

A History of Collaborating to Serve Our Students

In 1997, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) and the *Montgomery County Education Association* (MCEA) began using **Interest-Based Bargaining** (IBB) in their bilateral contract negotiations. IBB asks the parties to place agreement on interests at the top of the agenda—jointly deciding on the why. Discussions on bread-and-butter issues often spring from the joint interest of attracting and retaining the highest-quality staff. Discussions of workplace conditions are spurred by the joint interests of creating the best learning environment for students and ensuring time and resources for preparation, reflection, and peer discussion to achieve quality instruction. The enduring advantage to IBB is the tone it sets for discussions and the trust that evolves from it—the sessions become about agreements and mutually generated options to solve problems, rather than each side making concessions until enough has been conceded to make each side feel as if it has not lost.

The other two unions in MCPS, the *Service Employees International Union Local 500* (SEIU; representing support staff) and the *Montgomery County Association of Administrators and Principals* (MCAAP), adopted IBB for their **negotiations** shortly afterward. IBB has become a de facto way of doing business in the day-to-day operations of the system. The realization of the benefits of IBB led the way for the three unions and the school system to agree to jointly bargain the economic provisions of the contracts—salaries and benefits. Prior to this agreement, each union was left to wonder if the other two were getting a better deal. This sense of competition and the lack of trust it entailed were no longer acceptable, especially since it was one pot of money from which all compensation is drawn.

Concurrently, MCEA and MCPS began discussions on creating a **Professional Growth System** for its members. Representatives from SEIU and MCAAP were at the table as a new evaluation system, based on standards and descriptive observations that offered meaningful, timely feedback to educators, was developed. The Teacher Professional Growth System also includes a Peer Assistance and Review program, Staff Development Teachers in each school, coursework for both observers and those being observed to develop a common protocol for observation and language about quality instruction, and professional development plans. Comparable professional growth systems for administrators and support staff soon followed. The union and school system agreed to take joint responsibility for the quality of the work and for creating a structure to provide support for novice and underperforming employees.

Visit www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org and search professional growth system for more information.

As stakeholder involvement and shared decision making became the approach in more and more venues, the next logical step was to create a **budget development** process that was more inclusive. For

the past six years, the union presidents and executive directors have been on the school system's budget team. In addition, the president of the countywide PTA and one additional parent are included. This team has been especially important for the past three years, as decreased revenues have forced a total of \$400 million in cuts to the MCPS budget. When the Superintendent announces his proposed budget in December of each year, he does so knowing that the leadership of the employees and the parent community have agreed on the interests that guided the process and have agreed on how the system's funding should be allocated.

After a great deal of discussion about how to handle issues in schools that had ongoing concerns, the three unions and the system began meeting to develop a **Collaborative Climate Compact**. The Compact lays out two processes—one to jointly determine whether or not a school has persistent and pervasive climate issues, and another to work with the school to design and implement interventions and supports to address these issues. The process to determine the extent of the issues involves the Elected Faculty and Support Staff representatives, who are elected by their constituencies to the school's Leadership Team and work closely with the principal. The implementation of the Compact has started this year and the complexity of its implementation cannot be overstated, but we are committed to establishing a positive learning and work environment for all students and employees.

Visit www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org and search Culture of Respect to read the Compact.

Along the same lines, the system and unions are working on developing a true **Professional Learning Community** (PLC) for every employee. Many schools and workplaces in MCPS have already accomplished this, assisted by courses offered by the Professional Learning Community Institute in the MCPS Office of School Support and Improvement. Student achievement data has been the focus of teams in schools for years, but the PLCs are a means of expanding the conversation to include qualitative information with the quantitative. With the lessons learned from these discussions, professional development through the PLC can focus on areas that are of immediate use in meeting the needs of our students.