in “their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3).
Personal interviews, interaction, and observation were used in this study to provide more meaning and context to the case under investigation.

Creswell (2013) explains five different approaches to qualitative research. These five approaches include narrative research, phenomenological research, grounded theory research, ethnographic research, and case study research. Each of these approaches has its defining characteristics and challenges that present an opportunity for the researcher to pursue one that best suits the needs of the investigated phenomenon. Narrative research focuses on exploring the life of a single individual or a small number of individuals and presents a layer of challenges that involves collecting extensive information about the individual or individuals studied. Phenomenological research focuses on the common meaning of the lived experiences of several individuals. Finding individuals who have lived these common experiences can present a barrier to researchers. Grounded theory research concerns generating a theory that is grounded in data from the field. Determining when the theory is saturated or sufficiently detailed poses a level of difficulty to researchers who use this approach. Ethnographic research requires total immersion in a setting that exposes the researcher to the beliefs, norms, values, and mores of a group. The researcher needs an extensive amount of time for data collection in this type of approach, given the extent to which the researcher needs to infiltrate the socio-cultural field of the study.

Case study research focuses on a unit of study known as a bounded system (Gay et al. 2012). Theory development is a critical element to the design of this qualitative approach. In this case study, the bounded system was an organization (the teachers’ union) framed on the open systems theory of organizations and evolutionary change theory. As Yin (2009) recommends, considering statistical generalizations in case study research is flawed, given that the case or cases are too small to adequately represent a larger population.
Consequently, different methods of data collection other than surveys remain the most appropriate for this approach.

Yin (2009) defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in-depth and within its real-world context” (p. 16). Creswell (2013) reiterates the fact that in this qualitative approach:

The investigator explores a real-life contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes. (p. 97)

This study involved an investigation of the collaboration between two organizations, and that between the constituents affiliated with each of the organizations. The nature of the study called for data collection that involved participant observation, interviews, a focus group discussion, and review of published and unpublished sources of data. These data collection approaches were essential to guaranteeing an in-depth understanding of the case, as Creswell (2013) espouses.

Since the goal was to explore and gain an insight into the case under study, especially in understanding the change in culture, the researcher selected participants through purposive sampling. The benefit of this approach to sampling, as Gay et al. (2012) contend, is “the purposeful selection of cases that are ‘information-rich’ or those from which the researcher can learn a great deal about the research problem” (pp. 448-449). The researcher strategically selected the participants in this study due to the wealth of information they possessed, as well as the experience they had dealing with the case under investigation. Some of the participants on the school district side were former union leaders and brought dual perspectives
in dealing with the case.

At the start of the study, to obtain a vivid background of how the teachers’ union and the school district have co-existed, the researcher collected and reviewed published and unpublished data on the relationships between the two organizations. The data reviewed included collective bargaining agreements (CBA) between the school district and the teachers’ union from 1968 to 2016, articles from local newspapers, memoranda of understanding (MoU), legislative ordinances, conference agendas, meeting notes, and press releases and email communications. After this, there was a focus group discussion of three teachers and one-on-one interviews with school administrators and teachers, union leaders, and school-district leaders. The following exploratory questions shaped the way in which the study was conducted, especially in the formulation of one-on-one interviews and the focus-group discussion:

- How does union-management collaboration influence district policies?
- How is collaboration beneficial to collective bargaining negotiations?
- What is the influence of collaboration on school improvement, teacher satisfaction and retention, and student academic achievement?

**Role of the Researcher**

The researcher is an active certified teacher in one of the middle schools in the school district. He is also a member of the teachers’ union where he serves on the elected board as a member-at-large for middle schools. During some of the data-collection process, the researcher was a participant-observer due to his active role on the union’s executive board. These direct relationships with both entities facilitated participant recruitment and provided more perspective to the case under investigation. The act of recruiting an almost equal number of participants from both organizations reduced researcher bias to a minimum. The researcher adhered to all
ethical considerations to prevent any practices that could jeopardize the integrity of the study.

**Research Participants**

Participants for the study were selected using a purposive sample. These participants were not recruited because of their affiliations to any schools, but rather because of their knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation. Teacher participants were either building representatives, members of School Chapter Advisory Committees (SCAC), or union teacher leaders with a wealth of knowledge on the functioning of the union and the school district. Participants were screened ahead of time to ascertain their willingness to participate in the study and to ensure that they were knowledgeable about the issues under investigation. For some participants, informal interviews were conducted to determine their willingness to participate in the study and to obtain a full commitment to their participation.

Participants were either recruited in person, via email, or through another participant, otherwise known as snowball samples (Gay et al., 2012). An opportunistic sample that was appropriate for the study emerged during the data-collection process, and the researcher directly recruited them during a conference where the researcher was a participant.

As Creswell (2013) suggests, a study of this nature requires the researcher to find the following as participants: “…one or more individuals to study, individuals who are accessible, willing to provide information, and distinctive for their accomplishments and ordinariness, or who shed light on a specific phenomenon or issue being explored” (p.147). The key subjects who fit this description and who possessed the richest information for the study were at the leadership level of the teachers’ union and the school district. The researcher conducted interviews with participants who responded to the three research questions and provided their perceptions of collaboration between the two organizations and the potential outcome of such
collaboration. The researcher recorded interviews using a digital recording device and saved them on a password-protected computer accessible only to the researcher for later transcription.

Creswell’s (2013) sample was used to design an interview protocol with open-ended questions. The researcher also conducted observations in settings where the members of the leadership teams of both organizations were participants to determine if there were items of common interest that could foster a partnership between the two. Other observations included collaborative sessions between the teachers’ union with other community stakeholders. While the researcher was an observer in such sessions, he was a participant-observer in some cases based on his role as an elected member of the executive board of the union.

A focus group discussion was conducted with teachers to understand their perceptions of union-district collaboration regarding school improvement, teacher satisfaction and retention, and student achievement. These participants were individuals who had a reputation for their leadership both at the organization and school levels and possessed a wealth of information that was beneficial to the study. They were chosen from the senior ranks of the union and local schools and represented teachers from the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Some of these teachers served in multiple leadership capacities at the local school and the union-leadership levels. The focus group held one session in the conference room of the teachers’ union office that was conveniently accessible to the researcher and the participants. One participant called in by phone due to logistical problems on the day of the meeting. The focus group session was recorded with a digital recording device and saved on a password-protected computer accessible only to the researcher.

Finally, one-on-one interviews were conducted with school administrators at the elementary, middle, and high schools to obtain their perspectives on school-level collaboration.
and to triangulate the data from the previous interviews and the focus group discussion. The first administrator was a direct recruit by the researcher, the second one came from a snowball sample, and the third one was the result of an opportunistic sample. Table I shows the participant interview list.

Table 1

*Participant Interview List*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Participant</th>
<th>Years Employed</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus group (Teachers 1, 2, &amp; 3)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 5</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>School Administrator 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Administrator 3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Leader 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Union Leader 2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Leader 1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Leader 2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ethical Considerations**

Research involving human subjects requires specific ethical considerations. Qualitative research lends itself to interactions with human subjects in their natural setting (Creswell, 2013). At the start of the study, the principal investigator and the researcher applied for approval to
conduct research involving human subjects through the Southeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB ensured that the research posed no risk to human subjects beyond those associated with daily life. The Board also guaranteed the privacy and confidentiality of subjects and the appropriate storage of data. Further, the researcher guaranteed the IRB that he would use informed consent in conducting the study. He stored all recorded interviews on a password-protected audio device, and then he transferred them onto a computer accessible only to him. The researcher later transcribed the interviews and stored the transcripts on the same password-protected computer from where he later analyzed them.

At the start of all one-on-one interviews and the focus group discussion, the researcher explained the study to participants, explained their rights during participation, and obtained their consent (see Appendix H) both for participation and recording. Throughout the data-collection process, the researcher put no participant in an undesirable position nor did he breach any terms of confidentiality.

**Data Collection**

To acquire an in-depth understanding of the case, the researcher collected multiple forms of qualitative data to demonstrate different perspectives. In case study research, the researcher derives evidence from multiple sources. Each source is associated with various forms of evidence (Yin, 2009). To derive findings that were truly representative of the case or cases investigated, these sources of evidence included documentation, archival records, participant interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. At the start of the study, the following documents were reviewed and analyzed for relevance to the study: collective bargaining agreements between the school district and the teachers’ union from 1968 to 2016, email communication between the leadership of the teachers’ union and the school
district, MoUs, newspaper articles, and archived interviews and news reports from local radio stations and newspapers. These documents and archival data were used to corroborate data obtained from other sources.

Observations were a key part of the data-collection process. The researcher conducted direct observations of collaborative initiatives between the union and the school district, community advocacy organizations, and among its members. Direct observations of SCAC meetings were also instrumental in understanding relations between school administrations and the union at the local school level. An observational protocol (see Appendix I) was used to take field notes during all observations. In some cases, the opportunity to be a participant-observer provided unique access to information that was relevant to the study. The participant-observer role stemmed from the fact that the researcher is an elected member of the union’s executive board and as such took part in monthly executive-board meetings, conferences, and other stakeholder committees. In spite of the participant-observer role, the researcher remained unbiased and uncompromised.

The researcher collected most of the data through direct interviews with participants. Yin (2009) considers interviews as the most important source of evidence in case study research. An interview protocol was developed during the design phase of the study and used for all interviews. The researcher exclusively conducted these interviews using an audio recording device. Overall, one focus group discussion with three building representatives took place as well as three interviews with teacher leaders, two interviews with senior union leaders, three interviews with local school leaders, and two interviews with school district leaders.

Data Analysis

Multiple sources of data were utilized to obtain diverse perspectives on the case under
investigation. The study spanned four months (one semester) and took place at multiple sites. The data collected included document reviews, site observations, interviews, and a focus group. The researcher transcribed all recorded interviews and saved them onto a password-protected computer accessible only to the researcher. To guarantee the validity and accuracy of the interviews, interviewees received interview transcriptions (See Appendices J to T) for verification and approval.

Creswell’s (2013) Data Analysis Spiral (a process of moving in analytic circles) formed the basis of the data organization and analysis. All collected data, field observations, interviews, and documents were organized into computer files, coded, and classified by theme before interpretation. The codes determined the number of themes that the researcher used in the discussion of the case.

**Summary**

A comparison of the five different qualitative methods provided a rationale as to why case study research was the most suitable for this study. The theoretical framework of the study determined the design, the data collection, and the data analysis methods used. Qualitative methods were used instead of quantitative methods because of the inability to statistically generalize the findings given that the case was not robust enough to adequately represent a larger population. The explanation of the research context, the researcher’s role, and an explanation of the ethical considerations adhered to, together with the description of the participants, shed light on the validity of the research study.
IV. RESULTS

Overview of results

For over three decades, the teachers’ union in this study has been at loggerheads with the school district over compensation, teachers’ due process rights, and consultation in decision-making. In 1972, the union had its first-ever strike over the lack of funding and personnel (Shaffer, 2011). The antagonism was exacerbated in 2007 when city residents voted to transfer the operations of the school system from an elected school board to the mayor with city council oversight. The introduction of a performance-based teacher evaluation system by the mayor’s appointed chancellor led to the dismissal of many ineffective teachers, many of whom were older and tenured. Since 2013, the union changed its approach in dealing with the issues that its members faced by being more progressive and solutions-driven.

This study sought to explore how the teachers’ union used collaboration with the school district and other stakeholders to foster change in its organizational culture. Over the course of one semester, the researcher reviewed collective bargaining agreements (CBA) spanning four decades; observed members of the union in collaborative settings with the management of the school district, education advocacy groups, policymakers, and parents; and interviewed participants with diverse perspectives of the collaboration that existed among the stakeholders.

The researcher based the findings in the study on interviews conducted with participants who possessed in-depth knowledge of the two organizations and have been involved in past
collaborative initiatives. The interviews were equally distributed to ensure unbiased perspectives on both the union and management sides. Overall, the researcher interviewed thirteen participants, three in a focus group and others individually as follows: three teachers from elementary, middle, and high schools; three school leaders from similar types of schools; two members of the leadership team of the union; and two members of the leadership team of the school district.

Three research questions formed the base of the study:

- How does union-management collaboration influence district policies?
- How is collaboration beneficial to collective bargaining negotiations?
- What is the influence of collaboration on school improvement, teacher satisfaction and retention, and student academic achievement?

The interview questions were designed to provide supporting information to the three items above and included inquiries about teacher voice at the district and school levels, joint training, relationships, anticipated outcomes of collaboration, and future areas of collaboration.

A coding system for all the participants’ interview transcripts, field notes, and document reviews informed the analysis of the data. After reading and coding the various data, the researcher identified common themes, patterns, and insights relevant to answering the main research questions based on the design of the study.

**Methods**

Data for this study were collected using three primary sources: document reviews, observations, and interviews. At the start of the study, the researcher approached the teachers’ union and obtained CBA between the teachers’ union and the school district from 1968 to 2016. The researcher reviewed these agreements, archived interviews, newspaper articles, press
conferences, and memoranda of understanding (MoUs) and the relevant themes derived from them. These themes concerned the study’s research questions and overall purpose.

Field observations were also instrumental in obtaining valuable and relevant data for the study. Members of the teachers’ union participated in several collaborative settings with the school district and other education advocacy partners. The first joint event was the debriefing session of a summer institute called the Public Education Leadership Project (PELP) that the leadership team of the union attended with the school district’s leadership team. The researcher attended the debriefing session as a participant on the invitation of the union president.

The second collaborative was an initiative of the teachers’ union called the Early Childhood Education Collaborative (ECEC), whose aim was to seek a partnership with the school district in improving the quality of early childhood education in the district.

The third collaborative was one that involved the union and community organizations that aimed to work toward improving math literacy for minority students in the school district. Although the school district was not officially represented at the meeting, the union president stated that the chancellor had been involved in previous talks and endorsed the idea.

Fourth, the union invited a member of the chancellor’s management team, teacher leaders, a parent, and a member of the State Board of Education to the Center for School Improvement (CSI) Institute in New York, where the researcher was a participant and took field notes. Finally, another opportunity to observe the union in a collaborative setting was a meeting between a local education advocacy group to discuss attendance and grading with the union. The researcher recorded observation notes on an observational-protocol form.

The researcher scheduled interviews with the various participants upon approval of the application to conduct research by the Southeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB).
The researcher scheduled a focus-group discussion in the conference room of the teachers’ union for three teacher leaders (building representatives). One of the participants could not be physically present but communicated by phone for the entirety of the interview.

The participants signed adult consent forms before the group discussion. The researcher interviewed two members of the leadership team of the teachers’ union during separate occasions in the same conference room, two teachers in their classrooms after school, and one teacher in a coffee shop. He designed the interview questions for this group of participants to obtain their perspectives on collaboration with the school district at the district and local school levels. On the district side, he interviewed three principals and two members of the district leadership team to obtain their perceptions of collaboration with the teachers’ union. Their perceptions were important in triangulating the responses of the union member participants as well as the information obtained from documents and archives reviewed at the beginning of the study. Table 2 shows the demographics of the participants.

All interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder and later transferred onto a password-protected computer accessible only by the researcher. After transcription, the researcher deleted the audio files from the computer. He sent the transcripts of the interviews to the interviewees for verification of their accuracy. Due to extenuating circumstances, one of the participants (Teacher 1) in the focus group could not verify the information contained in that segment of the interview.

After reviewing all the documents and archives, as well as the manual transcription of all the interviews, the researcher organized all the data by themes and categories. First, he summarized the field notes and organized them into computer files. Secondly, he extracted relevant data from the documents reviewed and classified into categories.
Table 2

**Demographics of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1</td>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>Building representative and teacher trainer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2</td>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>Building representative and teacher trainer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 3</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>Building representative and executive board member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 4</td>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>Building representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 5</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Building representative and executive board member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 6</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>School Chapter Advisory Committee member and executive board member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Administrator 1</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Administrator 2</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Administrator 3</td>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Leader 1</td>
<td>Union Headquarters</td>
<td>Senior official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Leader 2</td>
<td>Union Headquarters</td>
<td>Senior manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Leader 1</td>
<td>District Headquarters</td>
<td>Senior official</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Leader 2</td>
<td>District Headquarters</td>
<td>Senior official</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, the researcher reviewed the interview transcripts multiple times to identify recurring themes and codes. He used Creswell’s (2013) data analysis spiral (p. 183) as a model for analyzing the data. He later aggregated the data from the three sources of evidence and consolidated it into more manageable data once he began the analysis process. He filed patterns that emerged from the various participants and sources under the same themes, color-coded
them, and used this information in reporting the findings.

**Findings**

The researcher derived the findings in this section from three primary sources of evidence: document reviews, observations, and participant interviews. A review of CBA between the teachers’ union and the school district from 1968 and 2016 generated several themes and patterns that later emerged from the participants’ interviews. The interviews thus helped to corroborate some of the evidence that emerged both from these agreements and other archival records. The observations also helped to validate some of the claims that emerged from interviews. All the participants were able to answer the three research questions that guided the entire study. The following themes emerged after a careful and a detailed analysis of the three sources of evidence: teacher voice, collective bargaining, student outcomes, school improvement and teacher retention, teacher quality, collaborative partnerships, relationships, and social justice.

**Teacher Voice**

The researcher noted the association of teacher voice with decision-making and consultation at the local school and district levels, as well as with the influence on district policies. The emergence of this theme was important in answering Research Question 1-How does union-management collaboration influence district policies? The four categories of participants in this study included union members (teachers), union leaders, school leaders, and district leaders. All three school administrators interviewed were at different levels in terms of involving union members in decision-making.

School Administrator 1 admitted that teacher voice was important in making decisions at her school, but when asked how union-management collaboration influenced policies at her school, she responded, “I read the contract; I don’t want to violate the contract. I’m aware of the
contract. Outside of that, I make decisions that I think are best for teachers and students within the building.” She did, however, refer to a discussion with the building union representative on the use of paper as an example of collaboration, but she was also planning on seeking the opinion and support of the School Chapter Advisory Committee (SCAC) on other issues once they started meeting.

School Administrator 2 argued that she always invited the building representative to look at what she was doing, share with constituents, and provide feedback on what others might think once the program was introduced. In her opinion, such an approach served the best interest of the school and reduced the number of grievances that teachers filed against her.

School Administrator 3 acknowledged that the union members at her school influenced decision-making and that together they collaborated to influence what happened at the district level.

Whenever I have a decision that I want to make about the school, I involve the members of the union, my SCAC, and LSAT to give input so that we could determine what’s in the best interest of the school. Even though we know that principals usually have the final say in decision-making, I use a collaborative approach where we come together to decide what’s in the best interest given the parameters that we may have at the district level. She added that if the teachers were part of the decision-making process from the beginning to the middle and the end, including reflection and reevaluation, there would be more buy-in.

The involvement in decision-making was different from the perspectives of the various union members interviewed. In the focus-group discussion, teachers expressed frustration that they were usually left out of the decision-making process at their respective schools. Common statements from participants were as follows: “She chooses who she wants to do things and work
with her at the pre-decision phase,” “No one consults the personnel committee prior to hiring new staff,” “my job is to react to something that has been put in place,” “I really struggle to think of an example where we are consulted prior to a school-wide initiative,” or “I think there is a lot of talk and then sort of a decision that is made unilaterally.”

At the district level, one of the leaders asserted that teacher voice was important to the work that they did. District Leader 2 cited local school committees like the SCAC, LSAT, and the chancellor’s cabinet as structures where administrators should hear the teacher voice. He indicated that leadership tried to hear the ideas that emerged through the various opportunities for collaboration, be it from the teachers’ union, other unions, parents, or student groups. According to him, his job was to use ideas that he heard from teachers and from various groups to improve. He stated that he had directed school leaders to involve teachers in whatever they were doing. The district leader felt confident about the input of the union in policies enacted at the district level, stating that when schools implemented programs, having the teachers feel that their ideas were incorporated was important. He said, “They can see how the input provided was respected. The ability to have your opinion reflected in some of the decisions, that makes sense.”

On the union side, one of the leaders underscored the importance of collaboration with the teachers’ union and teachers before administrators made decisions. Union Leader 1 spoke extensively about the influence of collaboration on district policies. Notably, she identified the structures that were responsible for education policy in the district such as the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), the City Council, and the mayor’s office. She underscored the importance of labor-management partnerships as fundamental to how policymakers perceived both organizations. The following quote provides one example of how collaboration
influenced policy:

For example, right now, the city law that says school nurses can have 20 hours per week; we partnered with the school district and with labor unions that we should have nurses 40 hours a week. And then we added parent groups to that partnership. Suddenly, the petition that we sent out to all these groups compiled, shook the council to say, ‘‘That’s a lot of people.’’ Parents, teachers, the school district, principals that sent the petition, insisted that it was not healthy for us not to have a nurse at a school. So, the council passed the legislation. (Union Leader 1)

Union Leader 1 also referred to the suggestion to school district leadership about the need to collaborate on incorporating a new math curriculum called the Algebra Project as a way of addressing the achievement gap in math literacy. Another district-wide policy decision that she believed the union and school district leadership agreed upon was the weight given to testing under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Her justification for this level of collaboration was that her counterpart at the district believed that, with the weight given to testing under ESSA, some schools could be labeled as failures. Consequently, such schools could be converted to charters, something that both abhorred. As supporters of public schools of right, both leaders could work collaboratively while finding other ways to address areas of disagreement.

**Collective Bargaining**

The second research question asked participants how collaboration was beneficial to collective bargaining negotiations. This question was only included in the interview protocols of the union and school district leaders. Union Leader 1 told the researcher that she wished that
during their previous collective bargaining negotiations both parties started out by agreeing on what was in the contract that was best for schools. Collaboration would have meant that the teachers’ union and the school district started by setting ground rules that paved the way for interest-based bargaining. She intimated that collaboration was a necessary component of the collective bargaining process. She stated that:

> Collaboration basically would have had both parties in the room at every meeting, starting out by agreeing on what we want in this contract that’s best for schools. It would have been so much easier to negotiate terms and conditions for teachers and students if both parties agreed to that. Teachers would have been talking; I can imagine teachers talking about learning conditions, understanding that that meant that they automatically would have had good teaching conditions. And management sitting on the other side saying, “I can see how that would help our schools.” It would have been a piece of cake.

(District Leader 2)

The leader of the school district agreed that collaboration facilitated the collective bargaining process, especially as he came into it as a new chancellor. His approach, he said, was to meet with union leadership on a regular basis and to agree on having a “win-win” outcome. He also insisted that it was in the best interest of the school district to have agreements with teachers regarding the contract. Collaborating to reach agreement on a new contract, in his opinion, was another way of respecting teachers. For him, agreeing with teachers in contract negotiations, especially on pay, was essential. He reiterated:

> We are improving as a school district. The people who are helping drive that improvement spend a lot of time in classrooms with kids, and so it can be both ways. It can’t be that we have improvements, but we can’t have a deal done in five years. If we
have improvements, we need those people in classrooms so that we are great. We have
the next five years, and we need to do even more. I can’t have them thinking that we’re
asking them to lose. (District Leader 2)

Both parties agreed on the fact that collaborating on the collective bargaining
negotiations was of critical importance, especially focusing on student outcomes. The union
official added that collaboration bred understanding on both sides, understanding that they both
were working toward the same goal, which was student achievement. The school district official
echoed the same thought when he acknowledged that teachers were responsible for the growth
that the district had witnessed in the classroom, and it was imperative that the school district
reached an agreement with them.

**Student Outcomes**

Throughout all the interviews, student achievement emerged as the recurrent outcome of
collaboration. Research Question 3 sought to investigate the influence of collaboration on school
improvement, teacher satisfaction and retention, and student achievement. This theme validated
the language obtained from the reviewed CBAs. In the 1968 agreement, the parties agreed to
work collaboratively to improve educational outcomes for students. In all the documents
reviewed, the reasons advanced for wanting to work together included academic achievement;
well-articulated programs of instruction; and shared commitment, responsibility, and
accountability for student achievement. The language in the agreements called for open
communication, trust, respect, collaboration, and shared decision-making. However, Article
2.2.4 of the 2016-2019 CBA stipulated that “the school district and the teachers’ union agree that
matters dealing with quality education decisions are the school district’s responsibility”
(Collective Bargaining Agreement, 2016, p. 14) even though it went further to state that teachers
must be allowed in the various stages of curriculum development.

Although the language in the CBA called for collaboration in determining student outcomes, the responses from the teacher interviews suggested that the school district unilaterally imposed a curriculum on teachers without their input. Despite the acknowledgment by the three-teacher focus group that student achievement was a shared common vision with their administrative teams, they believed that the administrators did not provide opportunities to collaborate. The teachers felt the need and urgency to improve student outcomes at their respective schools but complained that the lack of collaboration impeded their abilities to attain their goals.

One of the participants did, however, mention that her school was making gains in student test scores due to collaboration but cautioned that it was not enough and more needed to be done. One teacher shared that “we care about our students, but the lack of collaboration is impacting student achievement. If they work together and truly collaborate, it would produce proficient students.” Teacher 1 intimated that she wanted to work together with the administrative team to improve student achievement. Teacher 2 lamented that her attempt to collaborate with the school administration “turned into a battle instead of true collaboration.” These feelings were different at another elementary school, where the participant felt satisfied with the level of collaboration between the union and the school administration regarding student outcomes. In his view:

When we talk about student needs, there is a lot of shared vision. We both want that students are happy and working hard and are being challenged. We agree on what students need, we agree on teaching the whole child, we agree on a rigorous curriculum. Student achievement is consistently collaborative.
From his perspective, the high student achievement in his building could partly be attributed to the collaborative relationships that existed between the school leadership team and the local union leadership team.

The opinions expressed by teacher leaders at the local school level were echoed by principals, who were asked to speak on areas where they shared a common vision with the union. One school administrator mentioned in her response that “I hope my vision is that which works for kids and teachers to promote teaching and learning. It seems like that is also the union’s vision.” She further indicated that she made decisions that were best for teachers and students within the building. That response did not make any mention of working with the teachers’ union at the school to achieve those learning goals that she had stated in her first response. School Administrator 3 reiterated the importance of increased student achievement. She added that collaboration was responsible for student achievement at her school, especially given that the school made double-digit gains in reading and math, as well as closed the achievement gap between special and general education students. She suggested that there be “a partnership between the teachers’ union and management to ensure that we do what is in the best interest of children and maximize student potentials.”

The sentiments of teachers and school administrators about student outcomes were the same during the field observations. At one session that was organized by the school district and attended by union leadership and members, everyone concurred that there was an achievement gap between African-American students and their White counterparts, and they further agreed that the district had not adequately addressed the social-emotional needs of all children in the school system. The meeting attendees agreed to establish a shared understanding with all stakeholders around social-emotional learning competencies in the curriculum and build a
culture around it. The union leadership again reiterated the collaboration between the union and the school district at another observation centered on early-childhood education and social-emotional learning.

At an observation of a three-hour-planning meeting, discussion ensued on the union’s forthcoming annual shared-vision conference on math literacy for all students in the school district. Participants at the meeting included community organizations, teachers, civil rights leaders, and parents. Even though the union leader decried that the union had never been on the same page with the school district, she was satisfied that the school district was collaborating on the initiative.

At the AFT-sponsored Center for School Improvement (CSI) institute, the union invited all stakeholders from the school district to participate in a discussion on student achievement. Stakeholders worked collaboratively to disaggregate data on social-emotional learning, student suspensions, and the achievement gap. At the end of the three-day institute, participants from the school district agreed on the importance of working together to improve student outcomes. A four-step action plan resulted from the joint commitment that the group had developed at the end of the conference.

Interviews with the hierarchy of the union and the school district revealed the same goals for student achievement. Union Leader 1 commented that teachers could not rely on others who are outside of our classrooms and schools to decide what works best for kids, and we’ve got to agree that all children, irrespective of their race, class, and gender, should have access to the best quality public education possible. That has always been my mission as a teacher that all students are capable of learning. Another senior district official agreed with the union regarding prioritizing student outcomes.
She said,

Students are at the center of the work that we do. That’s the strongest area where I’m in agreement with the teachers’ union...When teachers feel like it’s an “us versus them” mentality, that the principal is over there and we’re over here, and collaboration doesn’t exist, that’s where you find low student achievement.

District Leader 2 was more specific in describing the areas of collaboration that he would like to have with the union regarding raising student achievement. He identified closing achievement differences in the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), reducing and eliminating the large number of students scoring below grade level on state assessments, ensuring that students were performing well on the SAT and in Advanced Placement (AP) courses, making sure that more students were graduating with college credit and certifications, and making sure that “our kids are getting a great education from us working together.”

**School Improvement and Teacher Retention**

In the focus group discussion, Teacher 1 lamented that “The lack of collaboration is affecting teacher morale and school improvement.” That sentiment was repeated by Teacher 2 in the focus group discussion. Teacher 2 attributed her school falling short on school improvement to the lack of collaboration. Teacher 3 argued that there was no way of measuring the impact of collaboration on anything in her school due to the lack of such cooperation. She hoped that going to the principal collectively, as opposed to just her as the building representative, might put pressure on the school leader to be open to collaboration, which could probably improve their school culture. She added that the administrative team had difficulty retaining teachers because of school culture. Another teacher
agreed that the lack of collaboration was responsible for low teacher morale, which resulted in low student achievement.

In a one-on-one interview with Teacher 5, she made the case that teacher retention was a major issue at her school. She pointed out that

A lot of older teachers, a lot of seasoned teachers, have either left or have been pushed out. We have tried to have that discussion, but the administration, there really isn’t any expectation that that is happening, or…not looking for my input to retain teachers.

Teacher 5 described her building as toxic and sick, yet her principal was oblivious to it, and she feared collaboration with the union because she wanted to maintain a culture of oppression. The teacher hoped to collaborate with the administration in a way that the school could be a pleasant place for adults and students.

Teacher 6 told the researcher that collaboration made people go above and beyond to fulfill the needs of the school, making teachers want to stay at the school longer. She further explained that collaboration

Leads to greater retention, mainly because you can problem-solve before it becomes a problem, people getting burned out, getting upset, or getting in trouble. A lot of times administration forgets how much time something that sounds small and easy can take, and if they don’t talk to us first, maybe they don’t realize that something is putting a huge burden and stress on people, and that can cause people to look elsewhere. So, I think the more that everyone can work together to meet the goals and initiatives of the district and to work with our kids, then the better the school runs.

At the level of school leadership, the lack of collaboration was associated with unhappiness. As School Administrator 2 characterized it, “An unhappy teacher makes an unhappy student.”
strategy for retaining top-quality talent was to work collaboratively with the union. Whenever she heard that people were going to leave because they were unhappy with something, she consulted the union representative to make sure that the issue was resolved. In response to the same question on school improvement and teacher retention, School Administrator 3 contended that it was impossible to improve a school without collaborating with teachers. She expressed that thought in the following statement:

I believe that it’s impossible to improve a school without collaborating with teachers because teachers must have the buy-in, and as the leader of the building, you may not know what exactly teachers need, and if you don’t have their input, you may make the wrong decisions as it leads to improvement efforts. So, I do believe in collaborating with teachers. I think that that has an impact on just the high retention that I have in my school.

She said that because teachers felt ownership in the school and could identify with its successes, they were willing to work and retire from there. She further intimated that in addition to collaborating with the school administration to improve the school, some teachers felt a sense of belonging because they went to the same school and enrolled their children there.

A member of the union leadership team pondered the same questions and concluded that “naturally, if teachers are happy in their schools, they are going to stay; if they are not, they want to leave.” She mirrored the concept of first-order change espoused by Burke (2014) that, although change within a subsystem of an organization might have consequences for the larger system, unless related changes take place in other related parts of the total system, the initial change is short-lived. Consequently, collaboration would only be effective between local school leaders and teachers if the hierarchy of the union and management modeled the collaboration.
stressed that school climate was an important indicator of teacher retention and “when teachers feel respected and they are integral parts of the school community, they stay.”

This last thought was shared by the school leadership representative who posited that teachers stayed for as long as they felt ownership in the school and believed that the school belonged to them. Referring to school improvement, teacher satisfaction and retention, and student achievement, District Leader 2 was firm that “collaboration is big in all those things. Schools don’t improve absent all those things.” From his perspective, school improvement was a recipe for student achievement. In the following quote, one could understand that collaboration at the local school level was an expectation that was in the strategic plan that the school district was getting ready to implement:

We’re working on something right now that we’ll be able to roll out as part of our strategic plan...One of the things that I look at that will be a component of [the plan] is distributed leadership. I am referring to the degree to which in the schools there are structures where decisions are made collectively.

**Teacher Quality**

Teacher quality emerged as a theme from several participants in the study. A review of CBAs from 1968 to 2016 revealed that the school district and the teachers’ union agreed to collaborate on teacher quality to a limited extent. From 1968 to 1994, the parties could collaborate on teacher evaluation, but in the 1998 to 2001 CBA, U.S. Congress legislation limited the ability of the union to be involved with teacher evaluation. According to Article XVII (A), “U.S. Congress legislation determined that teacher evaluation shall henceforth be the sole responsibility of the school district” (Collective Bargaining Agreement, 1998, p. 17). The
union was, however, allowed to consult with the superintendent before the implementation of the evaluation instrument.

Despite the limitations on teacher evaluation, both parties expressed the desire to collaborate on professional development on past and current agreements. Both the school district and the teachers’ union agreed in their CBAs to a shared vision and philosophy on professional development. Article 2.3.1 of the current contract stipulates that

The school district and the teachers’ union agree that quality professional development for teachers is essential to promoting and sustaining high-quality teaching and learning in the classroom. The teachers’ union is successfully collaborating and partnering with the school district to provide innovative and rigorous professional development for all bargaining unit teachers to promote student achievement. (Collective Bargaining Agreement, 2016, p. 14)

They also agreed to collaborate on the instructional coach model.

Union participants expressed several areas of teacher quality in their interviews that were either directly related to professional development or involved direct collaboration with colleagues and school administrators. Teacher 3 in the focus group expressed the idea that the school administration was very supportive of her action research and was open to having her present the findings to the rest of the staff. She also cited a case in which another teacher benefitted from the new-teacher induction program. Union Leader 2 identified professional development as one of the areas in which the union and school district collaboration was effective. According to Union Leader 2, school administrators were very accommodating in allowing the union to use their buildings for professional development. She added that she always tried
to let them know that we would love to have courses in their school. If they find that
their teachers need support in any kind of way with professional development, we would
be willing to come in and offer professional development for their teachers.

School Administrator 2 validated this claim and acknowledged that she frequently
welcomed the union into her building to offer professional development courses. At another
school, Union Leader 2 shared that, in addition to using a building to offer classes for all the
teachers’ union members, one school administrator encouraged the union’s professional
development team to help with his teachers identified as “developing” under the teacher
evaluation system. Under the school district’s evaluation systems, a “developing” teacher is a
teacher who needs improvement in his/her practice. Furthermore, the union’s team of
professional development facilitators supported the teachers’ implementation of new knowledge
or skills acquired through the courses in their classrooms.

Providing support to developing teachers was repeated by District Leader 2 who
purported to have instructed one of the members of the management team to reach out to the
teachers’ union so that they could do more together, especially in supporting the developing
teachers. Other areas where he felt strongly about collaborating with the teachers’ union on
teacher quality were career advancement and leadership pipelines for teachers who stayed in the
classroom. His rationale for entering into such a partnership was to make the teachers better
educators and leaders.

The members of the teachers’ union leadership revealed that the union was leading other
professional-development initiatives and sought the district’s collaboration. Specifically, the
early-childhood collaborative sought to develop academically appropriate lessons, curriculum for
early childhood, and professional development for early-childhood educators. At the time of the
interviews, the union sought the district’s collaboration in sponsoring an early childhood year-round institute that was estimated to cost $80,000. The leaders also cited occasions when the district leadership collaborated with them to release their members to attend professional development at locations outside of the school district.

**Collaborative Partnerships**

The reference to collaborative partnerships was evident in Article 2.1 of the 2016-2019 CBA. Fully implementing the CBA was the purpose of the Full and Equal Partnership (FEP) committee and the fostering of an “effective labor-management relationship to facilitate collaboration and shared decision-making” (Collective Bargaining Agreement, 2016, p. 12). The article encouraged collaboration between the chancellor and the union president and between principals and building representatives. The memorandum of agreement established at the end of the 2016-2019 CBA set the District Collaborative: Supporting Teaching and Academic Reform (DC STAR) with the mission of all stakeholder collaboration, a collaborative decision-making panel around an extended school year, and the best form of schools for each community.

Some of the collaborative initiatives observed aligned with the structures established by the CBAs. For example, at one school, the SCAC was observed working on grading issues and other initiatives. During the meeting that was led by the building union representative, the members pledged to work together on the grading issue and were planning another meeting in the interim to deal with the same problem.

The researcher observed the management team, the leadership team of the union, teachers, principals, and a parent at a meeting at the district headquarters. The meeting was a debriefing of the PELP summer institute that the management team attended together with union leaders and school administrators. The collaborative initiative they addressed at the meeting
focused on the Social-Emotional and Academic Development (SEAD) framework that the
district was adopting to help with the social-emotional needs of students. Stakeholders at the
session committed to build a shared understanding of social-emotional learning competencies in
the schools’ curriculum.

The AFT-sponsored CSI institute at the United Federation of Teachers headquarters in
New York was an all-inclusive collaborative initiative. The participants from the school district
were invited by the teachers’ union and included four members of the union leadership team, a
member of the district management team, a parent, a member of the State Board of Education, a
school administrator, and one teacher. According to a senior union official, the institute was the
first joint initiative that all stakeholders attended. A member of the school district leadership
team referenced the conference in a one-on-one interview with the researcher, expressing
enthusiasm and optimism at the opportunities to collaborate with the union.

The participant interviews revealed several cases of collaborative initiatives that took
place between the union and local school administrators as well as with the district managers.
Participants in the focus group noted that their respective principals were not forthcoming
regarding working collaboratively, but in cases in which they worked together, the outcomes
were beneficial to the entire school community. Teacher 1 reported that as a result of her team
and the school administrative team working together on the master schedule, the school leader
wanted to collaborate more over the summer in preparation for the next school year. Teacher 2
expressed excitement at having worked with the leadership team on the transportation plan, the
school’s extended hours, and the Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts, and
Mathematics (STEAM) initiative for the school. Teacher 3 expressed frustration that the
absence of collaboration was a problem at her school. Although the union members on the
SCAC shared a list of what collaborative initiatives they wanted to undertake with the administrative team, none of them were implemented despite the latter’s acceptance to work together. The one training that Teacher 3 received with the school administration and parents was due to the district mandate that members of the LSAT be trained together regarding the school budget. She was, however, optimistic that the creation of a culture committee could potentially change the culture of the building.

Teacher 4 met with his principal on a regular basis, but the meetings did not betoken working together on common initiatives.

I am working really hard to drive us away from complaining about issues and then figuring out how to consult them, figuring out what to bring to the table, and that has been something that I’ve been working on to bring to administration.

Complaining about issues was a common expression of frustration that emanated from the building representatives interviewed. They deemed their roles to be reacting to unilateral decisions made by the school administration that were not favorable to their members, even though they would like to be consulted before such decisions were made.

Teacher 5 suggested that she had not worked together with her school’s “administrative team on anything.” For Teacher 6, the school leader “is open to people taking leadership roles if it doesn’t create more work for him.” When Teacher 6 completed the master schedule, it was done single-handedly with the administration’s approval.

The school leaders did not have much to share about what they did collectively with the union teams at their schools in the past. School Leader 1 said she was looking forward to collaborating on the use of paper and the master schedule for the next school year. She had very little to share because she was a new school leader, but she expressed the desire to work
together with the union team at her school.

School Administrators 2 and 3 both attended joint training with the union and sent teachers from their schools to attend professional development that would benefit their school communities. They also attended multiple conferences with the union.

Union Leader 1 recounted several issues on which she was working with district leadership. Notably, constant communication, a shared commitment on closing the achievement gap, and adopting the Algebra Project were among the areas in which collaboration had been strong. District Leader 2 stated that he participated at the union’s previous shared vision conference. Because he and the union president had sent teams to conferences together, he was looking forward to collaborating on the implementation of an extended-school year and helping teachers pursue career advancement. He believed that stakeholders’ learning, thinking, and planning together would benefit students in the school district.

Both Union Leader 2 and District Leader 1 felt inspired and motivated by the amount of work that both organizations did together in the past, including putting on joint new-teacher orientations, holding joint retirement training, resolving grievances at the lowest possible levels, supporting developing teachers, ratifying a new contract, and developing the DC STAR program that would allow individual school leaders and school groups to collaboratively resolve problems. Union Leader 2 spoke emphatically when sharing the level of collaboration that she had with school leaders on helping their teachers with professional development.

I feel like now people are more open. I’m working with a principal right now who has told me, and I went to his school for something totally opposite, but by the time we finished speaking with each other, we’re now working with his teachers who are developing to help them improve.
Relationships

The theme on relationships emerged from some participants when they were asked about the anticipated outcomes of collaboration. Building relationships served as a catalyst to the collaboration that occurred between members of the union and the school district at all levels. One participant in the focus group noted that collaboration between the union and the administrative team at her school would lead to increased trust and transparency. Teacher 3 added that “you would have people that respected each other.” Teacher 4 had a good working relationship with his principal, and they met monthly.

What Teacher 6 had to share was compelling and depicted a very positive image of the relationships between her principal and members of the union. She expressed her thoughts in the following statements: “We can come to her with open dialogue.” “We keep the lines of communication open.” “He’s [the principal] very open to having union events.” “They [the administration] are open to people taking leadership roles.” “They’re pretty open to feedback.” The most telling comment was that “[the principal is known for] always having a very open door.”

The positive relationships notwithstanding, some teacher participants painted a gloomy picture of the situation in their buildings. Teacher 5 expressed her frustrations as follows: “She (the principal) doesn’t see that it comes from the top when you berate people in public.” “You call yourself collaborating, but you collaborate with the people that would be your ‘yes’ people instead of the ones that are going to challenge you.” “Certain teachers are treated differently than other teachers, especially our senior teachers.” and “She’s not seen; she’s not visible.”

All three school administrators spoke of the cordial professional relationships with their
building representatives and the union. School Administrator 2 described her relationship with the building representative as “very strong” and the relationship with the field representative as “wonderful.” For her, “there is strength in having a strong relationship both with your building representative as well as your field representative.” Her relationship with the union extended to the high ranks, something she believed would be helpful to her and her school.

School Administrator 3’s perspective was unique because her relationship with the union started prior to her becoming a building administrator. She described her relationship with the union as strong, but, most especially, the relationship with the entire staff at her school was collegial. She described it in these words:

But just the relationship that I have with teachers in the building overall, a lot of the stuff really doesn’t go to the level where you really have to use the contract, because we have shared leadership, just open-door policies where teachers are able to voice their concerns and express how they feel.

A participant from the school district and a member of the union leadership team echoed the same thoughts on relationships. For District Leader 2, “where you see collaboration, you see trust in the relationship.” He added that “people and teachers need to feel respected, and I agree with them. Respect isn’t too much to ask for.” His counterpart in the union mirrored the same opinion:

If the administration respected their teaching force, teachers would respect each other.

You would actually have students that would step up and would respect teachers and administrators. Once you have respect for each other and what each one’s role is, then you can actually work together.

She underscored that the respectful relationships that the union developed with the school district
were important in determining how much respect both entities received from policymakers, the council members, and the mayor and her deputy. Her close collaborator, Union Leader 2, attributed the success they had with professional-development courses to the relationships that they established with school principals or administrators.

**Social Justice**

Social justice was the union leadership’s driving force behind the push for equity for all students. Union Leader 1 described herself as follows:

I see myself as a social justice, solutions-driven leader…At our first meeting, we both established that the gap between the poorest and the most affluent students in the city was a priority for both of us. What has created that gap, we may not agree on all the things that created that, but we are going to start from where we agree.

The union’s first CBA with the school district, ratified in 1968, set the tone for matters related to social justice. According to the 1968 CBA, both the union and the school district agreed on the racial integration of both staff and students and fair employment practices to all regardless of race, creed, color, national origin, sex, or marital status. They also mutually agreed to investigate educational outcomes for students including racial integration.

Although the issues prevalent in 1968 were not common during the duration of this study, both the leadership of the union and the school district agreed that the racial achievement gap needs to be closed. According to Union Leader 1, the lack of opportunities was responsible for the achievement gap. She attributed the opportunity gap to poverty, housing, gentrification, a lack of proper school funding for the neediest students.

Both entities collaborated on helping to meet the needs of students dealing with the social-emotional issues resulting either from trauma or immigration stress. Union Leader 1
emphasized the collaboration with the school district leadership on the problem in the following quote:

One of the very first changes I noticed was that the chancellor saw a need to address school climate and the social side of education. He saw the need to focus more attention on social and emotional learning because a high percentage of our students come from communities in which they see and experience a lot of trauma. We have over 3,000 students who are coming to school from homeless shelters in the district, but people do not know that.

She mentioned some areas where collaboration was already taking place, such as the community schools model, but insisted that more collaboration was needed in expanding those schools, improving the forty lowest performing schools, and getting the resources and funding to convert those schools to become high performing.

**Summary**

The findings of this study revealed disparities among participants regarding their perceptions of collaboration at all levels of the school district. At the school level, school administrators contended that they collaborated with members of the union. The members of the union, on the other hand, believed that not enough collaboration took place. Although the researcher observed some collaborative partnerships between the school district and the union, members of the union argued that more work was needed. All participants, however, agreed that collaboration was a necessary ingredient to achieving better student outcomes. Participants who admitted to having shared leadership at their schools expressed satisfaction at their student outcomes, school climate, and teacher retention.
V. DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of the case study was to examine how a teachers’ union in the mid-Atlantic region used collaboration with the school district and other stakeholders to foster a positive change in its organizational culture. The findings revealed that, given the opportunity, the union could become part of the reform that the school system needs, engaging stakeholders at all levels with the overall goal of improving student outcomes. Parents, policymakers, and other education advocates would sympathize more with the union over compensation and due process rights if the latter’s mission extended to include quality in teaching and learning as well as equity for all students. This case study presented evidence that supports organizational change theory and believes that collaboration at the top levels of the organization would spread to other departments in the organization (Burke, 2014). This conclusion resonates with the theoretical framework of the design of this study.

The researcher used a qualitative approach in the study with a purposive sampling of participants from all levels of the union and the school district. The findings of the study were derived primarily from direct observations, published and unpublished data, a focus group discussion, and structured interviews.

Implications

This study found that teachers’ unions could be partners in school reform. Based on the
findings, the union is currently undergoing a change in its culture that was previously characterized by strikes and antagonism with the school district (Shaffer, 2011). The adoption of a more collaborative approach strategically positions the union as an organization that does not exclusively oppose decisions made by the school district, but as one that is willing to contribute solutions to an educational system in crisis. The perceptions of participants from the union-leadership team depicted the union as an organization that embraced education reform. The rank and file of the union endorsed the solutions-driven approach. All the union member participants at the school level expressed the desire to be part of decision-making and were more likely to comply with policies if they were consulted before such policies were implemented. The school leadership participants agreed with this sentiment.

**Implications for the teachers’ union**

The researcher focused his attention on the change that took place within the union in its approach to relations with the school district. The results of the current study portrayed the union as an organization that shows interest in other issues beyond its own interests. Teaching and learning emerged from the interviews as an area where the union wants to lead. Honowar (2017) identified accords between Annapolis High School in Maryland and the Teachers Association of Anne Arundel County (TAAAC), under which both parties agreed to work together to turn around the school.

The teachers’ union embraced a similar approach, although without any formal agreements. District Leader 2 and Union Leader 1 both expressed the desire to collaborate on closing the achievement gap in the school district. Union Leader 1 alluded to her intention of working with the school district to help turn around the lowest-performing schools, implement the Algebra Project to close the gap in math literacy, and work together with the school district to
guarantee equity for all students in the school district. The participants agreed that student achievement should be at the core of the work that the district leaders, school administrators, and the union do. By adopting a collaborative approach, the union can make the case that unions are partners in education, contrary to the views of Lott and Kenny (2013) who viewed unions as obstacles to student achievement.

The union sought the collaboration of parents and the community by inviting the latter to union-organized events and conferences. By collaborating with parents, the union wants to bolster its image in the community and to demonstrate that it cares about student outcomes. Union Leader 1 described herself as an advocate of social justice, and her involvement of parents in activities that stand to benefit students will solidify the union’s standing as the community’s ally in the long term.

The teacher participants (building representatives) viewed their roles in the schools as activists who reacted to bad policies imposed by their school leaders. In all interviews, the teacher leaders expressed the need to be part of decision-making with the goal of improving their respective schools and improving student outcomes. In the literature reviewed for this study, the description of the role of the union building representative was one who listened to teachers’ complaints or concerns and then raised the issues with the building supervisor for solutions (Coddett, 2014). Although School Administrator 1 believed that she was adhering to the contract by addressing all concerns that the building representative presented to her, the teachers interviewed for this study expressed the need for a different type of relationship. They wanted to be part of the decision-making process regarding all aspects of teaching and learning, a line of reasoning shared by District Leader 2. According to District Leader 2, all decisions at the school level needed to be reached with teachers’ input for them to be effective.
The findings of this study present an opportunity for the union to portray its success in teacher quality. Although teacher evaluation remained an area where the school district and the union did not collaborate, the union created openings for its members to be more effective teachers. Union Leader 2 reported that the level of support that the union provided to teachers designated as *developing* under the evaluation system was significant. The support, she said, was provided with the collaboration of building administrators, who allowed the union to offer professional-development courses in their buildings. The building administrators further allowed the facilitators to follow up with the teachers in their classrooms to ensure that the teachers properly implemented the strategies learned. The union’s professional development facilitators received joint training with the district’s Office of Teaching and Learning on the implementation of the evaluation tool. This joint training had the potential of benefiting teachers in their practice because the facilitators would share the knowledge learned with their members.

School Administrator 2 corroborated the assertion made by Union Leaders 1 and 2 that the school district and the union were collaborating in adopting a new math curriculum to address the achievement gap in math. She was proud to have released a member of her faculty to visit another school district with other union members and was looking forward to working more with the union to provide more professional development to teachers in her building.

The teachers’ union and the school district collaborated on collective bargaining. In answering Research Question 2 (How is collaboration beneficial to collective bargaining negotiations?), Union Leader 1 expressed the need for interest-based bargaining, the need for an agreement on what was best for schools, and the need for good faith in negotiating good teaching conditions for teachers. Both district leaders believed that collaboration with the union was responsible for the success in reaching agreement on the 2016 contract. District Leader 2 cited
open communication with the union president during the process as one of the reasons the district was able to reach agreement on a new contract. Under the leadership of the previous district leader, the union was not able to reach an agreement on the contract because of the adversarial relationships between the two organizations. According to Union Leader 1, the improved collaborative relationship with the new district leader paved the way for an agreement within one year.

**Implications for school leaders**

The school leaders in the study saw themselves as union-friendly and as leaders who did not want to violate the contract. School Administrator 1 stated that she understood the contract and did not want to violate it for any reason. She further intimated that she addressed all concerns that were brought to her attention. School Leader 3 was confident in her relationship with the union, referring to the leadership at her school as *shared leadership*. From the opinions espoused by the teacher participants and by School Administrator 3, school leaders and their schools would benefit if they practiced shared leadership as opposed to only addressing teachers’ concerns.

All the teacher leaders interviewed expressed the need for teacher voice in decision-making, a sentiment mirrored by District Leader 2. The argument for teachers’ involvement in decision-making was that teachers would support policy changes, schools would improve, and teachers would stay on the job longer.

From an organizational-change standpoint, the researcher noticed a change in attitudes at the highest levels of the union and the school district in the study. Burke (2014) underscored that first-order change could only be sustainable if similar change took place at other levels of a system. The change that was taking place both at the hierarchy of the union and within rank and
file was evident in the language obtained from the research interviews. Change was also taking place at the level of the school district, even though not at the same pace as the union. Both district leaders interviewed suggested that the school district was open to collaborating with the teachers’ union.

District Leader 2 was emphatic that he wanted school leaders to work collaboratively not only with the teachers’ union but also with all stakeholders to improve their schools. The findings of this study will hence serve as an impetus for school leaders who still maintain top-down leadership styles to be more inclusive in decision-making. School Administrator 3 credited shared leadership at her school for the gains in students’ standardized test scores and the high teacher retention rate that she enjoyed.

Positive relationships with the union have implications for school leaders in the sense that they build trust, transparency, and respect on both sides. In schools where the participants cited positive relationships with their school leaders, the result was a significant improvement in school climate. Participants described their school leaders as being open, supportive, and willing to collaborate, especially on student achievement. Even though the teachers are more likely to benefit from collaboration with their school leaders, such collaboration would extend to the entire school community. From the data collected, one can conclude that more teacher satisfaction will lead to increased retention, which will, in turn, result in better student outcomes. As School Administrator 2 put it, “An unhappy teacher makes an unhappy student.” Additionally, in buildings where teachers and their school leaders had positive relationships, they were more likely to meet on a regular basis to discuss issues affecting the school community.

The accounts of all the participants in the study make the case for the strengthening of union power within schools. Besides the fact that only one union member (Teacher 5) reported
that her principal berated some faculty members, union members and school leaders generally agreed that they enjoyed positive relationships. Based on these findings, the school district’s local schools are more likely to benefit from stronger union influence within their communities.

All parties within the school district need to consider embracing the union’s move to form partnerships that could improve equity in resources, close the achievement and opportunity gaps, and increase overall student achievement. The researcher observed District Leader 2 at union events, where he spoke to teachers and expressed the need for teachers to be respected and given a voice in decision-making as long as respect was mutual. He did not see unions as a threat and was willing to work with union members to help students succeed.

**Implications for policymakers**

The focus of this study was on collaboration between the teachers’ union and the school district. However, other entities are involved in policymaking in the school district beyond the stakeholders who participated in this study. As Union Leader 1 noted, policy is made by the city’s mayor, the city council, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), and the school district. Consequently, the district’s policymakers closely observe relations between the teachers’ union and the school district. The union garners more community support through its approach of putting students’ interests at the forefront of its mission. More collaboration with the school district adds to that support. The school district and the teachers’ union are more likely to gain respect from the mayor and council members directly overseeing the city’s schools if both organizations collaborated on issues.

Consequently, the two organizations can partner to demand a change in policy that will benefit everyone within the school system. As explained by Union Leader 1, the partnership to demand full-time nurses in every school that was advocated by principals, the union, and parents
led to a change in policy by the city council. Similarly, when schools and the teachers’ union partnered to request a reduction in the percentage accorded to test scores under the Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA), OSSE yielded to the pressure to make changes. This partnership demonstrated the power of working together, and policymakers rely on the collaboration to make informed decisions about what affects both students’ and teachers’ lives in the school system.

**Weaknesses**

The study was limited in scope especially given that it involved only one school district. The findings are however generalizable since the demographics of the school district reflect those of other large urban school districts in the region. Given the purposive nature of the sample, additional participants could have provided more perspectives on the case under investigation. As a follow up to the interviews, a survey of all union members and management could have captured some insights that the current study did not. The demographics of the school district are very diverse, and some of the participants’ perceptions could have been influenced by the geographic location within the city where they worked.

**Recommendations**

The findings of this study provide growth opportunities for all stakeholders in the public school district. Rubinstein and McCarthy (2016) defined union-management partnerships as institutional arrangements that provide a framework for school administrators, teachers, and union leaders to work together in solving problems and making decisions. This study revealed that teachers wanted to be part of decision-making that affect their lives and the lives of their students. It is, therefore, recommended that district and school leaders create structures that fully involve not only teachers in decision-making, but also community members, universities, parents, students, members of the State Board of Education (SBOE), and OSSE. When everyone
is communicating, attending the same training, and collaboratively making decisions, some of the mistakes of the past may be avoided, and student outcomes will improve.

Furthermore, the teachers’ union needs to be accepted as a viable partner in education and not as a separate organization that opposes education decisions in the school district. The results of the study portrayed some existing structures within the union that support teacher quality and some that advocate equity for all students. The school district can benefit from some of the expertise of the union members by collaborating with them regardless of minor differences that may still exist between the two entities. Cunningham (2014) made the case that people on all sides of the education debate do not always agree, but they fundamentally want the same thing: quality education for all students, more schools with the necessary resources that students need to learn, and respect for the professionals who teach them.

**Future Research**

This study was limited to examining change in the organizational culture of the teachers’ union as it sought to regain its credibility through collaboration with the school district. Because the sample was limited to members of the union who teach in the public school system, future researchers may consider studying collaboration in all the schools, including public charter schools. If researchers investigated collaboration among educators in general and the impact of that collaboration on student achievement, they may produce findings that can be generalizable.

Many stakeholders in the district are influential in education, and expanding the sample beyond just educators, may yield diverse perspectives that may be more beneficial than those from the participants in this study. The perceptions of OSSE, the city council, local education advocates, and students will produce results that could have implications on the educational outcomes in the district.
A comparative study of collaboration within the public school system, which is unionized, and public charter schools, which are not unionized, may be another area of interest to researchers. Such a study may compare the effects of collaboration on student achievement in both traditional public schools and public charter schools.
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APPENDICES
## Document Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Collaborative issue addressed</th>
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| CBA         | 01/1968 – 01/1969 | ▪ Cooperation between the union and the board on racial integration of staff.  
▪ Joint board-union committee to investigate best educational outcomes for students, including racial integration.  
▪ Consultation with school chapter advisory committee on matters of school policy and implementation of CBA  
▪ Mutual consent on matters not covered in CBA                                                                 |
| CBA         | 06/1971 – 03/1974 | ▪ The board and union declared intent to work together to attain academic achievement  
▪ Consultation with school chapter advisory committee on matters of school policy and implementation of CBA  
▪ Mutual consent on matters not covered in CBA  
▪ Joint Board-Union committee to develop fair evaluation tool.                                                                 |
| CBA         | 10/1976 -1/1978 | ▪ Consultation with school chapter advisory committee on matters of school policy and implementation of CBA  
▪ Joint Board-Union committee to develop fair evaluation tool.                                                                 |
| CBA         | 9/1979 – 8/1981 | ▪ Consultation with school chapter advisory committee on matters of school policy and implementation of CBA  
▪ Joint committee in teacher evaluation                                                                 |
| CBA         | 4/1982 – 4/1985 | ▪ Consultation with school chapter advisory committee on matters of school policy and implementation of CBA  
▪ Joint committee on teacher evaluation                                                                 |
| CBA         | 09/1985 – 09/1987 | ▪ Consultation with school chapter advisory committee on matters of school policy and implementation of CBA  
▪ The evaluation tool known as Teacher Appraisal Process shall be reviewed periodically by a joint Board-Union committee. Outside consultants shall play in role the process. |
<table>
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<tr>
<th>CBA</th>
<th>03/1988 – 09/1990</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Consultation with school chapter advisory committee on matters of school policy and implementation of CBA.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ The evaluation tool known as Teacher Appraisal Process shall be reviewed periodically by a joint Board-Union committee. Outside consultants shall play in role the process.</td>
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<tr>
<th>CBA</th>
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<td></td>
<td>▪ Consultation with school chapter advisory committee on matters of school policy and implementation of CBA.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Establishment of a Local School Restructuring Team composed of parents, teachers, administrators, community representative, support staff, union representative, and students, to advise on matters of local school policy.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Joint Board/Union committee shall develop new procedures for evaluation with the assistance of outside consultants selected by the committee. The instrument developed by the committee shall prevail for the life of the agreement.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>▪ Consultation with school chapter advisory committee on matters of school policy and implementation of CBA.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ U.S. Congress legislation determined that teacher evaluation shall henceforth be the sole responsibility of the school district. The Union may consult with the superintendent prior to implementation.</td>
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<tr>
<th>CBA</th>
<th>10/2001 – 09/2004</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Consultation with school chapter advisory committee on matters of school policy and implementation of CBA.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>▪ Joint Union-Management grievance committee to monitor and track grievances, and to seek alternative ways of resolving disputes.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>▪ Local School Restructuring Team composed of parents, teachers, administrators, community representative, support staff, union representative, and students, to advise on matters of local school policy.</td>
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| CBA          | 10/2004 – 09/2007 | ▪ Consultation with school chapter advisory committee on matters of school policy and implementation of CBA.  
▪ Establishment of collaborative planning  
▪ Full and Equal Partnership (FEP) committee to fully implement CBA  
▪ Local School Restructuring Team composed of parents, teachers, administrators, community representative, support staff, union representative, and students, to advise on matters of local school policy.  
▪ Effective labor-management relationship to facilitate collaboration and shared decision-making.  
▪ Encouragement of collaboration between superintendent and WTU president and building reps and principals.  
▪ Joint grievance committee to monitor and track grievances, collect and analyze grievance data submitted by FEP  
▪ Teacher evaluation is the sole responsibility of the school district, but the union and the district will consult on modifications to PPEP or development of new evaluation system. |
|--------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| CBA          | 10/2007 – 09/2012, through 09/2016 | ▪ Full and Equal Partnership  
▪ the parties agree to work cooperatively to develop well-articulated programs of instruction aligned to the district’s Teaching and Learning Framework for each grade level  
▪ The Parties shall jointly develop and conduct two mandatory trainings on the content of this Agreement  
▪ The parties agree to form a joint committee consisting of the Chancellor or a designee, the President of the union or a designee, and 3 representatives selected by the union President and 3 representatives selected by the Chancellor, to develop and implement a comprehensive mentoring and induction program. |
| CBA          | 10/2016 – 09/2019 | ▪ Full and Equal Partnership  
▪ the parties agree to work cooperatively to develop well-articulated programs of instruction aligned to the district’s Teaching and Learning Framework for each grade level  
▪ The Parties shall jointly develop and conduct two mandatory trainings on the content of this Agreement |
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<td>▪ The parties agree to form a joint committee consisting of the Chancellor or a designee, the President of the union or a designee, and 3 representatives selected by the union President and 3 representatives selected by the Chancellor, to develop and implement a comprehensive mentoring and induction program.</td>
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Appendix B

Union Leader 1 Interview Protocol

Time of Interview: TBD
Date: TBD
Place: Union conference room
Interviewer: Terence Ngwa
Name of interviewee: TBD

Questions

1. Please tell me about your role as the union president and what mandate you have from membership.
2. What is your vision for the union-school district collaboration?
3. What has been your relationship with the school district since your time in office?
4. What are some changes that you have noticed with the hiring of a new Chancellor?
5. What does collaboration with the school district mean and look like to you?
6. What is your experience collaborating with the school district?
7. How does union-management collaboration influence district policies?
8. How is collaboration beneficial to collective bargaining?
9. What is the influence of collaboration on school improvement, teacher satisfaction and retention, and academic achievement?
10. What joint training has the union received with the school district?
11. What significant issues is the union involved in at the pre-decision-making phase?
12. What are some areas in which you share a common vision with the school district?
13. In what other areas do you anticipate or wish collaboration will occur in the future?

14. What are some commitments to working together on any issues?

15. What kind of actions does your general membership endorse?

16. What is the union leadership’s position on collaborative partnership with the school district?

17. What are the anticipated outcomes of your collaborative initiatives?
Appendix C

Individual Teacher/Focus Group Interview Protocol

Time of Interview: Various
Date: Various
Place: Union conference room/Classroom
Interviewer: Terence Ngwa
Initials and position of interviewees: Various
Elementary School Building Representative: Various
Middle School Building Representative: Various
High School Building Representative: Various

Questions

1. What is the relationship between the teachers’ union and administrative leadership team at your school?
2. What are some areas where you share a common vision with the administrative leadership team at your respective schools?
3. What collaborative initiatives have you undertaken with the administrative leadership team at your schools?
4. What significant issues are you involved in at the pre-decision-making phase?
5. What is the influence of collaboration on school improvement, teacher satisfaction and retention, and academic achievement at your school?
6. What joint training, if any, have you received with the administrative leadership team?
7. What are some short-term or long-term commitments to working together on any issues?
8. What kind of actions does the membership at your schools endorse?

9. What are the anticipated outcomes of collaborative initiatives at the local school level?
Appendix D

School Administrator Interview Protocol

Time of Interview: Various
Date: Various
Place: Various
Interviewer: Terence Ngwa
Initials and position of interviewees: Various
Elementary School Principal: TBD
Middle School Principal: TBD
High School Principal: TBD

Questions

1. What is your relationship with the union leadership team (School Chapter Advisory Team) at your school?

2. What are some areas where you share a common vision with the union leadership team at your respective schools?

3. What collaborative initiatives have you undertaken with the union leadership team?

4. What is your experience collaborating with the union on issues?

5. How does union-management collaboration influence policies at your school?

6. What is the influence of collaboration on school improvement, teacher satisfaction and retention, and academic achievement?

7. What joint trainings have your administrative team received with the union?
8. What significant issues do you invite the union leadership team to be involved at the pre-decision-making phase?

9. What are some short-term or long-term commitments to working together on any issues?

10. What are the anticipated outcomes of your collaborative initiatives at the local school level?
Appendix E

District Leader 1 Interview Protocol

Time of Interview: TBD
Date: TBD
Place: School district conference room
Interviewer: Terence Ngwa
Initials and position of interviewee: TBD

Questions

1. Tell me about your responsibilities as director of labor and employee relations for the school district.
2. What is your relationship with the union? (follow-up questions if possible)
3. What is your vision for school district-union collaboration?
4. What are some areas where you share a common vision with the leadership of the union?
5. What is your experience collaborating with the union?
6. How much collaboration takes place with the union compared to arbitration cases?
7. What joint training have you received with the union?
8. What are some areas of collaboration that you anticipate or wish to occur in the future?
9. What is the District’s position on collaborative partnership with the union?
10. What are the anticipated outcomes of your collaborative initiatives?
Appendix F

Union Leader 2 Interview Protocol

Time of Interview: TBD

Date: TBD

Place: Union conference room

Interviewer: Terence Ngwa

Initials and position of interviewee: TBD

Questions

1. Tell me about your responsibilities as vice president and field representative.

2. What is your relationship with the school district? (follow-up questions if possible)

3. What is your vision for the school district-union collaboration?

4. What are some areas where you share a common vision with the leadership of the school district?

5. What is your experience collaborating with the school district?

6. How much collaboration takes place with the school district compared to arbitration cases?

7. What joint trainings have you received with school district officials?

8. What are some areas of collaboration that you anticipate or wish to occur in the future?

9. What is the union’s position on collaborative partnership with the school district?

10. What are the anticipated outcomes of your collaborative initiatives?
Appendix G

District Leader 2 Interview Protocol

Time of Interview: TBD

Date: TBD

Place: School district conference room

Interviewer: Terence Ngwa

Name and position of interviewee: TBD

Questions:

1. Tell me about your role as chancellor of the school district especially as relates to teachers.

2. What is your relationship with the teachers’ union? (follow-up questions if possible)

3. What is your vision for school district-union collaboration?

4. In what ways has the union reached to you for collaboration on any issues?

5. What are some areas where you share a common vision with the leadership of the union?

6. What is your experience collaborating with the union? What are some common initiatives on which you have collaborated?

7. How does union-management collaboration influence district policies?

8. How is collaboration beneficial to collective bargaining?

9. What is the influence of collaboration on school improvement, teacher satisfaction and retention, and academic achievement?

10. What joint training has the school district received with the union?
11. What is the involvement of the union in any pre-decision-making on significant issues?

12. What are some areas of collaboration that you anticipate or wish to occur in the future?

13. What directives are you providing to school leaders on collaboration at the local school level?

14. What are the anticipated outcomes of your collaborative initiatives?

15. From your perspective, what are some areas where you believe teacher voice will help you achieve your vision for the school system?
Appendix H

ADULT CONSENT FORM

Project Title:
Fostering Organizational Change Through a Solutions-Driven Culture of Collaboration: A Case Study of a Teachers’ Union in the mid-Atlantic region.

Introduction:
You are invited to be in a research study about collaboration between a teacher’s union in the mid-Atlantic region and the school district. This study is being conducted by Dr. Sherrie Johnson (Principal Investigator) and Terence Ngwa (Student Investigator) at Southeastern University. You were selected as a participant because of your knowledge of both organizations. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose:
The purpose of this case study is to examine how the teachers’ union uses collaboration with the school district and other stakeholders to foster a change in its organizational culture.

Procedures:
You will participate in a one-on-one/focus group interview to provide your perceptions of the collaboration that takes place between the teachers’ union and the school district, and its outcomes. The interview will not exceed 60 minutes.

Risks of Participation:
There are no known risks associated with the study which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Benefits:
Even though there are no known direct benefits to the subjects involved in the study, the findings may help strengthen the relationship and build more trust between the leadership of the teachers’ union and the school district. If you are interested, we will send you a copy of the results of the study when it is finished.

**Confidentiality:**

All data obtained from you and other subjects will be recorded and transferred from the audio recording device to a password-protected computer accessible only to the researcher. The interview recordings will be transcribed and erased from the device within 30 days of the interview.

The records of this study will be kept private. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers and individuals responsible for oversight will have access to the records. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and well-being of people who participate in research.

**Contacts:**

You may contact any of the researchers at the following email addresses and phone numbers:

Terence Ngwa @ tcngwa@seu.edu or (240) 601-1665 or Dr. Sherrie Johnson at snjohnson@seu.edu or (863) 640-6199. To contact the IRB, email IRB@seu.edu.

**Participant Rights:**

Your signature below indicates that you freely and voluntarily agree to participate in this study and you also acknowledge that you are at least 18 years of age. There is no reprisal or penalty if you decide to withdraw or discontinue your participation in this research at any time.
Signatures:

• I have read and fully understand the consent form and voluntarily consent to participate.

• A copy of this form has been given to me.

• I do not consent to participate in this research.

______________________                                                  _______________________
Signature of Participant                                                    Date

__________________________
Print Name

**Audio Recording Consent**

I understand that the recorded interview is for research purposes only and will be deleted and purged from the device within 30 days of this interview.

• I voluntarily consent to be recorded.

• I do not consent to be recorded.

______________________                                                  _______________________
Signature of Participant                                                    Date

__________________________
Print Name

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the prospective participant sign it.

______________________                                                  _______________________
Signature of Researcher                                                    Date
Observational Protocol

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Appendix J

Focus Group Interview Transcript

Time of Interview: 3:40 PM
Date: 12/16/17
Place: Union conference room
Interviewer: Terence Ngwa

Middle School Building Representative: Building Rep.

1. What is the relationship between the union and administrative leadership team at your school?

T.1-Ok so, my principal was a previous trainer with the teachers’ union, so she’s very well versed with the contract, what’s acceptable and what’s not. She gives us all the time that we need in school for different things that are in the contract for our union meetings. I can get like a five minutes’ window before staff meetings. We can come to her with open dialogue when we feel like there are contractual violations. The only time she pushes back is if it is something that she is really passionate about, she may try the bend the rule a little bit but we still try to come out with a solution. She’s very aware of the contract, what should be done and what should not be done. Sometimes she creatively does things that do not violate the contract but, in our heads, we know that it’s not fair, but she knows the contract and know how to not break it. So, it works well
with us without union in the building. We’ve been pretty prosperous this year with making sure that we keep the lines of communication open, supporting each other, so if we didn’t have her, it wouldn’t be like that.

T.2-Ok em, my principal identifies himself as union-friendly. So, I would say that, and I’m also the union rep in my building. I would say that his staff doesn’t necessarily agree with his self-assessed union-friendly diagnosis or identification, and I think that goes, em, in terms of, that’s because, though he identifies himself as union-friendly, he doesn’t necessarily understand the union contract. And so, the things that he does or requests his staff to do, he thinks fall within the guidelines of the contract but I have to often show it that they do not. He does, he’s very open to having union events, like we are able to do the union courses in the school and allows us to teach the courses there. He does allow us for our union meetings before staff meetings. We do have space in the building for union bulletin board. We are able to freely circulate union information to staff without any recourse or anything of that nature. He has on several occasions come to me when there was a staff issue and said that “hey, I’d like you to sit in this meeting, whether or not the person knows to ask you, I’m asking you because this may come up as a union issue.” So, he is very forward thinking in those terms. But he can use some brushing up..(not clear).

T.3-Ok, em, can you hear me? Basically, they are similar, my principal also is very supportive of the union, knows the history of the union in the district, the previous contract, and striking, but as far as dealing with issues as they arise, its different with us. We have a director of operations, and so we’ve had some issues with this person coming in without being an educator, or experience in administration., actually giving teachers a difficult time, giving myself a hard time as building rep last year. And so, I had to go to him about her and so he’s had to correct her and take a hands-on approach. And so, we had different issues, being a building rep. what we need
to do is adhere to the contract and respect the teachers. His style has been one of a layback hands-on approach. This person has good experience in logistics, making sure everything works, in their capacity as that on that side of making sure that the building runs with is difficult in her approach and inexperience in understanding what the contract involves and what teachers need.

2. What are some areas where you share a common vision with the administrative leadership team at your respective schools?

T.1-When it comes to doing what is best for student success. We all have that as our vision, improving our students, making sure that they meet whatever goals we have for them and reaching the whole student. Their social-emotional needs as well as the academic needs.

T.2-For me we are moving our school to data collection and fluency so that not only teachers know the students’ data, their goals, what they need to need to move to, but students are fluent with knowing their goals as well. So, they know their data, they know their iReady score, they know their RTI score and are able to articulate what their goals are and the strategies that they have agreed to apply to get to those so that we’re all data-driven in the school.

T.3-Yes, so, the try to be supportive when we as teacher leaders are asked to do something in the district, he’s been very supportive of that, and also when we are asking for professional development opportunities. I haven’t seen it with attending some of our activities, but it seems like all of them were busy, so I’d just leave it at that. (7:19 - revisit).

3. What collaborative initiatives have you undertaken with the administrative leadership team at your schools?

T.1-It was only one thing this year so far, because she has people in place that have to collaborate with her in certain things, but with me the building rep, the master schedule that we have. We had to work together because there was a lot of push back, a lot of people who were
not accepting it all summer. So, I had to find a way to present to both sides how everybody’s feeling, their rationale, basing it on the best needs of our students and it worked out. Unfortunately, the teachers didn’t really get what they wanted, but they did come out with a clear understanding of why it was done that way. So, we were able to collaborate, and do a little wiggling, it wasn’t much, but we were able to do a little wiggling to get people to understand why it was done that way and why they made that choice. And as a result of that collaboration, she’s going to want to collaborate more next year because instead of her trying to change some of the things that the teachers said, she left somethings there that are not working out right now, so we’re going to go through this year and see so she’s going to appreciate the collaboration more this summer.

T.2-Okay, so we, this year is our first year as an extended day school. Also, we are in a satellite location for two years while our permanent building is being renovated, so there was a lot of scheduling and transitional planning that needed to be done. So, we collaborated on the transportation plan, what the extended hours would look like, and the STEAM initiative for the school. We are an emerging STEAM school according to the national STEAM certification people. And so, our STEAM initiative needed to have certain characteristics for it to be recognized. I worked on the team with the leadership on that, the transportation plan, well the STEAM is what the extended hour is.

T.3-Okay, I’m sorry, you have to repeat the question for me. Em, I want to say, when I did my teacher of the year action research, they were very interest in it. (Can you hold on one moment). Okay, thank you, yes, they were very supportive, and wanted us to present to them our data findings and also the other teacher of the year at my school, they also included his new teacher
inductor program where a veteran teacher would be partnered with a new teacher to our building since we are such a large campus, and that has continued since then.

4. What significant issues are you involved in at the pre-decision-making phase?

T.1-I’m going to be honest, none. She chooses who she wants to do those things and work with her at the pre-decision phase and only get to us after they have made the decision. Right now, we’re encountering that with our international day, no discussion, no meeting to discuss what would be best for students and teachers and presented information to teachers and it turned just to, not even a productive meeting. It was horrible. People were fussing going back and forth, there wasn’t clear so even right now, the international day is this week, and since there was no clarity with pre-planning with people that would be involved with it, it does So that doesn’t look like it’s going to go well. No one knows what they’re supposed to do. So, that’s where we are right now as a result of not pre-planning with her staff.

T.2-None!

T.3-So, we do, I’m on the LSAT committee, and so, and I’m the chair this year, so I have been, we have been in that capacity. Serving on SCAC last year, still it’s difficult. I can give you examples as far as student activities and culture climate. We used to have like international week, it turned into international day. And then Black History month activities ……..And so, by and large, these activities have been reduced. And so, we’ve spoken out this year. We have an organization that is pushing for telling stories called Teaching for Change and so they’re helping the teachers with accountability to the community. And again, I want to say, it’s because we have a Director of Operations, and I don’t know how one person without the educational experience and investment in the community could come in and kind of steer things to what is most beneficial to them. And when we talk about it, it’s like we’re complaining, we’re not
compliant, and so the parents are now speaking out about this matter. And I’m going to speak on instructional lead roles, we have qualified veteran teachers in the building. However, when, I want to say the personnel committee, when they’re hiring and bringing new staff on board, there’re supposed to make the personnel committee aware. I’ve seen them conduct interviews when no other teacher could be there or review it or have input in it and ultimately, they’re picking, they pick outside new teachers to the district to fulfil these new teacher lead or coaching roles. And so, we watched this discrepancy, and it’s noticeable and something that should be mentioned.

5. What is the influence of collaboration on school improvement, teacher satisfaction and retention, and academic achievement at your school?

T.1-At my school, the lack of collaboration is really affecting everything that you mentioned. Morale is very low. Student achievement, we’re making gains but not significant and the gains we’re making are not as a result of us collaborating in making sure that we’re using the actual best-practices. Most of our students already come with the knowledge that they need so you’re just facilitating with them. Also, with school improvement, we are falling short. Again, because of lack of collaboration. There are one or two people that make the decisions, and that’s it. And there was even a quote from my leader that said, the call themselves “try and share leadership,” they really didn’t try effectively, and when something fell apart because of one of her special leaders that she has, she says, “see what happens when we try to do shared leadership” which is untrue. She thought she did, but it wasn’t exactly that. So, a lack of collaboration is causing us to be at a standstill with all of those things that you mentioned.

T.2-Ditto. I would say the lack of collaboration, I would say the absence of collaboration is actually what we are experiencing. And so, there is no way to measure its impact on any of those
things because we are living in the absence of it. So, there is a theoretical idea that research states that we will positively be impacted. All of those things however, my school is not living in a place where we can measure that because we don’t have any. (17.20 inaudible).

T.3-So, we’re separate from the administrative team that has made it very difficult to keep our teachers retained, especially teachers of color. And I want to say its impacting academic achievement. By and large in our campus, if we want to specify, we feel that the ELA, English Language Art, they are supported, as opposed to math. And I want to say that our data represents that we have high student satisfaction compared to maybe other campuses near us.

So, we care enough about our students. However, we had the teacher survey regarding our administrators, I don’t believe the collaborative effort would even correlate to how high our students rate us. We have like a 94-96% student satisfaction rate as far as our school…

6. Have you at all three of your campuses, as building reps initiated any form of collaboration with the leadership team?

T.1-With the administration, I tried and she said it was a good idea, that really did not happen. So, what I’m trying to do right now is just to start it at just colleague level. So, our union meetings are pretty much a time when you can share what you’re doing in your class with other colleagues. I feel like if I can get that culture going, we can collectively as a group go to her versus just me as an individual. It may put more pressure her to actually say that we need to collaborate because this probably would improve our school culture.

T.2-So yes, we have attempted to collaborate. We did create a list that was generated from SCAC of things that we would like to do in the building that were highly encouraged and accepted as an idea but hold off on implementing. We were told that “these were great ideas, but hold off. “So, no implementation for any of the things that we suggested at this point.
T.3-Okay, well, I want to say in my role as building rep I finally convinced him that the staff wanted his direct input on academic instructional issues, from him directly. So, I told you our director of operations, she literally would run the show with PD, back-to-school, back to work, when we would come in for our pre-service week. So, he finally would not only share the data for that one PowerPoint, he actually is giving direct input and strategies for our school newsletter, our staff newsletter which she emails Sunday night. And I think he’s making more of an effort to have himself present with different committees. We, I told him the contention of breaking up our staff meeting by grade level which he said was logistically easier, but then the staff was complaining that we don’t know each other, and we don’t get to have the placement for certain students that we want to. So, we do have a culture and climate committee but that’s about it.

7. What joint training, if any have you received with the administrative leadership team?

T.1-None this year.
T.2-No!
T.3-Yes, so because I volunteered, well, I was accepted, I applied for the position to be a family engagement lead teacher, the FEP team teacher on our campus, I had to be trained along with my administrators through the process of implementing this program on our campus, which was the first time for such a large campus, we tried to do it with fidelity across the grade levels. So that was one opportunity but other than that I can’t think of anything else. The name of the program is Flamboyan or Family Engagement Partnership (FEP).

8. What are some short-term or long-term commitments to working together on any issues?
T.1-I’m not sure if this is going to answer that question, but right now it’s just working towards the test, the summative assessment, PARCC. How are we going to do the tutoring, how are we
going to do the after school, who’s going to do what, how’s it going to be implemented, and things like that.

T.2-I would say we are still focusing on data. The push for the school year would be fluency in your own data, so staff as well as students.

T.3-My assistant principal is like the AP of math, and so have scaled down and isolated students who haven’t read along grade level for like three years. And so, we are isolating their weaknesses and strengths. He also introduced and built like us using a math fluency online to kind of program for motivation to get mastery and proficiency. And so, I would say those two areas are significant. Right now, also I have proposed to them to see if they will allow for us to attend some professional development either out of the country or here through the union. So, this is because of the union’s recommendation and request. I forwarded that to them this week to see if we can get some support. I’m seeing through LSAT that there should be money for teachers to seek professional development and to improve that school community. So, if we get it, we can come back and share our information to our math teachers on campus.

9. What kind of actions does the membership at your schools endorse?

T.1-Right now, I’m working on something where a teacher felt like an administrator unjustly gave her a reprimand, because a parent consistently texts, calls, and emails at odd hours of the night. And so, she didn’t reply to a text at around 10:30 in the evening, and the principal called her in and said, “you should have replied to that”. And so now we are working on having teachers put in writing hours that they are available, if they choose to be available outside of contractual hours, then they put it in writing what those hours are because no want should be subjected to a reprimand for something that is not within their working hours.
T.2-I would say, overall, recognition of staff. We don’t have like employee of the month type of programs or anything that celebrates staff for their accomplishments. It’s always these meetings where it is just about reprimands. Yes, we’re doing great, but you need to do this, but you know, a celebration of staff efforts. So, we will like to see that happening this year.

T.3-Okay, I do remember some of our staff, maybe it’s because of our location, it’s hard with parking. And so, my principal did parking and vandalism. He did request if there was something that the union could do when staff’s personal vehicles are vandalized. Or suffering damage on our campus or around our campus. I think he kind of feels our sentiment when things happen or people in our community are parking on our lot and hitting our vehicles, but he said on his end, DCPS doesn’t have any responsibility for that. I also want to, I don’t if this is the time to plug this in, but, even when staff are being asked to go to PD around the district, they notice that hardship. One of my APs did say “I’ll just like to host your PD here so that you don’t have to travel.” So, I think they see that burden on us too and trying to find parking where we’re going, and teachers are getting tickets. So, there could be some kind of collaborative effort that could happen with that.

10. What are the anticipated outcomes of collaborative initiatives at the local school level?

T.1-If they work together and truly collaborate, it would produce proficient students, I’m not saying proficient with everybody scoring a 4 or a 5, proficient to where those students are to reach an attainable goal that meets that child’s needs. And also, with teacher morale and the culture of the building because if teacher morale is low, it affects student achievement. So, if we actually collaborate together. I’m trying to help administrators understand that we are not trying to take their job, we’re not trying to step over and do something crazy, we just want to work together so that our students can achieve. If you look at the data from the district, they publicize
that we’re making so many gains, we’re really not, and if we are, if somebody is making a big
gain they’re making it from the base of where they were in the beginning. They were scoring
maybe 1 or 2%. So, and that because of the lack of collaboration. It seems to be a fear culture in
D.C. I worked downtown before, they’re fearing somebody is trying to do their job or tell them
what to do, and it trickles down to school administration. “Oh, the teacher is just trying to tell me
what to do” so it just turns into that battle instead of true collaboration for what we all should be
working for student achievement.
T.2-I would say, teacher morale absolutely, but that would lead to much more creative learning
in the classrooms. Teachers will feel more confident in stepping out of the box and being
creative in the classroom because I think right now everybody is walking a tight rope, which is
thinking that they don’t have the freedom to be creative because they have administrators coming
in and evaluating them on a very small window or scope and time or very small window in terms
of what or lack of objective window. So, it’s very subjective and teachers do not feel free to be
creative and really step out of the box to meet kids where they are. Teachers are very frustrated
with that aspect right now. Collaboration will definitely change things.
T.3-Yes, I would say, increased trust and transparency for both parties especially in light of when
you are facing the administrative churn where new administrators are coming in and out every 2
to 3 years. And teachers and staff feeling that they need to prove their expertise or efficacies all
the time. I just think in the long run, increased trust and transparency would be a wonderful
outcome.
Appendix K

Individual Teacher Interview Transcript

Time of Interview: 3:30PM
Date: 12/19/2017
Place: Teacher’s Classroom
Interviewer: Terence Ngwa

Initials and position of interviewees: Elementary School Building Representative

Elementary School Building Representative:

1. What is the relationship between the teachers’ union and administrative leadership team at your school?

T.4-I would say, fairly contentious when, there have been times when I have offered communication between the union President and the LSAT for example, I have had a lot of push-back by admin to not contact her with the fear that it would have some kind of contentious issue, and I have had to push back. It was an issue about budgeting, and it was supposed to be like a ward 3 ednet group that meets and I was saying it would be useful to include the union president because that would affect teacher pay and retention, and all that stuff. I would say that, my personal relationship with the admin team, as the building representative is fairly positive; it’s a good working relationship, but anything above is seen as an immediate sort of attack, I guess, on her. That’s how I see the relationship between the union and the admin team,

2. What are some areas where you share a common vision with the administrative leadership team at your school?
T.4-I think, we both have the same goals. I think we both want that students are happy and working hard, are being challenged. I think sometimes the road to get there is a bit different. I guess, mainly the students. I think when we talk about the needs of students, there’s a lot of shared vision. I think we agree on what students need, we agree on teaching the whole child. There are areas of that where we agree. Mainly we agree on a rigorous curriculum, I think teachers here really work to create, or at least follow curriculum that would at least give kids a challenge, and I think the admin team generally agrees with that. Making sure that students are challenged, I think is a big area of agreement.

3. What collaborative initiatives have you undertaken with the administrative leadership team at your school?

T.4-We do hold our monthly meetings between SCAC and our principal. I do have time when I can meet with my principal; she makes herself very available to talk. Other than that, nothing much. Monthly meetings and being able to discuss but most often those discussions aren’t always, wound up in agreement.

4. What significant issues are you involved in at the pre-decision-making phase?

T.4-No, I don’t think that happens. Often my job is reacting to something that has been put in place. The schedules are a perfect example. We have offered time to collaborate with the administration about the schedule, but we are consistently not included in that discussion. She just talks to other teachers, but as a union body we are not part of that discussion. I really struggle to think of an example where are consulted prior to a school-wide initiative. Researcher: That was going to be my follow up question, if you have reached out with any collaborative initiatives.
Absolutely, our team is especially very open to discussing any kind of initiatives, or anything that we think will certainly affect teachers and students, but very rarely, I rarely think of a time when I was consulted prior to a decision. I think mainly decisions are made, and then sort of, there is sort of this process of SCAC’s approval of certain things. There is often time when we don’t approve of decisions.

5. What is the influence of collaboration on school improvement, teacher satisfaction and retention, and academic achievement at your school?

Again, we have tried to discuss teacher retention, we have tried to discuss certain areas of improvement for the school. We do have a seat at the table, but I would say that my influence is very little. I think that there is a lot of talk, and then sort of a decision that is made unilaterally. Teacher retention has been an issue at our school. A lot of older teachers, a lot of seasoned teachers that have either left or have been pushed out. We have tried to have that discussion, but the administration, there really isn’t any explanation as to why that is happening, or certainly not looking for my input as to how to retain teachers.

Researcher: How about academic achievement. You think things would improve if there were more collaboration?

Absolutely. All of what you listed would improve if there were more collaboration between the union and the administration. I think student our student achievement is fairly high, often in the upper 90% range on standardized testing and things like that. But, student achievement, I would say, trying to close the achievement gap has been a discussion that has been had staff-wide. I would say that isn’t definitely a collaborative effort, but individual student achievement, I think we have been trying to focus on individual student needs, working to kind of push up those students who are behind. That had been a collaborative effort. I would say student achievement
is consistently collaborative. But then we get into the weeds of other things: time management….(inaudible).

6. What joint training, if any have you received with the administrative leadership team?

T.4-None!

7. What are some short-term or long-term commitments to working together on any issues?

T.4-I don’t think that there are any set commitments, other than monthly meetings that I set, but those meetings are discussed, and I try to follow up, but issues that we discuss are sort of not follow up by the administration. And part of that is on me; part of that is on administration, but often things become…(inaudible).

8. What kind of actions does the membership at your school endorse?

T.4-There is a lot of, I would say there’s about substantial union involvement at the school. I would say I’m working really hard to drive us away from complaining about issues and then figuring out how we consult them, figuring out what we bring to the table, and that has been something that I’ve been working on to bring to administration. We talk this issue out, we discuss possible solutions, and present that to administration. I would say that the building is generally very supportive of union action. I still think there is a big fear of retaliatory action, not necessarily by the principal, but by the school district as a whole, and so people still are a little reticent to come out, and speak out for themselves, which I think is why they often use us as that tool to administration. So, our union meetings are generally well attended, but I would like to see more action.
Appendix L

Individual Teacher Interview Transcript

Time of Interview: 12:00PM
Date: 12/21/2017
Place: 7th Grade Counselor’s Office
Interviewer: Terence Ngwa

Initials and position of interviewees: High School Building Representative

High School Building Representative:

1. What is the relationship between the union and administrative leadership team at your school?
T.5-I would have to say, we actually are on good terms. The principal actually does listen, and would work with us. We are really, since this is my first year as building rep, I would say we’re about to hit a couple of stumbling blocks coming up. We’re about to hit a big snag on the Core Professionalism when we come back. I don’t know how she’s going to handle that. We have a working relationship. We do meet every month.

2. What are some areas where you share a common vision with the administrative leadership team at your school?
T.5-Now with our CSC we went in and reconstructed some of the verbiage. So, we are actually on common ground with that. We are on common ground with grading. They understand that we do have a five-day grace period to turn in our grades because that was the sticking point at one point. We are on common ground when it comes to, I would say, probably working together because we are, I’m new, I’m a new building rep, so she’s feeling me out; I’m feeling her out.
Of course, we are going to have our differences when it comes to certain things such as how teachers are treated. That’s another thing where we don’t have a very good understanding on. Certain teachers are treated differently than other teachers especially our senior teachers.

3. What collaborative initiatives have you undertaken with the administrative leadership team at your school?

T.5-As a union we have worked with them in planning the …Let ne stepped back because we really haven’t planned with them, but then when I stepped out to talk about it, we haven’t really planned, they have made plans. I have challenged the plans, let me say that. Our previous building rep made plans, so I have to challenge that plans that he accepted. And some of them, like having in-house PD, some of them are almost a waste of our time. But they were pre-planned.

4. What significant issues are you involved in at the pre-decision-making phase?

T.5-Yea, she tries. But she is, the problem is, she’s not seen, she’s not visible, so most of our interaction is through email. Very little is through a face-to-face, one-on-one, or even group. And even when we are with the group, it’s just the SCAC and the administrative team. We are there, we just meet monthly, stepping outside of that, very little interaction. I’ll take fault for some of that, because when I do step out of that I get thrown to the wolves. When I call her on not consulting me before making decisions, that’s when I get thrown to the wolves. She did not ask me or bring me in to the grading training prior. She just said this is going to happen, this is coming from downtown. That’s the end of that.

5. What is the influence of collaboration on school improvement, teacher satisfaction and retention, and academic achievement at your school?
T.5-The first thing is, we would not have the toxicity that we have going on right now. In our school, it’s very doggy and toxic. Our building is sick, but our principal does not see that. She doesn’t see that it comes from the top down when you berate people in public; when you call yourself collaborating, but you collaborate with the people that would be your “yes” people, instead of the ones that are going to challenge you. It’s hard for other people to step in and say “hey, no, we may want to try it this way, or let’s step back and look at another way to try this”. I keep on saying my eyes have been opened immensely being building rep. I realized that high school teachers are very weak. They talk at the game but they are very weak. They don’t want to step up because they’re scared that they’re going to lose something in the end. And that’s the oppression and toxicity that the principal has created. You know, with herself, as well as with her administrators. And that’s not good; that’s not healthy.

6. What joint training, if any, have you received with the administrative leadership team?
T.5-Darn! Long pause. None! I have asked to be trained on how to do scheduling because our schedule is messed up. She was like “sure, no problem,” but I’ve heard nothing on that. We haven’t been privy. I am not a LEAP lead, so I’m not privy to the training that LEAP leads get. I don’t know why, but I have been invited to ALT meetings but other than that, that’s not a training per se.

7. What are some short-term or long-term commitments to working together on any issues?
T.5-Not answered!

8. What kind of actions does the membership at your school endorse?
T.5-High school teachers like to gripe, but they don’t like to step up sometimes. They want to things to be done, but they don’t want to step up. There is a problem with CP where teachers are getting marked down 10 points for each unexcused tardy, including the LEAP meetings in the
morning. But they won’t step up. I do the research and when I ask if they want me to write the grievance, they start sitting back. I didn’t realize how weak they are. I stepped up when the AP closed the grade book one day prior to the due date. I stepped up, called Jacky, emailed the principal, I emailed everyone, went to LMER, everything. And people stayed until 11pm to put their grades in, that Thursday before the due date that Friday. I told them, if they had not done the grades until the next morning, they would have had to open the gradebook. They had to because I didn’t turn mine in until that morning.

9. What are the anticipated outcomes of collaborative initiatives at the local school level?

T.5-You would have people that respected each other, that’s the first thing. The administration respected their teaching force, teachers would respect each other, you would actually have students that would step up and would respect the teachers and administrators, and hearing me say the word respect because that is the crux, that is the core. Once you have respect for each other and what each one’s role is, then you can actually work together and if you collaborate, then you know that “administrators, this is your role; teachers, this is your role; students this is your role; parents this your role”, and we all need to come together to say “I need to do this, so how are you going to help me; how am I going to help you?” instead of “I’m going to do this and you’re going to do that.” Because that’s where we’re getting now, it’s the dictatorship and I don’t call his name. It’s 45’s model, I’m the one and only, and you have to bow down to me. And that’s what we’re getting right now. And that’s scary because that’s what we’re seeing in education, and even when our chancellor is talking about social emotional learning, everybody doesn’t deal with social emotional learning. You cannot make people do that. That comes under health and physical education. Go to the experts and let us talk to you about it. Respect us, you know, that’s what we do. It’s so insane what we’re going through right now. They’re trying to
impose this and that, but they’re not looking at what they have, that’s their biggest problem. So, again, the huge word is respect, because once people respect each other, then we can actually work together. And it used to be, it was like that until when we went under mayoral control because they said teachers weren’t doing anything and all heck broke loose.
School Administrator 1 Interview Transcript

Time of Interview: 2:45PM
Date: 12/21/2017
Place: Principal’s Office
Interviewer: Terence Ngwa

Initials and position of interviewees: Principal

Middle School Principal:

1. What is your relationship with the union leadership team (School Chapter Advisory Team) at your school?

S.A.1-I have a great relationship with the building rep. I think we have a great working relationship. We haven’t started meeting for SCAC, we’re going to start that in January, and I look forward that being a positive relationship as well.

2. What are some areas where you share a common vision with the union leadership team at your respective schools?

S.A.1-I think we share a common vision in almost every single area of education in the school, which is why I think this is been going well. I hope my vision is that which works for kids and teachers to promote teaching and learning. It seems like that is also the union’s vision.

3. What collaborative initiatives have you undertaken with the union leadership team?

S.A.1-I don’t think there have been any collaborative efforts. When teachers have had struggles and challenges we’ve worked together with those. When teachers have questions or concerns that rep comes with them, and we discuss it. Our former rep also talks to teachers, you may know
him. But there are a couple of issues that I’m looking forward to collaborating with him on: use of paper, looking at the schedule for next year, and things like that.

4. How does union-management collaboration influence policies at your school?
S.A.1-I read the contract, I don’t want to violate the contract. I’m aware of the contract. Outside of that, I make decisions that I think are best for teachers and students within the building.

5. What joint training have your administrative team received with the union?
S.A.1-I haven’t. In my current role, I haven’t received any. I assume some budget training is coming with LSAT, but I don’t know if that also includes the union. So, none to date.

6. What significant issues do you invite the union leadership team to be involved in at the pre-decision-making phase?
S.A.1-I did invite the building rep to discuss the paper issue, but I think once we start meeting with SCAC, there are a couple of common issues where I definitely want their opinion and support.

7. What are the anticipated outcomes of your collaborative initiatives at the local school level?
S.A.1-So, because the union to me is this third body, I don’t really of it as the union. I think we have people who work in this building. I’m an administrator/principal, we have teachers who have a union. My goal is for us to work together which might sound like immature or that’s not how life gets along, but I think my goal is not to violate anybody’s right, and I want if there’s a problem in the building for us to work together so that teachers don’t feel like someone’s violating their rights. But also, administration feels like you’re keeping the kids first, you get that this is supposed to be a collaborative relationship. I think we have to call them the union; they have to call us management or leadership, but like, how do we figure out a way for this to
work? Especially in this school that is so large, and we have new people that don’t know things, and veteran people who tell them things that are not necessarily true. Or, in any workplace the things that work in that workplace may or may not be in the contract. So, I guess my goal is to collaborate on a way that this can be a pleasant place for adults, so that it can be an effective place for kids.
Appendix N

Union Leader 1 Interview Transcription

Time of Interview: 4:30PM
Date: 12/21/2017
Place: Union conference room
Interviewer: Terence Ngwa

Name of interviewee:

1. Please tell me about your role as union president and what mandate you have from membership.

U.L.1-I see myself as a social justice, solution-driven leader. At the top of that list is educator. I will always be an educator, career educator, taught for 44 years. The mandate from members is that we as educators decide that we are experts on what works in teaching and learning, and because we are the experts, we got to claim our voice, our power as decision-makers, that we have got to decide that we’re going to be a part of the reform that is taking shape nationally, but especially here in our local school district. Not rely on others who are outside of our classrooms and schools to decide what works best for kids, and we got to agree that all children irrespective of their race, class, and gender should have access to the best quality public education possible. That has always been my mission as a teacher that all students are capable of learning. When I hear the word the achievement gap, it gives the impression that we have a gap because some students are not capable of learning as others are, but I’ve never believed that. I think it has a lot to do with the opportunities and access that kids have in schools and out of schools. So, closing the opportunity gap for children in our school district is a number one priority for me, and I will
like it to be a priority for all teachers. I believe that our membership, even though is growing in numbers, and is also growing in capacity, but not to the level which I want to see it. I would like to see the district’s teachers controlling the education front. The reform movement belongs to the teachers in this district, they are the ones that understand the need to collaborate with others particularly parents. And of course, we see parents as our most powerful allies because one thing I do is that we want the same thing for our students that parents want for their children. And that is our common connection.

2. What is your vision for labor-management collaboration?

U.L.1-To identify the areas of greatest concern, and the chancellor and I have met several times, but at our first meeting, we both established that the gap between the poorest and the most affluent students in the city was a priority for both of us. What has created that gap, we may not agree on all the things that created that, but we are going to start from where we agree. We both agree that that is major area of concern, and it should be a priority for both the union and the school district. When he’s indicated that one of his priorities was to have greater collaboration with the teachers’ union, that is an added bonus. We have not had the best relationship with previous school district leaders, and from what I can tell, they had preconceived notions of what the teachers’ union was. We have changed the image of the union over the past four years to be one that is more solution-driven, social justice, because we focus on all the issues that impact public education, teaching and learning. We focus on supports that teachers need in order to do their jobs well. We focus on those individual organizations and leaders that are responsible for providing that support. And we do understand that that is support that comes all the way from the federal government to our local leadership: our mayor, our deputy mayor, our council, the chancellor. We’ve got to kill the notion or explode the myth that accountability is only at the
local school level with teachers. What teachers do at the local school level in their classroom can only happen with the support that they get from other structures, and even though our school district is not a core school district we get funds. How those funds are distributed to schools, especially school that need funds the most, there are issues around that, that we really need to take a closer look at to determine whether or not the funding for our public-school system is really supporting the neediest students, or a lot of the funds are being utilized at the administrative levels. The union has for the last four years expressed the need to rethink how school budgets are distributed to schools, how principals are allowed to spend it, what they are spending it on, whether or not they are sending it on those individuals who work closely with them, and that is not happening. And of course, the union, because we are in schools every week, either I or our general vice president or our field reps, we engage with teachers on a daily basis, we meet with them every month, and of course we share information that we think is relevant to the profession, but also information that helps them to advocate for our quality teacher advocate for funds and resources for their schools, and also advocate for their profession.

3. What has been your relationship with school district since your time in office?
U.L.1-I began my time as president in 2014, and of course it started off with a very good relationship with the chancellor at the time. I actually knew her before she became deputy chancellor. She and I had done work together, we had collaborated with some common organizations that we were affiliated with (City Voice, a number of organizations), and of course, my role as president of the union, and her role as chancellor, we both saw an opportunity, since we had known each other in the past, and we basically shared what we consider common thinking about where the school district ought to go, and what we could do to level the playing field for kids from all parts of the city. She and I both agreed that there were inequities that
existed in the school district, and of course, I did learn in the middle of my four years as president that we parted ways when we took a deeper dive into the reasons why some of those inequities exist. I did examine what created the inequities? Poverty, housing, gentrification, Kaya was not as familiar as I was with those issues nor was she willing to have deeper discussions about those. I am always concerned when we shy away from deeper dialogue from issues of inequity because if we don’t have them, we end up just skirting the issue and not solving the problem. It is uncomfortable because we have changing demographics in the district where we have an influx of teachers who are quite different racially, ethnically, and socio-economically from the kids that they teach. In some cases, we have cultural clashes because of the lack of understanding between teachers who are coming into the district. In some cases, they are coming with their own pre-conceived notions about who the children are, and then in some cases teachers who are flexible enough to connect what they teach to the lives of their kids, who also understand that no matter how poor or how wealthy the students are, they all come to school with knowledge. What I discovered was, in many cases poor kids are sometimes characterized as kids who come with empty vessels; they have no knowledge; they have no values. Even if they are three or four grade levels behind, they still come to school with prior knowledge, and how do we tap into that connected to what we’re teaching and move them ahead, that takes a very good teacher and one who understands that you’ve got to respect differences between you and the kids that you teach. And between you and other people, period. What we don’t have is, we have shifting demographics, we have teachers, and not just in the district, all over the nation. When you look at the influx of immigrant students coming into this country from all over the world, not just from Latin countries, but coming from all over the world, and teachers who are quite different, who have never visited those parts of the world, there’s going to be cultural
misunderstanding, and there’s going to be cultural conflict. And that cultural conflict sometimes is going to shape what the assessment of that child is academically. You may have a child that is brilliant, but because there is cultural conflict between him and his teacher, he may be perceived as belligerent, he’s disruptive, he’s disrespectful, and you can think of them on those levels. I have been in the school system for 44 years at nine schools and I have learned lessons by observing teachers; learned lessons by observing myself, students, and how we came to label each other based on preconceived notions that we have, and those notions can sometimes overshadow our ability to connect with those students.

4. What are some changes that you have noticed with the hiring of a new Chancellor? U.L.1-One of the very first changes I noticed was that he saw a need to address school climate and the social side of education. He saw the need to focus more attention to social and emotional learning because a high percentage of our students come from communities in which they see and experience a lot of trauma. We have over 3,000 students who are coming to school from homeless shelters in the district, but people do not know that. So, the first thing I noticed was that he realized that there could be other indicators of school success that we should be thinking about other than just the test score. And I do hope that I am getting the right interpretation from him. When he decided to focus attention on social and emotional learning and on restorative justice, I saw something that was quite different in this chancellor that I had not learned before. For me, he signals that he is not going to simply ignore the effects of poverty on teaching and learning. And I got the sense that the previous administration wanted to act as if it didn’t matter about poverty, and it does. Teachers who teach students from high poverty communities realized that, no matter how … the students need additional support. If you have a student coming to school each day from a shelter or whether they are living under conditions that are simply not as
wholesome as, they are going to need additional support. They’re coming already with baggage, and then for us to saddle them with the same stressors that we put on all of the kids – testing. You know, it never occurred to me that immigrant students are under additional stress because they are trying to learn a language while learning content at the same time, and then on top of that they are dealing with the fears that’s brought on by DACA and an administration that is not immigrant-friendly. All of that basically contributes to a child’s ability to focus on learning, pay attention, and this chancellor seems to understand that. The others just felt that, it seems like very little attention was given to all the other challenges that kids face while coming to our schools. As yet they all have the same set of circumstances, and they don’t.

5. What does collaboration with the school district mean and look like to you? U.L.1-It will mean collaborating with the teachers’ union and teachers before decisions are made, not after they’ve been made, number one. It would mean local school advisory teams that are elected by parents and teachers, and not only do they advise the principal, but the recommendations coming from those teams are valued and utilized. It means that parents and teachers are greater partners, but more so than anything else the union and the school district leadership are meeting on a regular basis sitting down to examine issues, problems, challenges to seek solutions together, not for the school district to cite a problem, or the union to present a problem to the school district and they come up with what they think is a solution. But, to collaborate on a regular sustained basis where they are looking at problems as a way of intervening before they escalate into greater problems. So, respecting teachers’ voice, giving teachers more authority to run their schools, removing a lot of the road blocks that prevent teachers from doing that. Looking at the formal assessment for teachers and principals to determine if it is contributing to the problem. Even to assess whether or not it has actually
helped to improve school conditions. Our teacher evaluation is one that is used not only for
teachers, but principals, custodians, cafeteria paraprofessionals. And if it is a bad assessment
tool, all of the stakeholders that that tool is used to evaluate would be in the conversation about
whether its working, how it is working, if it has a damaging effect on school climate and morale,
and together decide what are the alternatives. And there are lots of alternatives, but I cannot ever
recall in the last 10 years where there has been a collaborative discussion between the school
district and the union on whether teacher evaluations and other reform strategies, which I
consider that to be, has actually had a positive effect on student achievement.

6. What significant issues is the union involved in at the pre-decision-making phase?

At this very time, the union, has launched four task forces to address one, to address the
academic achievement gap in math literacy. There are not a lot at this point, when you think
about it. The chancellor has been in place for less than a year. One of the decisions that I
recommended that the chancellor has agreed to consider implementing district-wide is the
Algebra Project. It was founded in the 1990s by Bob Moses, and of course the chancellor and I
talked about the Algebra Project as a possible tool for addressing the achievement gap in math
literacy in the district. And we met with him in Boston and here in the district. Since that time
the union has decided to make the focus of our annual shared vision conference to math literacy.
At this time, I would like more involvement by the school district, but I’m going to just accept
the support that he is offering. That agreement to consider the Algebra Project as a possible
solution to addressing the math achievement gap is a one step forward. I think what we do from
this point forward, and of course we’ve decided to focus our attention on math with the
committee with the conference, we want to meet with the chancellor in the next week or so, to let
him know what steps we’ve taken towards that, and to just bring him on board. I do believe that
the union is the one that’s going to take the lead on reform, and I seem to not believe, based on my experience in the school district for 48 years that the school district is going to do that. Most people expect that should be the case, but we are not willing to wait. I do believe that the chancellor is beginning to see the union as a viable partner, but also as an organization that is going to become his best and most powerful ally. And that we are also the ones that will provide the most effective reform strategies that are going to turn around the school district. Gaining some respect from the city council and policy makers has been helpful, and I do think that our position in the labor community is strong. How the chancellor perceives the union, some of that has to do with how others perceive the union. If the chancellor believes that we are respected by policy makers, the council members, the mayor and deputy mayor that shapes his thinking as to who we are as well, but his thinking about we are and his thinking about what we do to earn that opinion I think is going to be perfectly aligned. I want us to have substance and evidence that we are the ones that are going to be the movers and shakers in school reform.

7. How does union-management collaboration influence district policies?

U.L.1-When we think about where the district policies come from in the district, policies on teacher certification, policies on graduation, testing, the ESSA plan, how much weight do we give to measure school performance, how much weight do we give to test scores, they come from OSSE. Policies regarding teacher evaluation, some of those policies are grounded in the city’s Municipal Regulation, so our collaboration is observed by policy makers on the legislative side, mayor’s office, deputy mayor, OSSE. I believe that when they view us as a partner, that we have stronger influence. We may have policies that are put forward by city council that are counterproductive for schools, and we may have policies coming from OSSE that are too. If the union and the school district are perceived as a partner we have more authority to basically undo
bad policies than we would isolated. So, when the mayor asks me how the chancellor is, whenever I meet with policy makers, the council members, the first thing they usually ask me is “are you working along with the chancellor?” Obviously, that means something, and I can see why, because if we are perceived as one entity with greater authority and we’re speaking in voice about what we mean, we have more authority to change even city laws. For example, right now, the city law that says school nurses can have 20 hours per week, we partnered with the school district and with labor unions that we should have nurses 40 hours a week. And then we added parent groups to that partnership. All of a sudden, the petition that we sent out to all of these groups compiled, shook the council to say, “that’s a lot of people.” Parents, teachers, the school district. Principals that sent the petition, 40 hours for each school because it’s not healthy for us not to have a nurse at a school. So, the council passed that. Now we are asking the council members to consider looking at the regulation about teacher evaluation and principal evaluation. “Don’t you think that we should give teachers more authority to decide what the evaluation process should look like?” Two council members, and this would not have happened more than five years ago, I don’t think, who said to me that they are willing to amend that legislation. If we get the support, and of course it starts with a conversation with one policy maker who says, “I’m willing to entertain being the architect of amending a piece of legislation around teacher evaluation.” The collaboration is just far more powerful to have. When you think about it it’s almost like you have an army, and the more members you add to that army, the stronger you become. If the school district leaders, the teachers’ union, the members are perceived as one partner, its less likely that we can be taken down because right now there are other entities outside our school district that are impacting what happens to schools, and these are entities that are nor public education-friendly. The chancellor understands that, I understand that. Our first
conversation was about the extended year. So, when we talked about what he wanted, he told me why he wanted an extended year. I told him why I did not think it was going to yield the results that he was expecting. He told me again that based on the ESSA, the weight given to testing, what can happen is that our schools could be labeled as failures, closed, and given to charters, and he said he didn’t want that. And I said I didn’t want that either. So, we both know that that’s one thing that we have in common. But how we decide how we want to stop that from happening might be slightly different, but because we both agree that we don’t want any more of our schools to go into private schemes to charters, we can work out the details that we need to work out on the solution. So, it becomes easier with collaboration because knowing that he is an advocate of public schools of right and I’m a stronger advocate, I believe, of public schools of right, that helps me in knowing that whatever differences we might have about how to go about achieving the goal, we can iron those out. The big issue is, do we both agree on having a quality public school system of right, schools that cannot just cherry pick kids and toss away the ones that they don’t want, like charters?

8. How is collaboration beneficial to collective bargaining?

U.L.1-It would certainly have made negotiating our new contract much easier. Collaboration in contract negotiation would have meant, each party – the union and the school district understanding that the proposals coming from both sides, basically I believe that we would have started out with ground rules that said, we wanted to do interest-based bargaining. We wanted to bargain on what was best for schools, we were going to make that a priority. Collaboration basically would have had both parties in the room at every meeting, starting out by agreeing that in want in this contract, what’s best for schools. It would have been so much easier to negotiate terms and conditions for teachers and students if both parties agreed to that. Teachers would have
been talking, I can imagine teachers talking about learning conditions, understanding that that meant that they automatically would have had good teaching conditions. And management sitting on the other side saying, “I can see how that would help our schools.” It would have been a piece of cake. To negotiate a contract when there is collaboration, because collaboration breeds understanding, understanding both sides, and understanding number one is, we’re all working towards the same thing. The school district, leadership, and the union, we’re all working towards our students. We think about the end goal, the students that we are turning out to lead successful lives, to go to universities, entering career pathways in which they are successful and productive citizens, responsive, critical thinking analytical citizens. If we all agree that that’s what our goal is, once we all agree, everything else will be to support that. And it can’t be that far apart. So, collaboration would certainly create a much easier negotiations process.

9. What is the influence of collaboration on school improvement, teacher satisfaction and retention, and academic achievement?

U.L.1-Naturally if teachers are happy in their schools they are going to stay; if they are not, they want to leave. Collaboration between the union and management (school district leadership) would actually spread to the local schools, through the local school leaders on to teachers. So, what is practice at the upper ranks would actually be passed on to the schools. If you have top-down managers, you would have principals who make decisions the top-down way. They exclude their staff, they exclude their teachers, they exclude support staff, they exclude parents, and other stakeholders. And that’s a recipe for disaster. But when you have collaboration where teachers at each school and support staff feel respected by the principal, feel as if they are part of the decision-making, not in superficial ways, but in real ways. When they sit with their principal, when they make decisions on how their time is utilized, their planning time, their morning block
time, the scheduling of classes. When teachers feel respected and they are integral parts of the school community, they stay. They love what they do, they look forward to reporting to work, and when they’re not, when they are disrespected, when they feel like the principals undermine their ability to make decisions, when they feel like they are inundated with initiatives that go nowhere they want to leave. So, school climate is a huge factor in teacher turnover. School climate, I can usually determine from walking into a school building meeting with a group of teachers how healthy the school climate is based on the questions they ask.

10. What joint trainings has the union received with the school district?
U.L.1-We have a joint new teacher orientation. Every year we do the joint retirement for teachers who are considering or planning retirement. Recently we did the AFT collaborative in which the union and the school district sent representatives to work on common initiatives, and the most recent thing, the Public Education Leadership Program (PELP) at Harvard. For the first time in the history of the PELP has the school district participated at that institute along with the union leader, and for the first time in the history of the union have they and the school district participated in the CSI institute, which is held annually in New York for school districts who want to have greater collaboration with their unions. So, this is the Comprehensive School Improvement(CSI) institute, that’s what it’s called.

11. What kind of actions does your general membership endorse?
U.L.1-What kind of actions? Naturally they endorse actions that involve, let me just name a few. One of them is the Safe Our Schools initiative, and it’s generally focused on reclaiming our public schools of right. There are so many. The early childhood initiative is one that we recently launched about 7 to 8 months ago, which has taken off in a huge way, and it was started by teachers who felt that early childhood educators have been somewhat ignored in the past few
years by the union. So, we wanted to first of all find out from them what sort of support they want from the union and the school district, and in so doing, they have sort of organized their local chapter of early childhood educators, which had disappeared over the years. And they are hoping to set change policies around early childhood education. They meet once a month, sometimes twice, they are planning an early childhood institute, which we are hoping that the teachers’ union, we’ve had one discussion with the chancellor on co-sponsoring that institute. This is a year-long institute for all early childhood educators in the district. Basically, course that would enable early childhood educators to develop academically appropriate lessons and curriculum for early childhood. They feel that the curriculum that is currently being used in the school district is not developmentally appropriate for many of the schools, the kids that they teach, and they are coming up with their own ideas to plan curriculum and professional development to what early childhood educators need. So, that’s one, and the chancellor has not said no to co-sponsoring the institute, whose cost is almost $80,000. Another one is the ESL taskforce, and restorative justice. We were able to get the school district to release teachers from their schools to attend a restorative justice summit. The teacher all want the union to have a good relationship with the school district, but they don’t want it to be a conditional relationship where the union feels like it must comply with everything that the school district wants. No, they want a mutually respectful relationship, but also want the union to surface as an organization of power, with the capacity to change policy. At the same time, the ability to build relationships with the school district leadership, policy makers, State Board of Education. In so doing, remain an entity that is respected by those policymakers and by the school district leadership. So, teachers want to see a positive image of our organization, they want to see an organization that is not only respected by the school district, but they want to see one that is respected by the local
community. We had a poll done about the union, four years ago, and we’re going to take that poll again. It was a poll that was taken city-wide, not just among our members. It gave a sampling of people in every ward of the city. It was not as bad as I thought it would be, but even though we could have done a lot more to be a bit more visible in the community to change the image of the union, to build the capacity of the union, we have just started that process over the past four years under my leadership. I’m not bragging, but I consider myself to be a very progressive leader. I think that I have been in the school district long enough to study the shortcomings and disparities that exist to have an understanding of what creates those disparities. Not only in resources to schools, but in how schools are staffed.

12. In what other areas do you anticipate or wish collaboration will occur in the future? U.L.1-Around the need to return our students to our public schools. I am, as I said earlier, an advocate of public education, and one area that I’d love for us to collaborate on is a campaign to return students back to our public schools. The second is the community school which I think is a perfect model for addressing some of the inequities. I’d like for the school district and the union to expand on the community school model. It’s helpful to have a mayor who is already committed to doubling the number of community schools. I would like to see us collaborating on improving the 40 lowest performing schools, students that are on the bottom quartile on testing, to focus on those schools as community school models. Basically, getting the resources and funding that we need to convert those schools that are referred to as the 40-40 schools, to convert them to community schools with the resources that would allow us to implement the community school model with efficacy because a few of them are really not operating as such. They have community coordinators, but additional resources that they need, the partnerships are not there, and what I’d like to see is for the school district and the union to collaborate on converting the
lowest performing schools to community schools with the adequate resources to operate effectively.
Appendix O

Union Leader 2 Interview Transcript

Time of Interview: 3:45PM
Date: 12/29/2017
Place: Union conference room
Interviewer: Terence Ngwa

Initials and position of interviewee:

1. Tell me about your responsibilities as vice president and field representative.
U.L.2-One of my main responsibilities is to manage the other field reps with their interactions with all of our building reps in our various schools, manage the grievances that come up, basically interact the building reps and the members within the school. I also have a responsibility that normally in the past the General Vice President hasn’t had, but I handle all professional development for the union now. I also manage the office and the staff.

2. What is your relationship with the school district? (follow-up questions if possible)
U.L.2-I started with the school system in 1993 as a pre-k teacher, and moved around to various schools, then when I moved to Thompson ES that had a high ELL population, I realized that I didn’t have the skills necessary to work with students who were coming to school with other languages, and I was lucky that at that time GW University received a big grant, and through that grant they were allowing teachers to get their master’s degrees in Curriculum and Instruction with specialization in bilingual special education. So, I was able to go and get my masters from GW for free. I stayed at Thompson ES probably for another three years, then I moved to High. When my son was finishing high school, I realized that I wanted to get back to South East, so I
stopped working as an ELL teacher, and went back to working as a kindergarten teacher when I went back to savoy. I started my major involvement with the union ten years ago, when I became a union instructor for Beginning Reading Instruction. And I always tell people that signing up to be a union instructor changed my whole life and career along with going to graduate school, because it improved my practice and it gave me an opportunity to meet teachers from all over the city. After becoming a union instructor for Beginning reading Instruction, I then became an instructor for Strategy for Student success, and then after that I had a woman who was a facilitator for teacher leaders invite me to become a teacher leader. Again, that was another experience that changed my career. I became teacher leader, probably about four or five years ago, and I did my research as part of being a teacher leader on retention of teachers in affluent versus poor schools (poverty or free and reduced lunch). Again, that research further led me to be passionate about outcomes in education for children in the district. From becoming a teacher leader, I became a facilitator for the program, and just totally became even more involved with the union so that I spent just as much time at my school teaching as I spent here being involved with the union, especially with professional development and with recruiting and getting teachers to become involved in the teacher leaders program.

3. So now as GVP and Field Rep, what is your relationship with the school district?

U.L.2-Well, part of my job as a field rep is to make sure that, not only connecting with the building reps that are also trying to set up a connection with the principals and the administration at their schools. And also, admin, as the person that leads professional development for the union, because a lot of times we have our most success with the courses if we set up relationships with the principals or the administrators at the schools. In the beginning of the year, I always make it a point, especially if it’s a new leader in the school to introduce myself to the
administrator as well as if we have a new building rep. And try to let them know that if they ever have any questions or concerns, they can feel free to call me. I always try to let them know that we would love to have courses in their school, if they find that their teachers need support in any kind of way with professional development, we would be willing to come in and offer professional development for their teachers.

4. What is your vision for labor-management collaboration?

U.L.2-Well based on the fact that I worked under another chancellor for about ten years, I feel like there was a break-down with the union and the school district collaborating with each other, and working with each other with the understanding that if we worked together we would get better outcomes for our students. I think there was a breakdown in the last ten years. It’s us and them, but I feel like, with the leadership of our President, and this is her second term, she’s always pushed collaboration between the school district and the union, but now I feel like with a new chancellor I can see that, that’s possible. I’m going into schools now, and I might go into a school to meet with the principal about a serious issue that he might be having with a teacher, and in working out that issue, the conversation always turns to, “how can we work together to improve the professional development for the teachers, which then will enhance outcomes for kids?” I’m finding out that they are more open to that, and I’m finding out that when I go around, the administrators are more open to have courses in their schools. We have the Algebra, math project, and we have invited some teachers to participate in it, and normally even though teachers are participating in something that we’re doing it would just be something that we’re doing in isolation, but I’m finding that principals are more open to say “oh, what are you doing with this new project, and how can I support you?” and there’s even a willingness to get their students involved in it, get other teachers involved in it, and open up their schools so that, even
though it’s something that’s been proven yet is going to work, there is an openness to try something new to improve student performance that I haven’t seen before especially as somebody who’s been teaching in the district for 26 years. I found that the last ten years to me have basically been, us and them. I’ve been teaching professional development for ten years with the union, and I found like it was always hard to convince the principals that what we’re teaching is aligned to what the school district wants. Although they might be open to let you have the courses, they see it as something separate than what they have to do, or what the school district is promoting. And now I feel like now people are more open. I’m working with a principal right now who has told me, and I went to his school for something totally opposite, but by the time we finished speaking with each other, we’re now working with his teachers who are developing, to help them improve. We’re offering a course on the Foundations of Teaching and Learning, so we’re going to have two of our instructors come in, teach the course, and then we’re going to work together so that the union instructors, who are also retired, can come to the school during the day to support the teachers in what they’ve learned in the course. Normally, we would have just talked about it, but nothing would have happened, but we’re talking about it and making it happen as early as January. To me, that’s something new that we can talk about something and actually make it happen, and work together whereas normally to make something like that happen, we’d have to work on it for half a year before you would see any little movement in us working together.

5. What are some areas where you share a common vision with the leadership of the school district?

U.L.2-I think, teacher retention, that’s a big thing. Teacher retention and outcome for students, because there’s been a drop in the outcomes for our poorest students in the last ten years, and we
can’t take this “us versus them” mentality, because that’s not going to improve, and is not
definitely going to keep teachers here. It’s not just here in the district. We were losing teachers,
every year we’re welcoming between 400 and 700 new teachers, which means we’re basically
losing a quarter of our teaching staff every year. In particular, we were losing teachers in our
lowest performing schools, and we can’t improve outcomes if we keep having this revolving
door of teachers, and so, we have one think how we’re going to keep these teachers, and one of
the ways that we have to support them is professional development. You know we have these
great young people, and I tell people all the time as I go around to the different schools, these
folks are coming from different places and have experiences, and their educational backgrounds
are stronger than the educational background that I had when I first started teaching. So, it’s not
like they’re not capable, it’s just that they don’t have the support that they need from their
administrators, because the administrators have so many responsibilities that a lot of times,
supporting new teachers and their growth is the last this on the list. They want to, but they have
so many other things to do. They’re not getting the professional development they need to, and
they’re not putting the induction programs they need to say” hey, this is what you really need to
do to stay into teaching,” and then, we’re all over the place as far as what works for kids. Every
year we’re coming up with something new. We got LEAP, we have evaluation system, but the
evaluation system changes every year, we have EUREKA math, we have Chicago math, I’m not
even sure if we have a set Reading curriculum. We’re just all over the map as far as what we
think would help improve outcomes for kids.

6. How much collaboration takes place with the school district compared to arbitration
cases?
U.L.2-Now we’ve realized that we have too many cases. We have cases as far back as 2008, and now we’re getting ready to go into 2018. There’s a backlog, so there’s not enough hours during the day to get through these cases, so we’re starting to realize now that we have to work together to at least mediate some of these cases, and that if we (the union) win a case, it costs the city money to keep appealing cases that we’ve already won. That comes at the expense of taxpayers. I think with the help of the President, they’ve shined a light on what was going on in the past administration as far as grievances. It’s too early to tell. We are mediating a lot of cases, and we are trying to clear the table on stuff that occurred in the past, but I think we have to see what happens after chancellor Wilson has done a complete year. I think what people eventually have to do is realize that the evaluation system has to go, it’s not fair, and we’re going to keep having cases, and we’re going to keep losing teachers if we keep that subjective evaluation system. I’m hoping that’s what we’re going to get to at some point.

7. What joint training have you received with school district officials?
U.L.2-Last year we had joint training with LEAP where we worked with them to come in to get training on LEAP. This year we pushed to get involved with teacher evaluations, and we’ve gone to training that they had on the evaluation system. I brought union trainers in on teacher evaluation training, but my hope is that the school district will also come to our training on teacher evaluation, that hasn’t quite happened yet. Labor Management and Employee Relations has been very open to come to our Union Leadership Institutes to support and give information to our building reps, SCAC, and LSAT leaders. Other than that, there hasn’t really been any training that I can recall right now, where we worked together, where we’re invited to their training, and they are invited to our training.

8. What are some areas of collaboration that you anticipate or wish to occur in the future?
U.L.2-I’m excited about the Algebra Math Project, I’m excited about the fact that I feel like the chancellor is more willing to have our teachers attend training and professional development outside of the school district, I’m excited that I feel like more principals are inviting us to come into their schools for professional development, and to collaborate with them on professional development.

9. What are the anticipated outcomes of your collaborative initiatives?

U.L.2-I think to me the number one outcome will be seeing the product in our students. That our students will do well, and the decline that we’ve seen over the last ten years will stop, and you’ll see scores go up. And then after that, retention of teachers. We’re not keeping teachers here, and what scares me is the fact that I’ve been teaching here for 26 years, but I don’t think that right now people see this as a profession that you get better with over time, and that this is something that you only start to get to the peak of what you’re doing after you’ve been doing it eight, ten years. I think, in the past with past chancellors, they didn’t see this as a long-term career, like you would see a lawyer or a doctor. I tell everybody, who would want to go to a heart surgeon who only has three years of experience. If you want to get major heart surgery, you want to get someone who’s had years and years of experience. If you’re a lawyer or an attorney, they don’t send you out to do major cases by yourself. I’ve seen it in a courtroom where the senior attorney says, “here is our young attorney who just finished law school, and he’s going to be here to watch what I do.” We don’t see that in teaching. I think we’ve thrown away or dismissed our most valuable people in our profession because we think, if you get to the 15th, 16th, 20th, God forbid, 25th year, you’re no longer relevant. I’d like to see the profession have a mix of people. I think of diversity as well as age. Where we’re right now with the profession that has more young people than anything, and I appreciate having young people around because it helps me improve,
and stay young, but that’s not sustainable. We’re not supporting them, and a lot of them are leaving the profession. We need a diverse teaching staff.
Appendix P

District Leader 1 Interview Transcript

Time of Interview: 4:32PM

Date: 1/3/2018

Place: School district conference room

Interviewer: Terence Ngwa

Initials and position of interviewee:

1. Tell me about your responsibilities as deputy chief of labor and employee relations for the school district?

D.L.1-Sure, so, it’s pretty lengthy. I oversee all of our labor management employee relations programs. That involves everything from dealing with our unions, our labor partners, and down to individual employee grievances, so a gimmick of our schools as well as central office staff. My team also oversees Equal Employment Opportunity work, so EEO both at EEOC and human rights in the city as well as the process for ADA accommodations and our mandatory drug and alcohol testing. In addition to adverse actions and corrective actions and taking care of employees that have issues in schools and central office. So, it runs the gimmick of overseeing that work. There’s a team of seven employees. I also oversee work with our investigations team too. So, very busy.

2. What is your relationship with the teachers’ union?

D.L.1-I guess the best way to describe it is that they are another organization that we deal with as one of our labor partners. The school district is the government agency for public schools in the city, and the teachers’ union is the union that oversees our teachers.
3. What is your vision for labor-management collaboration?
D.L.1-You know, that’s a great question. We’re really working on our partnership, and coming together, there’s a lot that we can do when we join forces. Our goal is to resolve cases, and only fight about things that we really fundamentally disagree about. We’ve had a lot of progress in coming together on new initiatives, we just finished our most recent labor contract. I think, our goal internally from our leadership is to formulate a better relationship with all of our labor unions because we have just more than the union.

4. What are some areas where you share a common vision with the leadership of the union?
D.L.1-I think we actually agree on a lot more than we disagree on, so that will take a longtime to really providing quality education to children in the city. We are all here so that every child that comes through school at the school district gets the best education, services, guidance, and leadership that they can, and so that is something that guides both of our work. You know, the union does it from an outside stance to handle their piece, and we handle it internally, and a lot of times we can come together and do things together, which is great. But, it’s always coming back to have to serve kids.

5. How much collaboration takes place with the union compared to arbitration cases?
D.L.1-I don’t know whether I can compare them, because it’s really different things. In my experience collaboration is something we come to together. We go to arbitration and litigation when there is something we don’t fundamentally agree on. And usually they involve individual employees, I couldn’t really get into the litigation piece, it’s really not an either/or, it’s situational.

6. What joint training have you received with the union?
D.L.1-We haven’t done training together recently. In my previous position, I actually served as an attorney for the school district, and there was a labor-management training to the event they did in 2013 that all of our partners were invited to across the city, so it’s lots of interesting stuff. Since that time, we have sent delegations to conferences together. The school district invited the union President to join; the union President invited the school district, our folks to come to programs with her, all kinds of great stuff internally. I myself have also done trainings for the union earlier this school year in a weekend training they did for their staff and field representatives, and people that were active in the union, so I presented at that training.

7. What are some areas of collaboration that you anticipate or wish to occur in the future?
D.L.1-I don’t know about things that aren’t currently happening, but our goals we’ve actually talked about together are to resolve grievances at the lowest levels possible, and also, we threw our backlog of older cases. Both parties have identified cases older than a certain point that they would like to see resolved, and we mutually decided that something we were interested in investigating moving forward, and figuring out the best way to do that both from the union stance and our stance so we can get those things done.

8. What is the district’s position on collaborative partnership with the union?
D.L.1-I think we’re making progress, we’re showing great strides. I think the best collaborative partnership we just saw is our recent contract, that we were all so excited, all kinds of press and publications, and just really thrilled that we were able to come together and resolve that contract after several years of not having one. It showed great leadership from the school district and the union in coming together. It was a really exciting moment.

9. What are the anticipated outcomes of your collaborative initiatives?
D.L.1-I think our goal is always to work together to find common ground. So, we implemented a new program through the new contract called DC STAR, which will allow individual school leaders and school groups through the administration and teachers to come together to resolve problems, so things like that, that allow us to have our schools do good work, and make sure the kids are learning, achieving, and seeing growth. We’re also taking care of their social emotional needs, and that’s always going to be at the forefront of how we can collaborate, and how are resources can best be used together.
Appendix Q

Individual Teacher Interview Transcript

Time of Interview: 4:45PM
Date: 1/5/2018
Place: Coffee Shop
Interviewer: Terence Ngwa

Initials and position of interviewees: L.F., School Chapter Advisory Committee (SCAC) member

Elementary School Building Representative: N/A
Middle School Building Representative: N/A
High School SCAC Member:

1. What is your relationship with the administrative leadership team at your school, as a union Rep.?

T.6-I am not the rep this year; I am just one of the SCAC team members, but my relationship with admin is pretty good at my school. We’ve been pretty stable the past couple of years, so they’ve gotten to know me, and know that I can be pretty demanding, but they also know that we are on the same team and the same page. Even if we argue or don’t see eye to eye, we both want what’s best for the kids. It’s usually pretty respectful, and I don’t have any problems with them, and I’m able to bring my problems to them. They don’t always do something about them, but they would listen and don’t retaliate, so it’s not too bad for this city.

2. What are some areas where you share a common vision with the administrative leadership team at your respective schools?
3. What collaborative initiatives have you undertaken with the administrative leadership team at your schools?

T.6-I don’t know if we really collaborated. I mean, we work together, so like, we meet with them as a SCAC team to talk about issues that we see in the building. I find my admin as very willing to let us do what we want. I did a program that was about education administration leadership, and I’ve done a lot of projects for different classes. I one year I did the master schedule, the kind of just let you do what you want, like you give them an idea, and it gives the impression that they’re not going to work any harder or have a benefit to them, they’re pretty open. They are open to people taking leadership roles if it doesn’t create more work for them. If it makes more work for them, there seem to be more conversation about it.

4. What is your involvement in decision-making?

T.6-I don’t know, it often feels like not really. It’s usually much more like they make a decision, and then we react to that decision. But’ we’ve found some moderate to low success with them trying to change the decision, but a lot of times a lot of damage has already been done. It’s been frustrating with them trying to come to us first, and to talk to us before they roll something out to everybody. Not a lot of success on the front end; it’s usually more a lot reactionary, but they’re pretty open to feedback in the sense like if the thing that has been announced is not good, and a lot of people have problems with it right away, they would readjust it if it’s possible to still meet their goal. If you present it to them like, we will follow the school district idea, but here’s a smarter way to do it, they’re pretty open to that,
especially again like if we’re doing more of the heavy lifting to make it easier, and they don’t have to do as much. They’ve been a few times where the principal would warn us that he’s getting an idea that the school district is going to ask them to do that he knew we weren’t going to like, or he knew was going to go against the contract. When that happens, and he gets kind of an idea beforehand, then we do try to work together. Like the lesson plan stuff, he knew that our assistant superintendent wanted him to collect them, and knew that we do not do that at our school, we don’t turn in lesson plans, that goes against the contract, and several of us were vocal about it, but he kind of warned us, and asked what we could do to compromise. We managed from keeping them from doing anything at all. So, there’ve been a few times when they’ve come to us when they knew it was going to be a problem in advance, and they kind of tried to sweet talk us into making a deal, but we usually don’t make deals if it’s going to violate the contract.

5. In your opinion, what is the influence of collaboration on school improvement, teacher satisfaction and retention, and academic achievement at your school?

T.6-I think it’s really important. I think that if teachers are part of the decision-making process from the beginning to the middle, and the end, doing reflection, and the reevaluation, and changing it in the future, it builds more buy-in. If makes people go above and beyond to fulfill the needs of the school, it leads to greater retention, mainly because you can problem-solve before it becomes a problem, people getting burned out, getting upset, or getting in trouble. A lot of times administrator forget how much time something that sounds small and easy can take, and if they don’t talk to us first, maybe they don’t realize that something is putting a huge burden and stress on people, and that can cause people to look elsewhere. So, I
think the more that everyone can work together, to meet the goals and initiatives of the
district and to work with our kids, then, the better the school runs.

6. As former building rep or member of SCAC, what joint training, if any, have you
received with the administrative leadership team?

T.6-I don’t think we’ve received any joint training. They’ve been like, I won’t call it a
training. There was an LSAT meeting where different wards came together, and it was the
admin and LSAT team sitting at table going through exercises that the school district was
putting forward. They did that once or twice, but I wouldn’t really call that a training
especially as it was really close to when the deadline was going to be, so it wasn’t like we
had a lot of time to use to process what they were telling us anyways.

7. If you were to work collaboratively together presumably, what anticipated outcomes do
you think would come out at the local school level?

T.6-Part of the challenge that I think our school is facing is that we don’t actually have a lot
of say on our building, even our own admin team doesn’t have that much say over a lot of
stuff that happens in that building. The assistant superintendent and central office come with
too many initiatives and too many demands. The budget, which is one area where we’re
supposed to collaborate, our school usually doesn’t have a lot of wiggle room with the budget
either because it’s getting cut or the central office has already decided how we’re going to
have to spend that money, or they’ve picked our STEM program for us, and they told us we
didn’t have a choice on that. So, even if our school is doing its best on collaboration, which is
not, but even if it was, unless central office is also collaborating with the local schools, right
now, I don’t think there would be much of a difference because we just don’t have much
autonomy as a local school to do things we want to do. There is little wiggle room, but in
terms of the big-ticket points that tend to stress people out, and cause burn-out in teachers, that’s not up to our local school. And while we can try to mitigate some of the problems, which I think we do try as a building and collaboration would be a better approach, it still won’t take away the bigger problems which are being caused by our central authority.
Appendix R

School Administrator 2 Interview Transcript

Time of Interview: 4:00PM
Date: 1/16/18
Place: Principal’s office
Interviewer: Terence Ngwa
High School Principal:

Questions

1. What is your relationship with the union leadership team at your school?

S.A.2-First, I would say coming from another state where I spent, this is my 20th year in education, and coming from Virginia, there is no union. Virginia is a Right to Work State, and so coming here, dealing with the union is very different. What I thought was important as it relates to the building rep is to have a strong rapport. My first building rep was D.P. I said, “look, I’m new to this union thing, talk to me about it”. And so, building a relationship with her and working on her on like, if I get something wrong, just pull me aside, help me. So always having a very very strong working relationship. I went from Ms. P to E.B. to M.B. who I have now.so always having a very open-door relationship with my building representative. Even if you reached out to our filed rep C.M. he would say we have a wonderful relationship. In fact, he emails me frequently to say, “hey are you doing okay R?” I think that comes from me building the rapport to ensure that if something is going on in my building, I would prefer that we handle it here because once it gets out it kind of blows up. I think there is strength in having a strong relationship both with your building representative as well as your field rep. And I can even go
on to say now that L. and I have had the opportunity to study together at Harvard for a week, she
and I now have a strong rapport, and I think that is going to be very helpful to me and to the
school.

2. What are some areas where you share a common vision with the union leadership
team at your school?

S.A.2-I would say sharing a common vision around always putting the children first. That is
something every union rep has said. How do we make sure we are looking at budget, how do we
make sure when we are looking at the needs of the building, that students are at the center of the
work that we do? I would say that’s the strongest area where I am in strong agreement with the
union, and that is, let’s do what’s best for children, and let’s put children first.

3. What collaborative initiatives have you undertaken with the union leadership team?

S.A.2-Can you give me an example of what you mean by collaboration?

Researcher – The things that you have done together, you mentioned that you and L. went to the
PELP, for example, things that you have worked on together to benefit kids.

S.A.2-I would say, L. and I were selected by the Chancellor to go with him to Harvard to work
on a problem of practice for the school district, and I think what was good about that was you
had multiple perspectives. I brought the school leader perspective, and L. brought the teachers’
perspective. I can’t think of anything other than always having a very open door. When the union
wants to come in and meet with teachers, I’ve never been resistant to that or pushed back, or say
“where’s your building user agreement, or why are you coming into the building?” I’ve always
been “you all want to come let me find you a space.” So just always being very welcoming. But,
in terms of partnership I think one additional example would be this past Friday. Mr. M.E. my
math teacher, the union leader reached out to me and said, “hey we want to start this Algebra
initiative with some schools in New York” and so she and I collaborated, and as a result Mr. E. the math teacher was able to go to New York and spend the day. Today was my first day to talk to him about that, but today was hectic. And so, I will have to get with him to see what he learned, I know he sent me a text, and he said it was an awesome experience, and I just need to probe more. But I think that is a good example of the union saying, what are some resources that we can provide to schools, and we would pay for your teacher to go. So that was powerful.

4. How does union-management collaboration influence policies at your school?
S.A.2-I think it has an influence. One of the things I tried to do, I’ll use the example of the CSC and CP which can be a very hot button issue for a lot of teachers. And so, what I’d like to do is, at the end of this year, I will go ahead and start making revisions for the CSC rubric for the next school year. But I will invite my union rep to come in and look at what I’m doing, and to also share back with the constituents which are the teachers. Like, “what are your thoughts?” Whenever I’m looking at policies and procedures that may be a hot button issue such as the CSC and CP I always consult with my building rep to go back, and then get feedback around what others may think about what I’m doing. It cuts down on, I’m not a principal who gets a lot of grievances and all that. This year, I’ve had zero, and most years (this is my 6th year) I had maybe one, and the person who tends to do it tends to be the same lady every year. But outside of her, I pretty much have zero.

5. In your opinion, what is the influence of collaboration on school improvement, teacher satisfaction and retention, and academic achievement?
S.A.2-It’s all correlated, it all goes together. If you don’t collaborate with people, people don’t feel like they are part of the decision-making process, hence they resign, they leave, they don’t come back. An unhappy teacher makes an unhappy student because, “I’m being taught by
someone who really doesn’t want to be here or is disgruntled or unhappy.” I think there is a trickle-down effect to students. When teachers feel like it’s an “us versus them” mentality, that the principal is over there and we’re over here, and collaboration doesn’t exist, that’s where you find very low student achievement. I think where you see collaboration, where you see trust in the relationship, I think that is where you see high student achievement.

6. What joint training has your administrative team received with the union?
S.A.2-We haven’t done joint training with SCAC; we’ve done joint training with LSAT and it went well. It was learning about the budget process, sitting in on webinars that were offered about the budget process just so that everyone was on the same accord around how we were to approach the budget season.

7. What is the involvement of the union in decision-making at your school?
S.A.2-Again, very high involvement. One of the things that has been important to me is that I like to ask numbers. There are 86 teachers in my building. When the union says, “teachers are feeling this way”, how many teachers are we talking about? Because to be in a building with 86 teachers, 10 teachers saying something versus 50 saying something has a very different meaning. And so, I tend to push a little bit more around how many people are feeling this way? Because if it is a very small segment, then I approach that differently that if it were half you staff or over half of your staff is feeling this particular way.

8. What are some short-term or long-term commitments to working together on any issues?
S.A.2-I think always increased student achievement is important; valuing teacher retention. Last year was the last year during my tenure that I lost a large majority, not large majority but a good majority. I want to say at least 30% of my teachers last year left, and that really hurt because in
the past I would say probably 15-16% of teachers didn’t come back, so that was low. And so how do I make sure that I retain top quality talent and making sure that I work with the union, where people are disgruntled and unhappy that I’m addressing that. Being proactive. Like if I hear now that people are going to leave because of XYZ, how can I work with the union rep to make sure that teachers do stay and that we work around whatever concerns that they may have.
Appendix S

School Administrator 3 Interview Transcript

Time of Interview: 6:05PM
Date: 1/19/18
Place: UFT Conference room
Interviewer: Terence Ngwa
Elementary School Principal:

Questions

1. What is your relationship with the union leadership team at your school?

S.A.3-I would say my relationship with the union is strong. We have a functioning SCAC, a functioning LSAT, we have building representation, and we meet to follow what is outlined in the contract established by the union. But just the relationship that I have with teachers in the building overall, a lot of the stuff really doesn’t go to the level where you really have to use the contract, because we have shared leadership, just open-door policies where teachers are able to voice their concerns and express how they feel.

2. What are some areas where you share a common vision with the union leadership team at your school?

S.A.3-One thing I would say is that I believe that what is good for teachers is also good for students. I do believe that there should be a joint partnership between union and management to ensure that we do what is in the best interest of children and maximize student potentials.

3. What collaborative initiatives have you undertaken with the union leadership team?
S.A.3-Well, this initiative here. Coming to the CSI conference as well as attending their conference that they have with school leaders. Also, I was a teacher under the union as well as an executive board member, I taught professional development for the union. So, my relationship started prior to me becoming a building administrator.

4. How does union-management collaboration influence policies at your school?
S.A.3-Whenever I have a decision that I want to make about the school, I involve the members of the union, my SCAC and LSAT to give input so that we could determine what’s in the best interest of the school. Even though we know that principals usually have the final say in decision-making, but I use a collaborative approach where we come together to decide what’s in the best interest given the parameters that we may have at the district level.

5. In your opinion, what is the influence of collaboration on school improvement, teacher satisfaction and retention, and academic achievement?
S.A.3-I believe that it’s impossible to improve a school without collaborating with teachers because teachers must have the buy-in, and as the leader of the building, you may not know what exactly teachers need, and if you don’t have their input you may make the wrong decisions as it leads to improvement efforts. So, I do believe in collaborating with teachers. I think that, that has an impact on just the high retention that I have in my school. Teachers pretty much stay for a long time. We have teachers who were students, teachers who work there for 30 years and retire, teachers who bring their children to go to school there. So, I think that because they feel ownership in the school and the school belongs to them, that output that the school receives in terms of what they are willing to do is greater than maybe in some other places. Collaboration translates into student achievement at our particular school because, like we were one of the few schools to have double digit gains in both Reading and ELA, we were the only school to close
the achievement gap between our special education and general education population in math in the district. It helps with student satisfaction. 98% of our students think that they love coming to school, and that they would recommend their school to someone else, so I think that it has an impact on the overall culture and climate at the school which impacts academic achievement. Students do well academically when they are in environments that they feel supported and comes as a result of teachers feeling supported.

6. What joint training has your administrative team received with the union?
S.A.3-The joint training that my team has received, other than attending the conference, the joint vision conference, I think that’s it.

7. What is the involvement of the union in decision-making at your school?
S.A.3-Already answered!

8. What are the anticipated outcomes of collaborative initiatives at the local school level?
S.A.-3-If there were perfect collaboration with the union, the outcomes would be increased student achievement, an increase in teacher satisfaction, what other gains? I think a true environment that fosters collaboration in that sense improves principal retention. So, retention all the way around, and that’s all that sums up.
District Leader 2 Interview Transcript

Time of Interview: 8:30 AM
Date: 02/12/18
Place: School district conference room
Interviewer: Terence Ngwa

Questions:

1. Tell me about your role as chancellor of the school district especially as relates to teachers.

D.L.2-Well, my role is the chancellor of the school district which basically means I’m responsible for the stewardship of the district, ensuring that things are aligned with our strategic plan, that we position our schools to function the way that they are supposed to function, providing the quality education that they are supposed to provide and making sure that young people get the education that they deserve. I officially report up through the mayor’s office and I enjoy the work that I do.

2. What is your relationship with the teachers’ union?

D.L.2-I think from my perspective, that relationship is good. I think that it’s important to try to maintain professional relationships with the union and that includes talking directly with the union president. When there are opportunities for me to work directly to represent the district personally in activities where there’s opportunities for us to collaborate, I try to do that and then when I think that there are opportunities to collaborate that don’t necessarily involve me,
involving opportunities where the union or teachers specifically have ideas around improving work here in the district, that I make district leaders available and try to encourage them to be part of those opportunities as well.

3. From your perspective, what are some areas where you believe teacher voice will help you achieve your vision for the school system?

D.L.2-In general, I believe that teacher voice is important throughout the entirety of our work. I think primarily teachers spend the most of their time in their schools. I think it is important that teacher leaders, teachers specifically have opportunities to inform the work that happens at their schools specifically the comprehensive school plans that schools establish. There is a Local School Advisory Team, I would expect that there are teacher leaders on that team, schools have Academic Leadership Teams thinking of the academic direction of their schools, I would expect that teacher leaders be part of that work, and I think that principals and assistant principals are regularly communicating with their teachers as a whole. I think that’s extremely important. That means meeting regularly, from my perspective, with the building rep. I think having a regularly scheduled meeting at least once a month to make sure that if there are any issues of importance, that they are practically talking about those things and trying to come up with solution. I also think that regularly communicating with your teachers at least once a week from the building perspective is extremely important. It is important that principals and assistant principals get out into the school and talk regularly with their teachers and create office hours just for people to express opinions. Beyond that, I think that when it comes time to rolling out our curriculum, I think that teacher voice is extremely important there. I think when it comes time to thinking of our formative and summative assessments, those that we get some say over, I think it’s important to have teacher voice there. I think in terms of the strategic plan, I have a teacher cabinet. They
are very important to me and how I think about things, hearing directly from them. Finally, I do faculty meetings because I want to hear directly from teachers and staff. If you’re in those meetings, its fifteen minutes where I’m sharing something, but 45 minutes of that time, it’s either people telling me what’s going well in their schools, celebrations, or just open Q&A. We’ll talk about anything that teachers raise. That’s important because I get to hear directly, it’s an opportunity where people can, so long as they are respectfully, as they always are. Actually, I can’t think of anytime when they haven’t been since I’ve been here. People can ask me anything.

4. What directives are you providing to school leaders on collaboration at the local school level?

D.L.2-Everything that I just said. I have said to school principals that those are the types of things that they should be doing. Everything that I just mentioned, I’ve shared with school leaders.

5. What is your overall vision for labor-management collaboration? Where do you want that to go?

D.L.2-I would like to be in a position where we are not at odds over things that we could find common ground on. I just think that it’s extremely important whenever possible to have the highest standards. I think it should be hard to be a teacher in the school district. I think that once you’re a teacher in the school district, it’s in our best interest to help you succeed as a teacher. I think that’s extremely important. The overwhelming majority of teachers that I’ve come in contact with are tremendous professionals who work really hard. They do a great job and I think it’s in the best of our interest to keep them. My goal and hope will be that we’ll be able to work together to figure that out. The other thing that I hope we’d be able to figure out together, that’s again most of the time is working directly with school leadership, but I also think it’s working
with our chief of teaching and learning, our chief of equity, deputy chancellors to make sure that we are working towards closing the achievement gap. For me, the achievement gap shows up in a few places. It is closing the differences in achievement in terms of PARCC assessment. That is certainly important both in terms of the kids that are getting 4s and 5s, but essentially reducing and eliminating the large number of the kids in the district who are scoring 1s and 2s, which I don’t think there is any reason why we should allow that. I think we should be working closely on that. Another thing that I think in terms of the achievement gap is making sure that all our students are doing well on the SAT, that they are doing well on their AP courses, that we have more and more kids graduating with college credit, certifications, credentials. Those things are clearly important because not every kid is going to test well, but if a kid can graduate with a CTE certification they are career ready, they are ready to go. I’m looking for collaboration along those lines. Also making sure that as we are trying to figure out how to transform our high schools, so they are relevant to our young people as much as possible, and we need to improve our attendance rate, I think that’s an opportunity to collaborate. Thinking of how we can do that together, I don’t think there is a one size solution, but I think that most if the work happens at the individual school level and I think there are some opportunities there.

6. In what ways has the union reached to you for collaboration on any issues?

D.L.2-Mostly it’s been when I’ve met with the union President and she shared some ideas and immediately I always followed up with my deputy chancellor Dr. L. or I followed up with LMER. I’ve also connected our chief equity officer B.E. with the union. The primary area of interest recently has been related to the issues that I mentioned to you like the achievement gap, but also work related to supporting developing teachers. I think that was a big thing. I know that we had teams go to some professional development together, go to some conferences together. I
understand that’s the first or at least the first in a long time. For me that’s the type of stuff we should be doing. We should be sending leaders together, learning, thinking, and planning together, and then when we roll out ideas at some level, the union should feel like they informed it. It doesn’t mean that they did everything, it just means that they can see how the input provided was respected.

7. How does union-management collaboration influence district policies?

D.L.2 - What I would say is, I try to hear the ideas that come back up through the various opportunities for collaboration, and then where we can do what is being asked, then we do it. I think it’s really that simple, so it has influence. I think that for me whether it’s the teachers’ union, another union, or whether it’s a group of parents or students, we try to get all that input and use it to determine what we do. I can tell you, when I’ve come back from a faculty meeting and people are regularly saying the same thing, then I share that. As a matter of fact, when there’s an issue I share it immediately to the person that raised it and say “hey, the teacher just told me this. I understand you guys are saying this, but this group of teachers just said something different. So, you guys need to go over there and figure it out because ultimately their job has to be easier.” That’s the whole idea. The work is hard, but our job is engaging our best effort to try to make hard work easier. The reason I say the job is hard is because we’re trying to get young people who have free will to do what they are supposed to do and work to their fullest potential and you’re trying to do it as part of a collaborative team, working toward one goal toward people work, and people have opinions and all that. Our job when we hear ideas from teachers, when we hear ideas from various groups that we use them to improve. Let me give you some specifics. Say we’re going to roll out a new curriculum or improve our advance placement program which is something I’m saying to our team, I’m not pleased with where we are with our
AP, it needs to be much stronger. What I also say is, but I’ve been in several classrooms where teachers are …..(inaudible) so whatever you’re doing, you need to involve them. They need to come together. We need to bring them in in together and have them help us create some commonality across the entire district as to what should be happening at every school. Why is that important? Well, the expertise clearly exists in the district. We need to leverage it and make sure that that expertise benefits everybody. That’s the type of things that I do behind the scenes and I will continue to.

8. You just signed a contract with the union recently. How is collaboration beneficial to collective bargaining?

D.L.2-My approach to that was meeting with the union President and agreeing to having regular conversations and trying to have win-wins. And that’s exactly my mojo that I used with her. I said, “I need to understand the core. What is the issue, because five years is a long time and I just believe it’s in our best interest to have deals with our teachers?” Does it mean we can always do what the other wants? But I generally feel like you can’t try to position your teachers to feel like they’re losing and you’re winning, and then vice versa. That was the approach. When I came to understand, I spoke at the conference last year, that was powerful for me. It wasn’t just the speaking, it was the time after the speaking when I was able to talk to individual teachers. I came back here and immediately that next meeting, what I said to my folks is “it’s clear to me what our teachers are asking for now. They asked what and I said “respect.” It’s that, it’s a voice. People and teachers need to feel respected, and I agree with them. And so, respect isn’t too much to ask for. The ability to have your opinion reflected in some of the decisions, that makes sense. Feeling like a deal can be reached in terms of pay when the improvements are happening. We are improving as a school district. The people who are helping drive that improvement spend
a lot of time in classrooms with kids, and so it can be both ways. It can’t be that we have improvements, but we can’t have a deal done in five years. If we have improvement, we need those people in classrooms so that we are great. We have the next five years and we need to do even more. I can’t have them thinking that we’re asking them to lose. That’s the approach that I took. For me I tried to translate that to the city administrator and the mayor’s team to say ‘Oh, I don’t think that the teachers are being unreasonable. I just think that they feel like they need to be respected and if we can get to the core and block out the other noise and just focus on that, I think we’ll get a deal.” That’s what we tried to do.

9. What is the influence of collaboration on school improvement, teacher satisfaction and retention, and academic achievement?

D.L.2-I think collaboration is big in all those things. Schools don’t improve absent all those things. I went through all those ways in which they are collaborating. We’re working on something right now that we’ll be able to roll out as part of our strategic plan. How do schools get to make more decisions at the local level versus the district level? It’s in a framework; it’s in a decision-making framework. One of the things that I look at that will be a component of it is distributed leadership. The degree to which in the schools there are structures where decisions are made collectively, where they agree on a plan, principals, teacher leaders, and they communicate and then they follow up and check on the things they say they’re going to do. I gain confidence when I see those structures in schools. I lose confidence when I see decisions made in vacuums. Those schools where decisions are made that way and they’re collaborative and they are doing things well, they should be making more decisions absent district involvement. And those schools where they don’t do that, then we should be more involved. We need to incent the right thing. For me, what I’m thinking about is how we incent collaboration.
The same is student achievement. Why do I care about the school improvement? It’s the same recipe for student achievement. If I walk into a classroom and I see one set of strategies and I walk into another classroom and see another set of strategies, that tells me that the adults haven’t come together and agreed on the approach. And that’s wrong. I could see three individual teachers all teaching well, but for the individual kid that has to move between those classes particularly the kids that do not do well in school, that’s a problem. The school needs to be on the same page in terms of what they’re doing. Teachers need to come together and that only happens through collaborative conversations between teachers collaborating with each other and school leaders (principals, assistant principals, coaches) all being in spaces and agreeing “what is our collective approach? What are kids going to consistently find happening from one class to another?” You don’t have one set of ways that we teach kids to take notes and then you going to teach another set of ways. You don’t come in and expect kids to come and allow kids to put their heads down and check out, and then in my class they’re expected to work in collaborative groups and so on and so forth. That’s bad for kids. I’m looking for that collaborative approach and when I don’t see it, I raise it with principals on those drop-in visits. “Hey, I went into this classroom; I saw four people working hard, but it looked different in every classroom. What is your approach here?” and then they will tell me, and I will ask, “how do your teachers know that? Can you show me some documentation, some evidence where you guys have come together and agreed on the way you’re going to approach it?” And I’ll normally say, when the leader struggles with that, I’ll say “See, you just can’t tell them. As a principal, I will say, we all need to be on the same page. We have to be aligned in our approach and that’s a none-negotiable for me. We need to come together and figure out what that should look like. We have to figure that part out together.” That’s what I’m looking to see in all of our schools. Our job from that district level is
to try to help you understand ways in which schools do that, different strategies that you could choose, research-based curriculum that type of thing, but the curriculum, you know, is just one piece of the work. You got to align collaboration, you have to have a clear set of goals and strategies and then you got to come together regularly and iterate. You got to adjust because no one gets a ride during the first meeting. You have to have a structure where you are regularly having these conversations.

10. Let me shift focus a little bit to training. What joint training has the school district received with the union?

D.L.2-I’m going to be honest with you. I’m not as close to that. It’s possible so I won’t be able to speak in detail about that, but I think a better way to approach that will be with Dr. L. and chief E. I will say one of the reasons why I wanted to connect chief E. and Dr. L with the union is so that we were doing more things together particularly as related to supporting developing teachers. So, when you talk about teacher retention which was part of the last question, we don’t have a problem with retention of effective and highly effective teachers. We keep 90-92% of the teachers. Our issue is early career teachers and keeping a high percentage of teachers who are in their first five years in helping them get to the second five years, and then also making sure that when teachers are developing that we have a high success rate of helping them become effective and highly effective in three years. That to me, and I think we are in the 60% range or something like that. I think we can get to over 90% and that’s where that collaboration comes in, and so the union President mentioned that. I know when I’ve met with groups of teachers even most recently it was mentioned and when I came here I shared with our team. Again, I know that you went to the professional development together. Chief E. came back very enthusiastic about the opportunities and I think that over the next three to four years I think we’ll get really good at it of
we can avoid the temptation that will be created. See what happens nationally in urban districts is a strong effort to try to get one side to point the finger at the other side and I reject that. I know I get labeled as a reformer; I consider myself as a transformer. My issue is on doing what is best for kids and its clear to me that the only way that we’re going to get there is in terms of our kids getting a great education through us working together. That’s what I believe.

11. What are some areas of collaboration that you anticipate or wish to occur in the future?
D.L.2-I want to collaborate on how to have a longer school year and what that time should look like ads what the school day should look like. I want to collaborate on how we help teachers pursue career advancement. I want to see more teachers get master’s degrees and advanced degrees in their subject areas. Why? Because they’ll be better teachers, they’ll be better leaders. I want to collaborate on how we create leadership pipelines for teachers who stay in the classroom, not just those who want to be principals and assistant principals. I think it’s a weakness that the only way that you can gain in stature is if you leave the classroom. We know that the top countries internationally they have these very structures. I like to partner with the union to make sure we have them as well. What does a teacher leader mean? What does a highly effective teacher mean? And what are the various distinguishing characteristics we should have for teacher leaders? I don’t know, but I think those are conversations that we should have and begin to think about how that looks like. Those are some areas I am interested in collaborating on. I think all those benefit student achievement, I think all those benefit teacher development. You know where you are in your first five years as a teacher coming in in terms of how you think of your career often times is different from your second five years and your third five years. And so, what are some of those distinguishing characteristics that we have? Beyond money, also title, also responsibility, because people, that’s really what they want. They want responsibility, they
want title, because the title bestows responsibility and that all means respect. And I think that
that’s worth figuring out.

Thank you very much. It’s been a great honor.