



CASE STUDY:

Labor-Management-Community Collaboration in Springfield Public Schools

About Our Case Studies

With each Case Study, we conduct an in-depth examination of a single initiative to extract lessons learned and promising practices. The Case Study series is another way in which the Rennie Center focuses attention on key issues, provides insight and perspective, and helps shape an effective public agenda in Massachusetts.

Introduction

Few people hail teachers' unions as leaders of education reform. Teachers' unions are routinely characterized as part of the problem, protecting the interests of members at the expense of quality instruction and exercising unchecked political power. School districts fare little better in the public eye; they are often perceived as large, ineffective bureaucracies which perpetuate under-performance among low-income and minority students. Furthermore, community involvement in public education reform, though a widespread phenomenon, is largely unrecognized in the national policy debate about the future of schools. Given this, it is difficult to imagine three less likely partners in education reform than a local teachers' union (labor), district leaders (management), and local organizations and foundations (community). Yet the work of some education and community leaders has shown that collaboration between labor, management, and community has the potential to build capacity and improve student learning.

In districts where such partnerships take place, the focus is on collective impact—the process and outcome of getting leaders from different groups to work together in concert to solve complex social problems.¹ When teachers' unions, community organizations, businesses, politicians, and school districts share goals and resources through daily collaboration, the effects of poverty and inequity can be mitigated, and student achievement can rise.² Evidence shows that in order for student learning to improve, adult behaviors must become more collaborative and student-focused.³ However, few examples of genuine labor-management-community collaboration in U.S. public schools exist. This is despite the growing need for collaborative approaches brought on by new teacher evaluation policies, changing teacher workforce demographics, growing school- and staff-level accountability, and recent emphasis on improving the international competitiveness of the U.S. education system.

Lessons Learned from Collaboration in Springfield, Massachusetts

Work by union, district, and community leaders in Springfield Public Schools (SPS) offers one compelling picture of labor-management-community collaboration in practice. Eight years ago, the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy, an independent, non-partisan research and policy organization, approached district and union leaders in Massachusetts about building more collaborative district-union relationships. SPS and the Massachusetts Teachers Association's local affiliate, Springfield Education Association (SEA), joined as original members of the Rennie Center *Labor-Management Initiative* in 2003 (see page 6 for additional information about the Rennie Center *Labor-Management Initiative*). With facilitative support from Rennie Center founder Paul Reville, SEA President Timothy Collins and

then-Superintendent Joseph Burke worked together through the *Labor-Management Initiative* to develop a common definition of a successful school, administer a comprehensive school-based survey across the district, implement an instructional coaching program, and craft a new teacher evaluation system.

With continued support from the Rennie Center, the collaborative efforts endured the departure of Superintendent Burke in 2008 and accelerated under the leadership of Superintendent Alan Ingram. Today, union leaders sit on the district's senior leadership team and budget committee. Union and district leaders present together to teachers, principals, and the school committee, and support each other on potentially controversial issues. The district-union collaboration is building community and business partnerships, expanding family engagement programming, and supporting school-based instructional leadership and shared decision-making. As part of its effort to receive a \$1.25 million grant from the National Education Association Foundation, Springfield formed a five-organization coalition to serve as an organizing hub for all the collaborative efforts between the district, union, and community. Members of the *Springfield Collaboration for Change* (SCC) include Springfield Public Schools, Springfield Education Association, Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation, Hampden County Regional Employment Board, and the United Way of Pioneer Valley.

In the process of deepening collaboration, adults in the system reported working together more effectively; communication between district and union leaders was more frequent and productive, and follow-up surveys showed improved teacher-administrator relations. In terms of student achievement, since 2008, the percentage of Springfield students proficient or above on the English language arts state test was up seven points; math increased by two points.⁴ In high school, the percentage of tenth grade students proficient or above in math and English language arts increased four and fourteen points, respectively, during the same period.⁵ These gains are modest, but to district and union leaders, a sign of forward momentum for the second largest school system in Massachusetts.⁶

Methods of the Study

This study used a qualitative inquiry strategy that incorporated interviews, field notes, and document review into a case study design.⁷ Sources of data included newspaper articles, newsletters, research reports, collective bargaining agreements, and websites. In addition, 15 district, union, and community leaders were interviewed. In all, over 600 pages of documents and 18 hours of interviews were analyzed.

Springfield's journey toward labor-management-community collaboration has been long and filled with detours—superintendent and school committee turnover, municipal insolvency, state intervention in low-performing schools, and a severe economic recession. Future challenges, such as Ingram's departure as superintendent in July 2012, will continue to test the durability of the partnership. Yet, there are still important lessons to be learned from the Springfield story. From the Rennie Center's work in labor-management relations and current research in Springfield, five key lessons emerge. The goal is not for communities to simply replicate the systems and structures Springfield uses to collaborate, but to learn and apply the key lessons to their local contexts.

LESSON 1: Use data to maintain focus and drive action plans that center on student needs.

LESSON 2: Expect unexpected disruptions to collaboration, and do not give up when they occur.

LESSON 3: Build collaborative structures and relationships that extend beyond the superintendent's office.

LESSON 4: Rely on third-party facilitators to initiate difficult discussions, keep conversations productive, and maintain momentum.

LESSON 5: Invite community organizations to lead on-the-ground efforts to improve student learning, and involve community leaders in district leadership teams.

Setting the Stage: Collaboration Emerges from Chaos

The city of Springfield and its public schools had a chaotic start to the 21st century. A long decline in Springfield's manufacturing-based economy, reduction in state aid relative to other cities, failed attempts at new job creation, mismanagement, and corruption led to the city's insolvency in 2004.⁸ The Commonwealth provided a \$52 million interest-free loan, and Springfield avoided bankruptcy. As a condition of the loan, a state-appointed five-member Financial Control Board (FCB) took over all aspects of the city government, including its public schools.⁹ The near-bankruptcy of Springfield and loss of local control were only a few of the challenges facing Springfield Public Schools (SPS) at the time. When the FCB came into power in July 2004, teachers had been without a contract and had not received a pay increase for two years.¹⁰ At the same time, Springfield witnessed a significant increase in the percentage of low-income students attending SPS, which in turn, put strain on the system's resources.¹¹ Finally, student achievement was amongst the lowest in the Commonwealth. In 2004, only about half of students graduated from high school in four years, the percentage of students proficient or above in English language arts remained in the mid-30s for all tested grades (36, 35, and 32 percent in grades 4, 7, and 10, respectively), and only a quarter of fourth graders and fewer than one in ten eighth graders were proficient or above in math.¹²

From 2004 through 2007, under the direction of the FCB, the problems facing SPS appeared to worsen. After an acrimonious and protracted negotiation with the FCB that included a state-imposed mediation process, the Springfield Education Association (SEA) agreed to a contract in September 2006. Nevertheless, the agreement was not welcomed by the union members, and the working relationship between teachers and the district quickly deteriorated. Collins put it bluntly: "Basically they had us in a corner with a gun to our heads. We got the best deal that we could for our teachers." Despite efforts to improve working conditions for teachers, Burke took much of the blame. In an unprecedented move, the SEA issued a vote of *no confidence* in Burke, charging him with being "divisive," "disingenuous," "dishonest," and "promoting radical, untested, and dangerous ideas." Over 80 percent of teachers turned out to vote, and 96 percent indicated they had no confidence in Burke as their leader.¹³

Teachers fled the uncertainty, stress, and low pay for nearby districts; after the first year of FCB control, the district experienced the largest exodus of licensed teachers in a single year.¹⁴ Over the tenure of the FCB, SPS had to hire 1,800 new teachers, representing nearly 70 percent of the district's teaching force.¹⁵

Collaboration Emerges

Throughout this period of contentious relations and massive teacher turnover, SPS Superintendent Burke and SEA President Collins had been quietly meeting behind the scenes about how to build a stronger relationship between the district and union.¹⁶ The Rennie Center and then-President Reville played a crucial role in these ongoing discussions. As an independent education think tank, the Rennie Center acted as a neutral third party in a polarized environment. At the same time, Reville's facilitative leadership helped Burke and Collins look beyond the FCB-era and commit to working together.

The first clear sign of district-union collaboration came in the fall of 2004, when Burke and Collins formed Springfield's *Joint Labor-Management Initiative*. The *Joint Labor-Management Initiative* (JLMI) was a seven-member team composed of three union members, three district representatives, and a school board member, designed to create action plans to improve district-union collaboration.¹⁷ As its first task, the JLMI team embarked on the Definition of a Successful School project. Over the next 18 months, the team met a dozen times to develop and agree on the characteristics of a successful school. Completed in February 2006, the Definition of a Successful School created a common definition of success for public schools in Springfield, focused on improving student achievement, and set objectives for all stakeholders—students, parents, teachers, and administrators (see Appendix A). Despite completing the work, the JLMI team waited to release the Definition. Contract negotiations between SEA and the FCB had turned hostile; consequently, Collins felt SEA could not issue a joint-release of the document in such an environment. With encouragement and support from Reville, the JLMI team finally released the Definition to teachers and the community in January 2007.

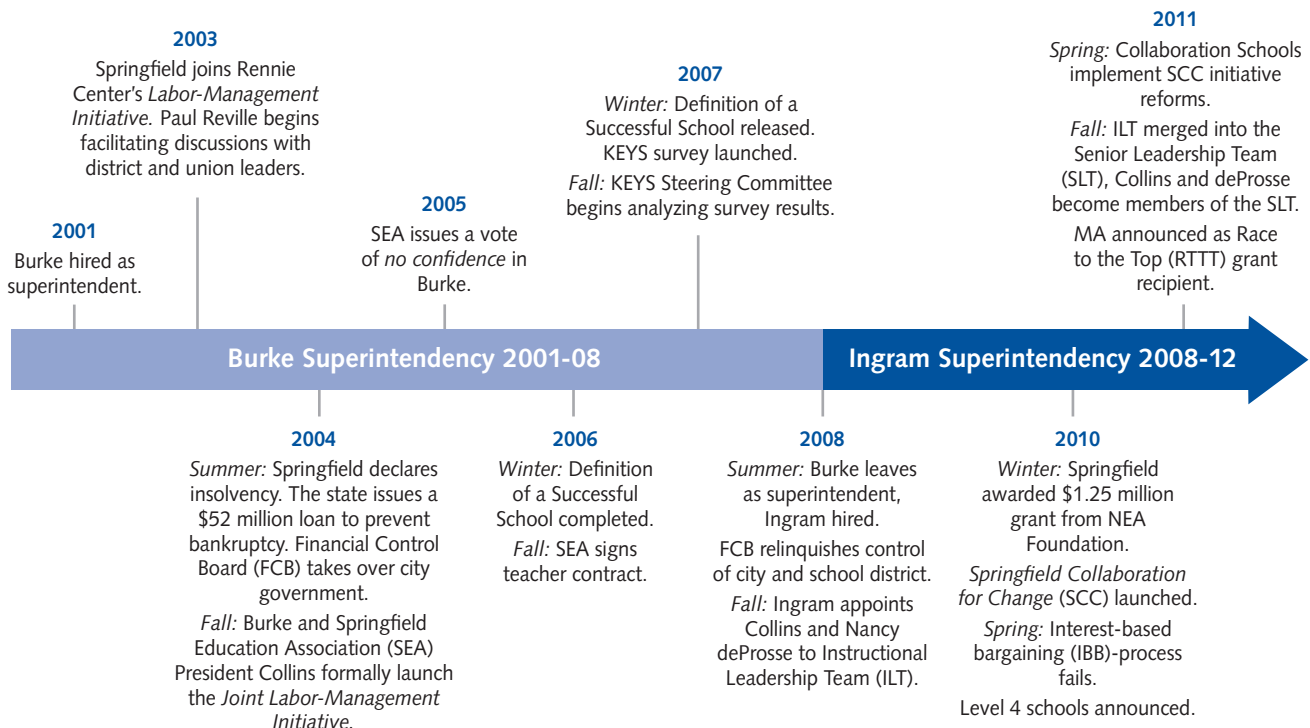
The KEYS Survey

To the members on the JLMI team, the next natural step was to see if public schools in Springfield had the characteristics of a successful school, as described in the Definition.¹⁸ Team members discussed their options and decided that a survey was the best route to gathering detailed information on all the schools in the district, efficiently and transparently. They reviewed several different surveys before selecting the National Education Association-designed KEYS survey, which uses 42 indicators to measure six *keys* to school improvement work.¹⁹

The KEYS survey initiative was announced in a joint letter to all staff members from Collins and Burke, and the online survey was carefully administered in March 2007.²⁰ In the end, over 80 percent of district teachers and administrators completed the 45-minute survey. To analyze the district-level data, the JLMI team expanded to 20 members with equal district and union representation. The renamed KEYS Steering Committee began meeting in the fall of 2007. The first few meetings were divisive; teachers and administrators spent most of the time blaming each other for the school-based problems highlighted in the survey.²¹

The team continued to meet through the fall. Progress was slow, but team members began to see that Burke and Collins were serious about collaborating.²² After 25 hours of meetings and many difficult conversations, members of the Steering Committee finally reached consensus. The Committee decided to focus on three indicators they believed were critical to student success that showed a need for improvement in SPS: 1) The school operates under the assumption that all students can learn; 2) The school provides a safe environment for learning; and 3) Teachers are involved in decisions about school operations.²³ With facilitation from Reville and a representative from the Massachusetts Teachers Association state office, the Committee worked on creating goals and action steps, and rolling out the findings to schools.²⁴

Timeline of Important Events



Key Actors in Springfield's Collaboration

More than a dozen people have played important roles in sustaining the collaborative partnership in Springfield. Below is an alphabetical list of some of the key players involved in the day-to-day efforts over the years:

Andrew Bundy, *Partner, Community Matters*: Bundy is the co-founder of Community Matters, a firm that helps public and private sector institutions develop high-impact strategies to benefit children, youth, and families. He has been a Rennie Center-supported facilitator of labor-management-community collaboration work in Springfield since 2008.

Joseph Burke, *Former Superintendent, Springfield Public Schools*: Burke served as Springfield superintendent for over seven years, from 2001 to 2008. He worked previously as an administrator in Dade County Public Schools in Florida. Burke is currently the superintendent of Lee County Public Schools in Ft. Myers, Florida.

Timothy Collins, *President, Springfield Education Association*: Collins taught middle school and junior high math in Springfield Public Schools for 25 years. He has served as the Springfield Education Association president since 1996.

Nancy deProsse, *UniServ Director, Massachusetts Teachers Association; Project Director, Springfield Collaboration for Change*: deProsse worked over 20 years as an organizer for the United Auto Workers in Massachusetts. She has been a Massachusetts Teachers Association representative with Springfield Public Schools since 2006. In 2011, deProsse was appointed project director of the *Springfield Collaboration for Change*.

Alan Ingram, *Superintendent, Springfield Public Schools*: Ingram served in the U.S. Air Force for 22 years before retiring to work as an administrator in the Oklahoma City Public Schools. A graduate of the Broad Superintendents Academy, he has been the superintendent in Springfield since 2008.

Paul Reville, *Founder and Former President, Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy; Massachusetts Secretary of Education*: Reville is a former teacher and administrator, executive director of the Pew Forum on Standards-Based School Reform and senior lecturer at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education. He co-founded Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education and chaired the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. Reville currently directs the Executive Office of Education in Massachusetts as the Commonwealth's Secretary of Education.

In addition, the following individuals were integral to collaboration in Springfield and were interviewed for the study:

Arlindo Alves, *Professional Relations Associate for Springfield Education Association and Joint Labor-Management Team Member*

Sylvia deHaas-Phillips, *Senior Vice President Community Impact & Engagement, United Way of Pioneer Valley*

Denise Hurst, *Vice Chair of Springfield School Committee*

Rosemary Kalloch, *Director of Social Studies and Springfield Administrators Association Representative, Springfield Public Schools*

Jill Norton, *Former Executive Director, Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy*

Peter Reese, *Teacher; Springfield Education Association Vice President*

Patricia Spradley, *Chief Parent & Community Engagement Officer, Springfield Public Schools*

Mary Walachy, *Executive Director, Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation*

Bill Ward, *President & Chief Executive Officer, Hampden County Regional Employment Board*

Daniel Warwick, *Deputy Superintendent, Springfield Public Schools*

Rennie Center *Labor-Management Initiative*

Launched in 2003, the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy's *Labor-Management Initiative* (LMI) is an ambitious effort to support labor-management collaboration in Massachusetts school districts, and advance knowledge of best practices in labor-management collaboration. LMI promotes a theory of change that by placing student learning at the core of collective decision-making, student achievement will improve. Opportunities are created for professionals to collaborate and innovate prior to responding to local challenges, allowing knowledge and evidence to be better leveraged for the benefit of children. Rennie Center founder and current Massachusetts Secretary of Education Paul Reville calls it a "high-priority reform approach that creates mutual ownership of student learning."

In 2005, the Rennie Center published *Win-Win Labor-Management Collaboration in Education: Breakthrough Practices to Benefit Students, Teachers, and Administrators*, a compilation of research on strategies, practices and systemic reforms to strengthen the quality of professional relationships in education. Since that time, the Rennie Center has worked with nearly a dozen, mostly urban, Massachusetts school districts, providing "Change Coach" facilitators, exposing them to learning opportunities in statewide meetings, and assisting them in developing a new set of practices in labor-management collaboration. Its strong track record of success includes the following:

- In Falmouth, a team of labor and management leaders used the construction of a new high school as an opportunity to redesign the high school's schedule and program to emphasize college and career readiness.
- In Southbridge, one of the state's lowest performing school districts, a team of labor and management leaders worked together for two years to craft a winning proposal for expanded learning time funding from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), securing nearly \$1 million in new funding for the struggling school system.
- In Worcester, the superintendent and the labor leadership worked to establish the new role of "coach," which was the first step in creating differentiated roles and leadership opportunities for teachers.
- In Springfield, labor-management collaboration has contributed to policy and structure changes that afford labor leaders roles in key areas of work at both the district and school levels. Multiple community partners also participate in labor-management exchange, and large investments have been made by external funders and allies at the local, state, and national level.

In 2011, the Rennie Center, working with its long-standing partner Community Matters and other state education leaders, worked with the superintendents, union presidents and school committee leaders of ten different Massachusetts school districts to explore the possibility of developing a statewide community of practice on labor-management collaboration. This work leveraged the districts' participation in the nation's first conference on labor-management collaboration in public schools, convened by U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten, and National Education Association President Dennis van Roekel.

Five Lessons in Labor-Management-Community Collaboration

The Definition of a Successful School and KEYS survey work established a foundation for an evolving district-union partnership in Springfield. However, the collaboration had yet to reach the classroom in a deep and meaningful way. The next five lessons explain how Springfield attempted to build on its early work to transform the ways adults interacted and students learned. There were still challenges to overcome:

Burke left the district in 2008, an economic recession hit the country, and significant state reforms created turmoil in the lowest-performing schools in the district. Despite this instability, the collaboration between the district and union remained resilient as it expanded into the community and deepened into the classroom. For Ingram, labor-management-community collaboration was the key to improving student achievement in SPS: “Everyone—the district, union, and community—has to work together. Some things can be mandated. Reform is not one of them. You need to collaborate out of dire necessity for the children.”

“Everyone—the district, union, and community—has to work together. Some things can be mandated. Reform is not one of them. You need to collaborate out of dire necessity for the children.”

Superintendent Ingram

LESSON 1

Use data to maintain focus and drive action plans that center on student needs.

The first thing that strikes visitors to Springfield is the language and tone used by district, union, and community leaders. District and union leaders all speak about the common needs of “our kids.” Springfield Education Association (SEA) President Collins is often heard repeating, “The focus has to be on kids and what is best for kids.” From Superintendent Ingram is a similar refrain: “Always bring it back to the kids; when we make it better for the kids, we make it better for the adults in the system.” Establishing a unified focus centered on what is best for students required hundreds of hours of working together and months of meetings. It also meant taking a few steps backwards in order to move forward when personnel changed or policies shifted. The KEYS Steering Committee had analyzed the survey data, presented to schools and teachers, received feedback, and implemented a small, school-based, coaching, pilot program at two schools. Yet, while the district transitioned to a new superintendent, Ingram, the most difficult work remained. Springfield Public Schools (SPS) still needed to craft action plans to address the three most serious problems identified by the Steering Committee from the KEYS survey data: inconsistent expectations for student learning, concerns about unsafe learning environments in some schools, and lack of opportunities for teachers in shared decision-making.

Staying Focused on Kids with a New Superintendent

In the spring of 2008, the KEYS Steering Committee had just begun the difficult work of addressing its top concerns when the collaborative effort was dealt a serious blow. In one of its final moves, the Financial Control Board (FCB) opened up a search for a new superintendent, sending the message to Superintendent Burke that his time in SPS was coming to an end.²⁵ While the KEYS Steering Committee continued to meet, the FCB conducted a national search over the spring and early summer for a new superintendent. The FCB selected Ingram, a former military leader and graduate of the Broad Superintendent’s Academy, to lead SPS. He started full-time in the position on July 1, 2008.

With the arrival of a new superintendent, the district-union collaborative efforts and KEYS initiative easily could have been abandoned or deemed a low priority. In general, a key stumbling block for developing productive labor-management relations in other districts has been the brief tenure of urban school superintendents—the average urban superintendent lasts about 3.5 years.²⁶ Members of the KEYS Steering Committee felt that they had worked too hard and made too much progress not to make a strong case to the new superintendent that the team should continue its work. District and union committee members had moved beyond simply looking at KEYS survey data; they were

now working together to solve problems that impacted student learning. KEYS Steering Committee member and Massachusetts Teachers Association UniServ Director Nancy deProse remembered, “We had built a strong relationship amongst ourselves; we were doing things like resolving grievances and addressing issues in the schools that we weren’t able to do before.” The Steering Committee decided that the best way to introduce the new superintendent to the collaborative effort was to invite Ingram to participate in a Steering Committee meeting.

At the meeting, Ingram listened as the group conducted its regular business and discussed the collaboration and why it was important to sustain. Ingram was impressed by the way union and district leaders jointly-focused on what was best for student learning. “Superintendents always talk about what to throw away,” Ingram explained, “but just as important was what to keep.” At the end of the meeting it was clear that Ingram supported sustaining the district-union collaboration. He asked members to present their work to the next district-wide principals meeting. As deProse said, “It made us realize right away that he was going to buy into this idea of collaboration.”

Members of the Steering Committee were not the only people promoting district-union collaboration in Springfield. As Ingram spent the first months of his superintendency listening to the Springfield community, he heard additional support for labor-management collaboration from key business and non-profit leaders, teachers, and community members. For example, at the Springfield-based Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation, Executive Director Mary Walachy expressed her perspective, “You cannot have a reform-focused agenda without a good relationship with the [teachers’] union. The only way to make long-term profound change is to work within systems.” Bill Ward, president and CEO of the Hampden County Regional Employment Board, described the collaboration succinctly, “Once you step into it, you have to be in it for the long haul. This kind of change is a long-term process that demands a long-term commitment.”²⁷

Gathering More Data and Developing Action Plans

With Ingram’s support and engagement, the Steering Committee refocused on the KEYS work. Ingram also helped the team gather additional information on the effectiveness of school leadership teams and central office departments using the Organizational Health Indicator survey.²⁸ The survey complemented the school-level KEYS results with insights into the capacity of district leadership across ten dimensions. Using the combined data, the Steering Committee began to develop action plans to address the three issues identified. The action plans for the three areas were then incorporated into the district’s overall improvement plan.

Inconsistent expectations for student learning. One of the more controversial findings that emerged from the data was that Springfield teachers had varying expectations for what all students could learn. Initially, there were heated conversations on the Steering Committee about what exactly it meant that SPS had scored low on the statement “school operates under the assumption that all students can learn.” However, as the Committee members unpacked their concerns and met with teachers in schools, they found the problem to be less about belief and more about preparation.²⁹ Teachers felt they did not have the skills and knowledge needed to meet the diverse learning needs of their students.

As Steering Committee members were having difficult conversations about teacher capacity, the district was beginning to implement a new comprehensive teacher evaluation system, the Springfield Teacher Evaluation and Development System. An outgrowth of the contentious bargaining process with the FCB, the new system created a process for evaluating teachers and included the new roles of instructional leadership specialists and teacher leaders to help struggling teachers.³⁰ With the new evaluation system in place, the Steering Committee recommended that the district and union form a small working group to develop the rubrics, observation forms, and evaluation reports needed for the evaluation. This joint working team then created the evaluation instruments used for all district teachers, teacher leaders, librarians, and counselors. The district also asked SEA to help train teachers and administrators on the new instrument. This joint implementation of the new evaluation reduced miscommunication and increased buy-in. As one union leader noted, “It ensured that principals and teachers were receiving the same message at the same time from the same people.”

The district and union also collaborated on a new professional development (PD) system aligned with its new, less experienced teacher workforce. Prior to 2008, the PD offered was a relic from when a majority of SPS teachers had more than ten years of experience. deProse explained the new reality, “Two-thirds of teachers were new, but PD kept on going like that wasn’t the case.” To revise the district’s PD offerings, the SEA’s Professional Development Committee met regularly with SPS staff members from the Professional Development Office. Together, they shifted PD from a centralized weeklong process to a school-based one where school leadership teams decided how to use PD funds. New teacher orientation was also revamped with union input.

Concerns about unsafe learning environments. Another important concern raised by many teachers in the KEYS survey was the belief that some schools were not safe learning environments. Many new teachers struggled with managing classroom behavior. In Springfield, with its large percentage of new teachers, creating a safe learning environment became a district-wide issue. To address the problem, the union and district met to discuss various approaches to reducing problematic behaviors across schools. Together they decided that the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports model met the needs of SPS students and teachers.³¹ To implement the model, each school formed a leadership team composed of the principal, teachers, and other staff members who made joint decisions about the school’s culture.

Lack of opportunities for shared decision-making. The third concern identified by the KEYS data and highlighted for action by the Steering Committee was that Springfield teachers felt they had little say in how the district and schools operated. “The basic idea is for teachers to stop being the objects of reform,” said Collins, “and start being the architects of reform.” Incorporating teacher voice into school and district decisions meant including teachers or their representatives on senior leadership teams, a move some superintendents are hesitant to make. Ingram had a different perspective. Entering as the new superintendent, Ingram found himself in meeting after meeting with different labor and district leaders. At the same time, Ingram knew that if he was committed to collaborating, he would have to spend even more time with union leaders.

The solution seemed simple: invite Collins, deProse, and other union heads to join him and senior district leaders on the district-wide Instructional Leadership Team (ILT). Rather than meeting with SEA leaders separately, inviting them to participate in ILT meetings enabled district leaders to spend more time with them and develop better relationships. Ingram explained his rationale, “Time is the enemy. If you are trying to build a relationship with someone, then you have to spend time with them. You can’t work in isolation to get the kind of results needed.” In his first year as superintendent, Ingram appointed Collins and deProse to the ILT. Not everyone agreed with the decision; Ingram received criticism from some of his senior cabinet members. “My staff thought I had lost my mind,” Ingram remembered, “they said to me, ‘you’re going to bring him [Collins] into our meetings, where we decide what goes on in schools. What are you thinking?’”

While it had an uneven start, the ILT eventually transformed into a powerful, decision-making committee heavily involved in implementing the reforms embedded in Massachusetts’ winning Race to the Top application. In the beginning, the ILT highlighted the tension between intentional collaboration and urgent action. Or as Ingram asked, “How do you give people a sense of urgency while giving them their voice?” Using data was one way to navigate the tension, and focus the team on establishing and maintaining momentum. In Springfield, the KEYS and Organizational Health survey data highlighted fundamental problems facing the district, kept conversations focused on student needs, and allowed leaders to jointly craft specific action plans.

LESSON 2

Expect unexpected disruptions to collaboration, and do not give up when they occur.

The strength of collaboration in Springfield was best seen in the district and union’s reactions when unexpected mandates materialized or planned initiatives did not go as intended. Springfield Education Association (SEA) President Collins, Superintendent Ingram, Nancy deProsse, and others never gave up working together to solve the problems they faced. The leaders worked to build disagreement into their daily discussions. As Collins noted, “You have to be willing to disagree with each other without being disagreeable.” The issues that threatened the working relationship between Springfield Public Schools (SPS) and SEA over the last several years were not minor. They involved the failed implementation of interest-based bargaining in contract negotiations and state intervention in ten of Springfield’s lowest performing schools. With each incident, some thought the collaboration would end. However, the partnership prevailed as union and district leaders remained committed to working together.

Interest-based Bargaining Challenges

In 2009, with their collaborative partnership growing stronger, Ingram and Collins agreed to try something different in the next round of contract negotiations. The teachers’ contract that had been in place since 2006 was set to expire in June 2010. In the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year, the SPS and SEA negotiating teams settled on using interest-based bargaining (IBB) to negotiate the next contract. IBB is a negotiating approach that emphasizes actual needs as opposed to positions. The basic idea is that the sides define their common interests and work together to craft mutually beneficial solutions.³² After agreeing to use IBB in the negotiation, the district and union sat down at the collective bargaining table in January 2010. Because Springfield’s mayor chaired the school committee and believed in the importance of having a strong city presence at the bargaining table, the chief negotiator and other officials from the city of Springfield also participated. The inclusion of a negotiating team from the city created a new tension in the room. One lingering concern of both the SEA and the SPS was the role of city funding: in seven of the previous nine years, Springfield had failed to meet its minimum local contribution to public schools as required by Massachusetts law.³³ In addition, prior to this contract negotiation, the city had not been a part of the collaborative efforts over the last several years. Now, the city had as many people on its negotiating team as the district, bringing the total number of people at the bargaining table to 23.

Collective Bargaining 101

Collective bargaining is a process by which employers (i.e. management) and a group of employees negotiate the regulations that govern workplace conditions. Employees are typically represented by elected leaders from a labor organization or union, but final agreement is achieved by a vote of all organization members. The result of collective bargaining procedures is a contract known as a collective agreement. In public education, management is primarily represented by the school district superintendent, although other municipal and school officials may participate in contract negotiations. Through collective bargaining, school systems determine salary scales, work schedules and hours, professional development requirements, hiring and dismissal practices, grievance mechanisms, and other essential workplace policies.

The negotiation did not go as Collins or Ingram had hoped. Despite their attempts to follow IBB practices, the sides kept sliding back into positional bargaining. The SPS and SEA teams spent a lot of time bringing the city team up to speed on recent initiatives and collaborative efforts. The large size of the committee made building personal connections and discussing the complexities of teaching and learning difficult. In addition, the experienced and well-regarded facilitator—on assignment from the Massachusetts Labor Relations Board to help the group to learn and use IBB—had to leave unexpectedly in the middle of the negotiation.

After five months of bargaining, the three sides settled on a mutual decision about compensation for the next two years, and agreed to a contract that left all other aspects of the prior collective agreement in effect. Collins called the negotiation a “very frustrating experience.” Ingram found the negotiations and their limited results to be deeply disappointing. Despite these difficulties, neither Collins nor Ingram gave up on using IBB in future negotiations. Starting in the 2011-2012 school year, the district, union, and the city has begun another attempt with IBB. This time the group has the help of a facilitator from the U.S. Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service.

State Intervention in 20 Percent of Springfield's Schools

Just as Collins, Ingram, and city leaders struggled through their first attempt at IBB contract negotiations, the Springfield collaboration faced another setback. In early March 2010, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) released a list of 35 of the state’s “most persistently low-performing schools.”³⁴ These “Level 4” schools were selected based on their four-year performance in math and English language arts on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System.³⁵ In January, a few months prior to the announcement, the state passed *An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap*, which gave DESE and district superintendents sweeping powers to intervene in Level 4 schools.

Under the law, Massachusetts superintendents were given an extremely tight timeline to develop action plans for the Level 4 schools in their districts. Within three months, for each of the Level 4 schools, superintendents had to convene a stakeholder group, solicit recommendations from the group, and submit an improvement plan to their school committees and DESE.³⁶ Driven largely by criteria established in U.S. Department of Education’s Race to the Top (RTTT) competition, the turnaround plan could include a new curriculum, expanded day, changes to the collective bargaining agreement, teacher dismissal, or a requirement for all teachers and the principal to reapply for their jobs. In addition, if the plan used one of the RTTT-sanctioned approaches, the school was eligible for federal aid.³⁷

When the names of the Level 4 schools were announced on March 4, 2010, Collins and Ingram knew that some SPS schools would be on the list. However, they were surprised to find out how many. A total of ten SPS schools serving more than 6,600 students—nearly a quarter of the district—were identified as Level 4.³⁸ With the fast-approaching deadline and pressure from DESE, the district minimized collaboration with the union over the next several months. All Level 4 schools in Springfield lengthened each school-day by 45 minutes, implemented additional academic intervention programs, and changed the process by which teachers transferred between schools. In addition, the Level 4 schools prepared to implement a new teacher evaluation system that incorporated student growth as a measure of performance, as required by *An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap*. The schools also created principal-led school teams of teachers and instructional leaders to implement and monitor the improvement plans.

Despite having some say in how the turnaround plan was carried out in their schools, teachers felt deeply frustrated by the top-down nature of the response to the Level 4 mandates. As one teacher commented, “Things were initially set up for teachers to have a voice, but then ideas were squashed in the Level 4 process.” In addition, while teachers received a stipend for the additional 45-minutes of work each day, the amount was less than their pro-rated salary. Some teachers felt that they were treated as “less valuable” for the 45 minutes. To address teachers’ concerns about lack of collaboration in decision-making about Level 4 schools, the district has established a Level 4 Steering Committee composed of SPS leaders, community members, and representatives from the SEA and support staff.

Never Giving Up

Despite the challenges with IBB and the Level 4 schools upheaval, Ingram and Collins remain steadfast in their commitment to collaborate. Conversations are often tense and full of conflict. “It is not all Kumbaya,” said Collins, “but, we remember that we have more in common than not.”

LESSON 3**Build collaborative structures and relationships that extend beyond the superintendent's office.**

Leadership turnover constantly threatened the sustainability of collaborative efforts in Springfield. Although Collins has been president of the Springfield Education Association (SEA) for 15 years, the district has had two superintendents between 2007 and 2012. In addition, in the period between 2009 and 2011, Springfield Public Schools (SPS) had three different chief academic officers. To address the high turnover of the superintendent position and the senior cabinet, leaders in Springfield worked hard to build opportunities for joint interaction at multiple levels in the district. The KEYS Steering Committee was a good start, but Superintendent Ingram sought to move the collaboration to permanent standing committees, such as the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) and Superintendent's Budget Committee. By appointing deProse, of the Massachusetts Teachers Association, and Collins to the ILT, Ingram took the district-union collaborative relationship deeper. However, as the union leaders soon realized, attending senior level committee meetings with district leaders did not automatically lead to collaboration. Effective district-union collaboration required restructuring the ILT. Once the team began functioning well, the ILT became the driving force in the Springfield's Race to the Top (RTTT) work. Then in the spring of 2011, the ILT merged into the district's Senior Leadership Team.

Building the Capacity of the ILT

Established prior to Superintendent Ingram's arrival, the ILT was a 20-member district-wide committee charged with overseeing nearly everything that had to do with teaching and learning in SPS—grants, special programs, discipline policies, curriculum, and grading. Led by the district's chief academic officer, ILT members included curriculum directors and chief schools officers. When Collins and deProse joined the ILT in the 2008-2009 school year, they found that committee members were not really working together. Members were hesitant to share their expertise and knowledge about what was going on in schools. deProse explained her initial interactions with the ILT, "We tried to get discussions going. But we were often the only ones who said anything, because we were safe. Everyone else's boss was running the meeting."

At the end of the school year, there was turnover in the leadership of the committee, and Collins and deProse saw their opportunity to build the capacity of the ILT. They approached senior SPS leaders about forming a volunteer working group to look at the structure, culture, and functioning of the ILT. The SPS leaders agreed, and deProse, in collaboration with the new chief academic officer, moved forward with overhauling the ILT. With facilitation support from an outside organization,³⁹ they brought together a small group of people from the ILT to redesign the committee's work. The group then reconvened the ILT and discussed as a whole group how to make the committee function better. deProse recalled, "We talked about the problems we all saw and what we would like to see changed."

A few meetings after this discussion, the ILT began to function like a collaborative team. People questioned each other respectfully, brought their insights to problems, and worked together to develop solutions. According to Collins, ILT members began to have "deep, thorough discussions about the focus of the district." The ILT created a common template for all grants and ensured the district was not piling one reform on top of another. Collins said of the ILT's work, "We couldn't put another thing on teachers' plates without taking something off. We had to narrow our focus and look at the data."

Extending Collaborative Relationships

Just as the ILT was coming together, it was announced that Massachusetts had won \$250 million in Round 2 of the RTTT competition.⁴⁰ The district would receive funding from the grant and members of the ILT agreed that their committee was best equipped to handle implementation of the RTTT reforms. The group formed five subcommittees based on the RTTT work—Evaluation, Common Core State Standards, College and Career Readiness, Human Capital, and Data—with each subcommittee co-chaired by two people from the ILT. With the leadership structure in

place, the ILT opened up participation on the subcommittees to teachers and principals. Teachers applied to be on the subcommittee of their choosing and some principals were asked to serve. These subcommittees then took over the district's RTTT work with the subcommittee chairs meeting periodically to share their progress.

While the district had created the opportunity for teachers to participate in these decision-making subcommittees, it took some encouragement before teachers felt comfortable voicing their opinion. According to Collins, many teachers were used to operating in a system where “loyalty to the institution meant agreeing with the institution.” Collins joked about the “double-bind” teachers often found themselves in, “Speak up, get involved. You have nothing to lose but your job.” But, for genuine collaboration to take place, as Ingram pointed out, teachers need both the opportunity and willingness to speak up. To get teachers on the subcommittees to share their knowledge, it finally took the explicit encouragement of deProse and Collins. “We had to say,” deProse recounted, “you have the opportunity, now use your voice.”

While the RTTT subcommittees continued to meet, Ingram merged the ILT with the SPS Senior Leadership Team (SLT) in the spring of 2011.⁴¹ Collins and deProse now worked together with the top-level SPS administrators to craft district policy and strategy. However, some of the same problems initially encountered with the ILT surfaced with the SLT. The group was large, with over 20 members, and did not always have productive discussions. While deProse and Collins were frustrated by the change, particularly since the ILT had become so effective, they also knew this was another opportunity to help the district's senior leaders collaborate more effectively. The SLT was a work-in-progress, and deProse and Collins felt they were forming stronger relationships with committee members. Some problems previously addressed through formal grievances were now being solved by working together with members of the SLT. Most importantly, through the RTTT subcommittee work, teachers began to have a voice in the direction of SPS. The remaining challenge was bringing the collaborative efforts to the neighborhood- and school-level, something Collins, deProse, and Ingram hope to accomplish with a grant from the National Education Association Foundation and the creation of the *Springfield Collaboration for Change*.

LESSON 4

Rely on third-party facilitators to initiate difficult discussions, keep conversations productive, and maintain momentum.

In nearly every chapter of the Springfield collaboration story, the support of a third-party facilitator played a key role. At the outset, the Rennie Center and then-President Reville helped the district and union work together to form the Springfield *Joint Labor-Management Initiative* and develop the Definition of a Successful School (see Appendix A). When Reville was appointed Massachusetts Secretary of Education, the Rennie Center invited Andrew Bundy from Community Matters to become the lead facilitator in Springfield. Bundy helped sustain the collaboration through superintendent turnover, collaborative bargaining challenges, and the Level 4 school designations.

These positive experiences with the Rennie Center led Superintendent Ingram and Springfield Education Association (SEA) President Collins to seek out the help of other facilitators. Springfield leaders asked an organization called Focus on Results to help revamp the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT). When the ILT created the Race to the Top subcommittees, Springfield Public Schools (SPS) asked District Management Council, a consulting firm helping on other strategic work, to assist members engage in productive conflict. Third-party facilitators played a key role in the change process in Springfield. As Nancy deProse said, “When you are trying to make a sea change from a non-collaborative environment to a collaborative environment, third-party facilitation is absolutely necessary.”

Every facilitator had a different approach, but their ends were the same—initiate discussions, keep conversations productive, and maintain momentum. The facilitators played an even more important role when there was leadership turnover. They helped maintain consistency, but did not allow past transgressions to derail the relationship. The key, explained Ingram, is to “honor the past, but don't be held hostage to it.” Collins followed, “And the best way to

honor the past is to learn from it.” When things became heated in meetings, facilitators were there to remind Collins, Ingram, and others of their commitment to collaboration and productive conflict.

Promoting Collaboration

When the Financial Control Board (FCB) was in control, then-Superintendent Burke and Collins were often publicly “at war” with each other. In 2004, with Collins as president, the SEA charged that Burke had “failed as an advocate for Springfield’s students.”⁴² While Burke did not have equally harsh words for the union, he did not make any public statements that went against the controversial actions of the FCB—inaction that essentially aligned him with the unpopular board. Despite the hostile environment, behind the scenes Reville was having conversations with Burke and Collins about working together. He encouraged the SPS and SEA leaders to build their dialogue on common ground. This eventually led Burke and Collins to the Definition of a Successful School initiative. Reville also held Collins and Burke accountable to keep moving forward with the collaboration. When the district delayed the release of the Definition, Reville kept the collaborative work in the minds of Collins and Burke through regular meetings and phone calls. Reville explained, “The discipline of having to meet regularly kept a channel of communication open. The real challenge was keeping it going. I was calling up [Burke or Collins], saying, ‘How is it going? I am going to be there in a month from now. I expect to see you there.’”

Reville did more than just encourage collaboration and help initiate conversations. He also served as an outlet for Burke and Collins when conversations broke down or the FCB made an unexpected decision that harmed the district-union relationship. As Reville said, “As a result of Burke and Collins continuing to come to the table, the discussions served as a refuge from the hard-edged bargaining process. It was a welcome outlet.” Burke or Collins could also speak to Reville privately and express frustrations about a situation. After some cathartic venting, Reville could bring the two together for a calmer and more productive discussion.

Sustaining Collaboration

The spring of 2008 was a period of significant change for SPS. In March, Reville was appointed Massachusetts Secretary of Education, a position he would officially start on July 1 of that year. A month later, Burke announced that he would not pursue a contract extension to remain superintendent in Springfield. With two people essential to the nascent district-union collaborative leaving at the same time, many thought the partnership would end. Support from the Rennie Center through Bundy from Community Matters helped bridge the gap left by the departures of Reville and Burke.

In May 2008, Bundy picked up where Reville left off as Springfield’s labor-management facilitator and met for the first time with Burke, Collins, and Reville. Shortly thereafter, the FCB named Ingram as the district’s new superintendent. The series of events marked an important turning point in the district-union collaboration. There was deep uncertainty about whether any collaboration would continue with the arrival of Ingram as the new superintendent. While Collins recommitted to the partnership and Burke and Reville offered their support as they transitioned out of the district, Ingram’s buy-in was essential to sustaining the collaboration. Bundy explained it was a pivotal moment, “There was a period of uncertainty about the new superintendent and whether he would support the collaboration.”

Over the next few months, Bundy worked with Collins and deProse to inform Ingram on the collaborative work. They explained the prior work with the Definition of a Successful School and the KEYS survey. Ingram also attended the KEYS Steering Committee meeting, where he decided that the group should present to the district’s principals. Ultimately, Ingram saw that the collaboration not only worked, but also would benefit from additional investment. He redoubled the district’s KEYS efforts and appointed Collins and deProse to the ILT.

Two years later, the district and union faced another barrier. The contract negotiations using interest-based bargaining (IBB) were not going well, and the Level 4 schools process underway included minimal input from teachers. Both Ingram and Collins felt aggrieved. Ingram was not happy with what he perceived as an inflexible approach by

the SEA bargaining team in contract negotiations. At the same time, SEA leaders and teachers were upset about the lack of union involvement in district decisions about the Level 4 schools.

Bundy worked to bring the groups back together by facilitating two “reset” meetings in November and December of 2010. At the meetings, Ingram, Collins, and SPS and SEA leaders expressed their anger and frustrations at what they perceived as the other party’s refusal to work collaboratively. According to Bundy, “The meetings were pivotal. They helped clear the air. Alan [Ingram] and Tim [Collins] got their grievances against one another out of their systems.” In separate one-on-one meetings, leading up to the “reset” meetings, Bundy reminded each of them how much they had been helped by the other. “You can say that he’s never done anything for you, but here are a few things he has done,” Bundy would tell Collins or Ingram, “Tim, what about when Alan put you on the ILT and Budget Committee?” or “Alan, what about the time when Tim stood up at the big Race to the Top meeting and said, ‘We have to do this.’ He not only said it to superintendents and policy makers, he said it to his peers across the state.”

Building Capacity

True success for third-party facilitation is to reach a point when the collaborative relationship no longer requires a third-party facilitator. Moreover, for Bundy and other facilitators, the ultimate goal is capacity-building—to shift the work from individual leaders to an internal culture of collaboration. Springfield still has a long way to go before the support of third-party facilitators is no longer needed, particularly with the arrival of a new superintendent in school-year 2012-2013. Yet, the partnership continues and every step is seen as progress. As Bundy recalled, “I will never forget the first time I heard Alan refer to Tim as ‘Timmy’, a nickname that his long-time colleagues sometimes use. That was important because it showed the kind of relationship they had formed: they were still just as likely to go at it in debates with one another, but they were on a different, surer footing. They had earned a different level of trust.”

LESSON 5

Invite community organizations to lead on-the-ground efforts to improve student learning, and involve community leaders in district leadership teams.

Springfield Public Schools (SPS) and the Springfield Education Association (SEA) leaders have taken substantial steps to broaden their collaborative efforts to include schools and community organizations. To Superintendent Ingram, this was the only way to ensure that improvements lasted beyond any one superintendent’s tenure: “Real education reforms are developed by the community with buy-in.” SPS has long had strong partnerships with local organizations in the community. The district has worked together with the United Way of Pioneer Valley (UWPV) and the Hasbro Corporation to bolster student learning in summer programs through the *Hasbro Summer Learning Initiative*.⁴³ For nearly a decade, SPS and SEA have partnered with the community organizing group, Pioneer Valley Project, to develop the parent-teacher home visit program. In addition, SPS and SEA collaborate with the Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation, UWPV, and the Hampden County Regional Employment Board on the *Talk/Read/Succeed* initiative, which targeted literacy interventions to 200 families in two low-income housing developments.⁴⁴

Each community collaboration brought together several organizations to address a specific challenge: summer learning loss, parent engagement and early literacy. Yet, Ingram, SEA President Collins, and deProse, of the Massachusetts Teachers Association, still saw the need for a comprehensive collaboration that could get everyone in the community—schools, unions, foundations, non-profits, and families—working together to help students learn. Their decision was consistent with research that shows that complex social problems, such as poverty and low student achievement, cut across organizational boundaries.⁴⁵ These and other problems could only be solved through labor-management-community collaboration, or what Bundy of Community Matters calls the “community solution.”

Finding Support for the *Community Solution*

Implementing the *community solution* in Springfield would take a significant amount of money, which, in an era of budget cuts, was difficult to obtain. Fortunately, soon after arriving in her current position and observing the beginnings of the labor-management collaboration, deProse was aware of a source of funds that could help launch a comprehensive labor-management-community collaboration. The National Education Association (NEA) Foundation offered large multi-year grants to increase student achievement through district-union collaboration, increased teaching effectiveness, and parent and community engagement with its *Closing the Achievement Gaps Initiative*.

After a national search in early 2009 to increase the number of districts participating in its *Closing the Achievement Gaps Initiative*, the NEA Foundation invited Springfield and four other districts from among hundreds of districts nationally to each apply for a planning grant. The Foundation then visited Springfield, meeting with deProse, Collins, Ingram, Bundy, Mary Walachy of the Davis Foundation, and other community stakeholders in a series of gatherings organized by the SPS-SEA team. At the conclusion of its visit, the Foundation determined that the Springfield team had a solid theory of change, a track record of strong district-union collaboration, and a clear understanding of the need for community engagement. In April 2009, it awarded Springfield a six-month planning grant.

As part of the planning phase, Ingram, Collins and deProse asked for and received support from the Davis Foundation and UWPV. Working together with facilitation support from Bundy, the group generated a labor-management-community collaboration plan that integrated parent-teacher home visits, the *Hasbro Summer Learning Initiative*, joint district-union school leadership teams, and increased collaborative structures at the district level. The NEA Foundation was impressed by the plan's depth of collaboration and the integration of parent engagement and summer learning work. In February 2010, the Springfield community was rewarded for its collaborative efforts with a \$1.25 million five-year grant from the NEA Foundation and the *Springfield Collaboration for Change* was born.⁴⁶

Springfield Collaboration for Change Emerges

The goals of the *Springfield Collaboration for Change* (SCC) were twofold: deepen collaboration at the school-level and increase parent and community engagement. Embedded within the goals were four key activities that all members of the SCC agreed were the most important factors impacting student learning:⁴⁷ These included: aligning the instructional core; monitoring results; strengthening parent partnerships; and building the capacity of all partners.⁴⁸ To Collins, the success of the SCC would mean everyone in the Springfield community was working together on the same goals supporting student learning. He compared the vision of what the SCC could become to the celebrated community-collaboration, the Harlem Children's Zone, "Our vision of the SCC is a Harlem Children's Zone for Springfield. All the people are on the same page, doing their part, to help students?"

To begin, the SCC focused on building collaborative school leadership teams, providing school-based support coaches, and scaling up parent-teacher home visits to reach more families. To implement joint leadership teams in schools, the SCC planned to restructure the existing school-based leadership team, so that half of the members were elected by the staff in the school.⁴⁹ The transformed school leadership team was then supported by two instructional coaches—a former teacher and a former principal.

The final component of the SCC plan was the expansion and strengthening of a parent-teacher home visit program that had been run by the district in collaboration with the Pioneer Valley Project and SEA since 2006.⁵⁰ With a partner, teachers visited student homes twice a year: first, for a one-hour introductory visit designed to foster a personal connection; and second, to bring some capacity-building information to parents. The home visiting component also aligned the *Talk/Read/Succeed* program and the *Springfield Parent Academy*. Funded by the Davis and W. K. Kellogg Foundations and administered by the Regional Employment Board, the *Talk/Read/Succeed* program provided parents and families in two housing developments with intensive support to help their children's language development. The *Springfield Parent Academy* offered additional supports to parents, families, and caregivers through courses and seminars on supporting children's academic learning. The overall approach was to integrate all the resources avail-

able to parents and families into a tight network of support for each child in Springfield. As Collins explained, “We are trying to get a culture that connects parents to schools. Our framework is about strengthening the ability of kids; it is about the community, parents, teachers, and kids.”

Implementing the *Springfield Collaboration for Change*

With the components of the model outlined, the SCC Leadership Team began implementation. The Leadership Team established a working group to develop criteria to select the first “Collaboration Schools” that would participate in the SCC initiative.⁵¹ Through the early fall, interested schools applied and the Leadership Team interviewed principals. At schools that passed through the first round, staff members were asked to complete a survey about their willingness to participate in the project and conduct home visits. Only schools with 70 percent or more of staff members willing to participate were considered as potential Collaboration Schools. Eventually, the SCC Leadership Team selected four Collaboration Schools to participate in the 2010-2011 implementation.⁵²

Through the winter, the SCC Leadership Team and Collaboration Schools proceeded with hiring instructional coaches and restructuring the school leadership teams to be more collaborative. While there were challenges, by the late spring of 2011, the four schools had shown progress in implementing the SCC components. The schools had hired coaches and set up collaborative school leadership teams. In addition, 80 teachers were trained to conduct home visits, and a number of home visits were conducted across the four schools. Three of the schools also integrated the *Hasbro Summer Learning Initiative* with success.⁵³

Impact of the *Springfield Collaboration for Change*

By the fall of 2011, the impact of the SCC initiative in the four schools was starting to emerge. Principals were beginning to see that teachers who went on home visits were changing the way they taught, and parents were becoming more engaged in the school. One Collaboration School principal explained, “It’s basically a relationship-building experience...Parents are more apt to share with us information about their children. They are more relaxed to ask questions about school. It builds an overall collaboration that really is essential for student achievement.” This was particularly important in Springfield where students did not necessarily attend schools located in their own neighborhoods. “A lot of our students are bused in and don’t live nearby,” explained one teacher, “so, it’s good for a teacher to go out and see where they live...and for parents to see that their teachers really want to help them and their child.” Similarly, parents felt better informed about what was going on in school and how they could help support learning. One father stated, “Before, I never knew what was going on; I never knew anything. I would just pick her up and leave. Now I come in and say ‘Hi.’ You see people, you know people.”

SCC’s impact was also reaching beyond the classroom, throughout the schools and district. The newly formed school leadership teams looked for ways to integrate teachers into the schools’ decision-making process. At the district and community level, the SCC Leadership Team brought a new level of resource coordination to Springfield. With leaders from the five major organizations—SPS, SEA, Davis Foundation, Regional Employment Board and the UWPV—funding or leading work with children, the SCC Leadership Team could quickly see overlaps between programs, gaps in services and opportunities to partner. Perhaps most importantly, the SCC helped build widespread support for quality education and services for the children in Springfield. Said Ingram, “Community collaboration helps build public trust and confidence. It is in the community’s best interest to work with schools.”

Conclusion

There is no easy way to collaborate. “Collaboration in education is hard work,” Superintendent Ingram noted, “it would be easier to just ignore it.” The challenge is establishing the support systems and structures and building community commitment to deepen and sustain collaborative problem solving. Ingram, Springfield Education Association (SEA) President Collins, and other leaders in Springfield are the first to acknowledge that their collaborative efforts need constant cultivation. Collaborative efforts at the school level are growing, but have a long way to go before reaching the level desired by Springfield Public Schools and the SEA.

“Collaboration is as fragile as the human relationships upon which it is based.”

SEA President Collins

Springfield faces another test of the strength of its collaboration. Ingram will leave as superintendent in July 2012, and a new superintendent will take his place. The leaders in Springfield believe their collaboration will survive the transition, but they expect to revisit the key lessons they have learned to date. After all, as Collins pointed out, “Collaboration is as fragile as the human relationships upon which it is based.”

Learning from Springfield

In Springfield, the district, union, and community work together in unique ways not found in most other urban school districts in the United States. The leaders in Springfield have overcome extraordinary challenges—insolvency, state takeover, bargaining impasses, and reform turmoil—to sustain and expand labor-management-community collaboration. Their successes, failures, and experiences offer many lessons for other districts across Massachusetts and nationally. In this report, five of the most important lessons are highlighted:

- LESSON 1:** Use data to maintain focus and drive action plans that center on student needs.
- LESSON 2:** Expect unexpected disruptions to collaboration, and do not give up when they occur.
- LESSON 3:** Build collaborative structures and relationships that extend beyond the superintendent’s office.
- LESSON 4:** Rely on third-party facilitators to initiate difficult discussions, keep conversations productive, and maintain momentum.
- LESSON 5:** Invite community organizations to lead on-the-ground efforts to improve student learning, and involve community leaders in district leadership teams.

Based on the experiences, leaders in Springfield suggest a few straightforward and low-cost steps for districts, unions, or community leaders interested in starting a collaboration or deepening existing collaborative efforts:

Read the contract.

This simple and obvious first step is often overlooked by district and community leaders. One way leaders can “honor the past” without being “held hostage to it,” is to understand and learn from the hard work and debate captured in the contract. This can form a basic first step in strengthening the district-union working relationship.

Use traditional committee structures for non-traditional collaborative meetings.

Time is an incredibly valuable resource in school reform. In Springfield, Ingram and Collins used time efficiently by redesigning the senior leadership teams for collaboration. Then they used the reorganized collaborative committees to implement state and federal policies such as Race to the Top and Level 4 schools. These traditional committee structures provided an existing place and time to meet, eliminating the need to schedule yet another meeting.

Focus on what you agree on.

When individuals from different organizations representing different interests get together, it is easy to find topics of disagreement. This is particularly true for any community with a long history of contentious district-union relations. In meetings, district, union, and community leaders should challenge themselves to find agreement on an issue,

problem, or definition. For Springfield, one early area of common ground included defining their shared goal of success, which led to the Definition of a Successful School. Find common ground, and work together on it.

Prepare to be uncomfortable.

Even decisions made with the best of intentions centered on improving student learning will have critics. In Springfield, Ingram faced disapproval from his senior staff when he appointed union leaders to the Instructional Leadership Team. Collins faced backlash from his membership for collaborating with Superintendent Burke and agreeing to support Race to the Top. Collaboration involves learning to cope with discomfort and being open to productive conflict.

Appendix A

Springfield Public Schools' Definition of a Successful School, 2007

A successful school provides a broad, comprehensive education to all students. The school aims at high academic achievement for all students and shows a pattern of steadily improving all students' academic performance. Performance is measured in a variety of ways, and improvement is considered a function of individual growth and group progress. Students learn much more than academics in the successful school.

The successful school projects a clear vision of excellent, equitable education. The school's mission is to realize this vision, and it employs a set of effective strategies for fulfilling its mission. All constituents in the community—administrators, teachers, students and parents—understand the school's mission and support its strategies. In particular, educators aim to engage students' families as partners in the educational process. The school has clear, uniformly high expectations for all students, and the school is organized to meet the learning needs of each and every student. Finally, the school has clear goals against which it measures progress in terms of both current status and growth over time. In meeting the goals, the school always adheres to a set of ethical values.

The successful school's faculty is uniformly composed of skilled, caring and committed teachers who have the knowledge, teaching expertise and drive to meet the learning needs of each and every student. The school's administrators share the faculty's instructional expertise and commitment while inspiring and leading the school in a spirit of a collaborative endeavor characterized by strong interpersonal, listening and communication skills, consistently supportive action and the balanced mediation of various interests. The professionals in the school actively work together in an adult learning community that is relentlessly committed to student success.

The successful school's professional learning community is based on a commitment to achieving high standards of learning for each and every child. Administrators and faculty are committed to a process of continuously collaborating to strengthen their own skills and knowledge so as to better serve the students. Professionals are attentive to the whole child, including his/her social and emotional needs. The school has induction and mentoring programs for new teachers. Leadership roles are shared among members and the professional development work is based on data on student performance and needs. There is adequate time for genuine, collaborative professional work and learning. There is an open, respectful dialogue between all parties and a high level of trust. In the end, the professional community is focused on meeting the personal learning needs of all of the students.

The successful school does not operate in isolation. It is supported by the central office and works closely with teachers and with parents as partners in their children's education. The school also seeks partnerships with the community and various agencies and organizations which share the school's interests in the children's success. Infusing the work of the school's staff is an understanding of and appreciation for the rich diversity embodied in students' lives.

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10. Goonan, P. (2003). New budget still raises concerns. *The Republican*, June 22, 2003.
11. The percentage of students from low-income backgrounds, defined as those receiving free or reduced priced lunches, had increased by nearly 17 percentage points between 1994 and 2004; by 2004 77 percent of students in Springfield were low-income. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2011). *State and district profiles: Springfield Public Schools*. Retrieved November 2011 from: <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu>.
12. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2011). *State and district profiles: Springfield Public Schools*. Retrieved November 2011 from: <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/>.
13. Teachers felt betrayed by the new contract and the way in which the Financial Control Board forced teachers to accept it. Deputy Superintendent Daniel Warwick explained, "The Control Board had power and it wielded that power in a way that created a lot of ill will. They made unilateral decisions that probably could have been negotiated, but the Board didn't want to take the time." Springfield Education Association staff member and district veteran, Arlindo Alves, agreed: "The relationship was adversarial. Many teachers saw the Financial Control Board as trying to destroy them." See, Sacchetti, M. (2006). Springfield teachers OK merit pay contract: Wages could be tied directly to how well students perform. *The Boston Globe*, September 9, 2006; Springfield Education Association. (2005). *Press release of bill of indictment, September 14, 2004*. Springfield Education Association website. Retrieved November 2011 from: <http://www.seateachers.com/HTMLobj-1177/pressrelease92205.pdf>.
14. For the 2005-2006 school year, SPS was forced to hire nearly 600 new teachers, representing 15 percent of the total teaching force. A majority of the new teachers hired for whom data was available were not licensed or considered highly-qualified under standards set by No Child Left Behind. Springfield Education Association. (2005). *Press release of bill of indictment, September 14, 2004*. Springfield Education Association website. Retrieved November 2011 from: <http://www.seateachers.com/HTMLobj-1177/pressrelease92205.pdf>.
15. Churchill, A. & Rallis, S. (2009). *Using KEYS 2.0 District-wide: A Springfield, Massachusetts Case Study*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Center for Education Policy.
16. Teachers were not aware of the conversations, and even some of Collins' and Burke's closest staff members did not know the two were working together so closely. To the outside world, it was Collins and the Springfield Education Association versus Burke, Springfield Public Schools, and the Financial Control Board. As Collins said: "There were days on the talk radio shows where Burke would be on, and then I'd be on, and it was like two heavyweight boxers throwing jabs and body blows at each other." Churchill, A. & Rallis, S. (2009). *Using KEYS 2.0 District-wide: A Springfield, Massachusetts Case Study*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Center for Education Policy, p. 3.
17. Churchill, A. & Rallis, S. (2009). *Using KEYS 2.0 District-wide: A Springfield, Massachusetts Case Study*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Center for Education Policy, p. 11.
18. *Ibid.*
19. The six areas are: shared understanding and commitment to high goals, open communication and collaborative problem solving, continuous assessment, personal and professional learning, resources to support teaching, and curriculum and instruction. Results from the survey showed the school's average, standard deviation, the average of all schools in the district, and the average and 90th percentile in a national validation study on each of the indicators and keys. National Education Association. (2004). *KEYS 2.0: Keys to Excellence for Your Schools Facilitation Guide*. Retrieved November 2011 from: <http://www.keysonline.org/guide/index.htm>.

20. With an uncertain labor-management environment following the contract negotiations, *Joint Labor-Management Initiative* team members knew the process in which the survey was rolled out was as important as the survey's results. The team crafted a careful implementation plan that detailed specifically how the survey would be administered in schools and what the district and schools would do with the results afterwards. Every step along the way was carried out jointly by the district and union. Collins and Burke asked each school to develop a KEYS team that included a project administrator, two facilitators, the principal, and a union representative. The KEYS school teams then received training on the survey in February and shared the information with the staff at their schools.
21. Churchill, A. & Rallis, S. (2009). *Using KEYS 2.0 District-wide: A Springfield, Massachusetts Case Study*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Center for Education Policy, p. 18.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. To inform schools of the findings, the Steering Committee split into joint district-union teams and presented to school-level KEYS teams. The Steering Committee teams asked school teams if the indicators were the right ones for the district to focus on in the coming school years. Burke and Collins attended the meetings, received feedback on the process and answered any questions. As an outgrowth of the school-level KEYS work, the district piloted a school-based coaching intervention at two schools. The major goal of the project was to address the issues raised in the KEYS results with the support of two coaches—one former administrator and one former teacher—at each school. The school-based coaching intervention was limited, but for Collins, it was one of the first times teachers had been asked for their input on the district's direction: "For the first time, we were looking at what we need to do—not being told what to do. People were being asked, at the building level, is the district picking the right concerns to work on? It was empowering, and people respected the process." Churchill, A. & Rallis, S. (2009). *Using KEYS 2.0 District-wide: A Springfield, Massachusetts Case Study*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Center for Education Policy, p. 20.
25. Goonan, P. (2011). Former Springfield schools chief Joseph Burke offered superintendent post in Florida school system. *The Republican*, May 18, 2011.
26. Council of Great City Schools. (2010). Urban school superintendents: Characteristics, tenure, and salary. *Urban Indicator*. Retrieved November 2011 from: http://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/DC00001581/Centricity/Domain/4/Supt_Survey2010.pdf.
27. Moreover, as a new superintendent in Massachusetts, Ingram had been assigned a coach—former Boston Public Schools Superintendent Tom Payzant—by the state's superintendents' association. Payzant also encouraged Ingram to continue the collaborative approach.
28. For additional information, see Hoy, W. K., Tarter, C. J., & Kottkamp, R. B. (1991). *Open schools/healthy schools: Measuring organizational climate*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
29. Churchill, A. & Rallis, S. (2009). *Using KEYS 2.0 District-wide: A Springfield, Massachusetts Case Study*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Center for Education Policy, p. 25.
30. During contract negotiations in the spring of 2006, the Financial Control Board wanted to include a value-added measure of student achievement as a component in the teacher evaluation. After a series of impasses, Springfield Education Association took the issue to arbitration. In the fall of 2006, a state arbitrator ruled that the proposed value-added measure could not be used in the teacher evaluation. Springfield Education Association and the Financial Control Board then bargained for the Springfield Teacher Evaluation and Development System (STEDS).
31. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports is a prevention-based behavior management system that incorporates data and evidence into a team-based decisions making process. Sugai, Horner, Algozzine, etc. (2010). *School-wide positive behavior support: Implementers' blueprint and self-assessment*. Eugene, OR: University of Oregon. Retrieved January 2012 from: http://www.pbis.org/common/pbisresources/publications/SWPBS_ImplementationBlueprint_vSep_23_2010.pdf.
32. The key tenets of Interest-based bargaining are: separate people from the issues, identify and consistently refer to those interests that all parties have in common, generate many options before making decisions, and define success on an objective standard. Fisher, R. & Ury, W. (1991). *Getting to yes: Negotiating agreement without giving in* (2nd ed.). New York: Penguin Books: p. 4.
33. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2012). *Chapter 70 district profiles*. Retrieved January 2012 from: <http://finance1.doe.mass.edu/chapter70/profile.xls>.
34. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2010). *Press release: Landmark opportunity for students in Massachusetts' most struggling schools*. Retrieved November 2011 from: http://www.wbur.org/files/2010/03/0305_underperforming-schools.pdf.
35. Springfield Public Schools. (2011). *Level 4 schools*. Springfield Public Schools website. Retrieved November 2011 from: <http://www.sps.springfield.ma.us>.
36. Superintendents had to convene a stakeholder group of no more than 13 people within 30 days of Level 4 designation being made. Forty-five days after its first meeting, the stakeholder group had to submit recommendations to the superintendent. The superintendent then had 30 days to submit a plan to the school committee, stakeholder group, and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Minor modifications could be made at that point, but the plan had to be finalized within the next month. Commonwealth of Massachusetts. (2010). *An Act Relative to the Achievement Gap*. Retrieved November 2011 from: <http://www.mass.gov/legis/bills/senate/186/st02pdf/st02247.pdf>.
37. There were four models: turnaround, restart, school closure, or transformation. The turnaround model involves dismissing at least 50 percent of teachers and the principal. In a restart, the school would be transformed into a charter school with the principal and most teachers being removed. School closure meant shutting the school down and dispersing students to other schools in the community. Transformation involved developing a comprehensive school improvement plan that included investing in teacher training, extending the school day, and implementing a new teacher evaluation. U.S. Department of Education. (2009). Department of Education notices. *Federal Register*, 74, No. 164, Retrieved November 2011 from: <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2009/pdf/E9-20612.pdf>.

38. Springfield had the highest proportion of Level 4 schools in the state—the next nearest district had only 6% of its schools identified. Following the deadlines set forth in the January 2010 Act, Superintendent Ingram was forced to form ten stakeholder groups and submit ten improvement plans to the state by June 13, fewer than five days after the last day of school. In addition, the number of schools labeled Level 4 in Springfield triggered the “Rule of Nine,” which prohibited any district with more than nine persistently low-performing schools from using the transformation model with more than 50 percent of the schools. In the end, Springfield Public Schools selected five schools for turnaround and five schools for transformation.
39. Facilitation was provided by Focus on Results, an education-support organization that works with schools and districts across the United States and Canada on improving student learning, school leadership and decision-making.
40. U.S. Department of Education. (2010). *Nine states and District of Columbia won second round of Race to the Top grants*. U.S. Department of Education website. Retrieved November 2011 from: <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/nine-states-and-district-columbia-win-second-round-race-top-grants>.
41. The Senior Leadership Teams included the superintendent, deputy superintendent and all chief-level positions (e.g. chief of human resources, chief schools officer, chief of federal programs).
42. Springfield Education Association. (2005). *Press release of bill of indictment, September 14, 2004*. Springfield Education Association website. Retrieved November 2011 from: <http://www.seateachers.com/HTMLobj-1177/pressrelease92205.pdf>.
43. United Way of Pioneer Valley. (2012). *Hasbro Summer Learning Initiative*. United Way of Pioneer Valley website. Retrieved January 2012 from: <http://www.uwvpv.org/index.php?id=331>.
44. Flynn, J. (2010). Springfield housing authority families receive \$390,000 literacy grant. *The Republican*, November 17, 2010.
45. Trist, E.L. (1983). Referent organizations and the development of interorganizational domains. *Human Relations*, 36, 269-284.
46. The NEA Foundation has invited Springfield to participate in the second year of an anticipated five-year initiative, based on the district and union’s success to date in deepening collaboration and creating the conditions necessary for systematically improving teaching effectiveness.
47. The *Springfield Collaboration for Change* was overseen by a Leadership Team composed of a core group of district, union, and community leaders. By the spring of 2011, the team included key leaders from Springfield Public Schools, Springfield Education Association, Davis Foundation, the Regional Employment Board, and United Way of Pioneer Valley. A smaller Resource Development Group met frequently to plan fundraising efforts. Nancy deProse served as the project director.
48. The outcomes the *Springfield Collaboration for Change* hoped to accomplish were closing the achievement gap, increasing overall student achievement, and preparing students for future life and career success. Lawrence, R. Rallis, S. & Churchill, A. (2011). *The Springfield Collaboration for Change: A NEA Foundation-Funded Initiative Year-End Report 2010-2011*. Amherst, MA: Center for Education Policy.
49. Every school was required to have an Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) composed of the principal and other school personnel. Up to this point, in many schools, the school-based ILT was seen as an extension of the principal and offered no opportunities for teacher input.
50. The home visit program was based on the highly-acclaimed Sacramento model of home visiting that emphasized building trusting relationships with parents. The Parent Teacher Home Visit Project. (2011). The Parent Teacher Home Visit Project website. Retrieved November 2011 from: <http://www.pthvp.org>.
51. The working group met through the spring of 2010 and eventually settled on several conditions that schools had to meet to participate in the initial rollout. First, the group immediately ruled out Level 4 schools. While these schools were likely to benefit from the *Springfield Collaboration for Change* initiative, timing prevented their participation in the initial implementation. Level 4 schools were in the midst of massive change in spring 2010 and simply did not have the time or capacity to commit to being a Collaboration School. The second criterion set by the working group was that a school’s participation had to be voluntary. Schools had to self-select into the program, first by applying and then by having 70 percent of staff members vote in favor of participating. Collins explained the rationale: “From the very beginning, we did not want something that was going to be imposed on schools. It very much had to be a partnership.” Third, the initial group of schools would focus only at the elementary and middle school levels. The working group believed that concentrating on elementary and middle schools would best leverage the resources provided by the NEA Foundation grant. Finally, the values and philosophy of participating schools had to align with those of the *Springfield Collaboration for Change*—the school had to commit to shared teacher leadership and increased family engagement.
52. The four schools selected were: Boland, Hiram L. Dorman, William N. DeBerry and Sumner Avenue. Overall, the schools represented the district’s diversity: on average, over 90 percent of students in the schools were low-income, 24 percent received special education services, 62 percent were Hispanic, and 21 percent African-American.
53. At two schools, 78 students were able to attend a summer camp with a nature-based curriculum and embedded literacy instruction. At another school, 24 children participated in a five-week summer program coordinated by the *Hasbro Summer Learning Initiative* and a local childcare provider.

Case study produced by the **RENNIE CENTER** for Education Research & Policy

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The **RENNIE CENTER** and its *Labor-Management Initiative* are generously supported by

The Noyce Foundation

Irene E. & George A. Davis Foundation

Acknowledgements

The Rennie Center would like to express its gratitude to Community Matters, Springfield Public Schools, Springfield Education Association, United Way of Pioneer Valley, NEA Foundation, Regional Employment Board of Hampden County, and other community members who have played important roles in sustaining the collaborative partnership in Springfield, Massachusetts. We are especially grateful to the individuals who we interviewed for this case study (listed by name on page 5)—we appreciate their time, candor and commitment to sharing what they have learned so that others might develop successful labor-management-community collaborations. We also extend our thanks to the individuals who reviewed drafts of the case study for sharing their feedback.

Collaborating for Student Achievement

Collaborating for Student Achievement (CSA) is an initiative created by the Rennie Center and Community Matters to accelerate student success by facilitating high-impact collaboration between school administrators, teacher union leaders, and community leaders. CSA is designed to:

- Help a cohort of leading public school districts, unions and community allies master the use of labor-management-community collaboration practices;
- Conduct research that expands the knowledge base about what works in LMC collaboration, and documents its impact on student achievement;
- Promote increased knowledge and use of labor-management-community collaboration as a driver of effective education reform.

For more information about *Collaborating for Student Achievement* or this case study, please contact Chad d'Entremont at cdentremont@renniecenter.org.

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The Rennie Center's mission is to develop a public agenda that informs and promotes significant improvement of public education in Massachusetts. Our work is motivated by a vision of an education system that creates the opportunity to educate every child to be successful in life, citizenship, employment and life-long learning. Applying nonpartisan, independent research, journalism and civic engagement, the Rennie Center is creating a civil space to foster thoughtful public discourse to inform and shape effective policy. For more information, please visit: www.renniecenter.org.

Suggested Citation

Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy. (Spring 2012). *Labor-Management-Community Collaboration in Springfield Public Schools*. Cambridge, MA: Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy.