

We, the organizations of the NLMP, believe that the moment is right for us to unite to achieve a culture shift toward a collective focus on student success, and collaboration at all levels of our system to support it. Educators, administrators, and communities are collectively rejecting the last wave of top-down education reforms that blamed educators for students' under-performance without providing the supports, resources, and authority needed to improve student outcomes. Education stakeholders are moving beyond the test-and-punish era of reforms because they see the evidence that shows there is another way – a better way – to ensure that every student is afforded the benefits of attending a great public school.

It is time to usher in a new era in education – one characterized by professional respect, unity, and collaboration toward student-centered outcomes. **By fostering a culture of learning and joint problem-solving in our schools and districts, the solutions to today's education challenges will arise from within the system, not from outside it. Together, as those closest to the students and families, empowered education stakeholders will transform our nation's public schools.**

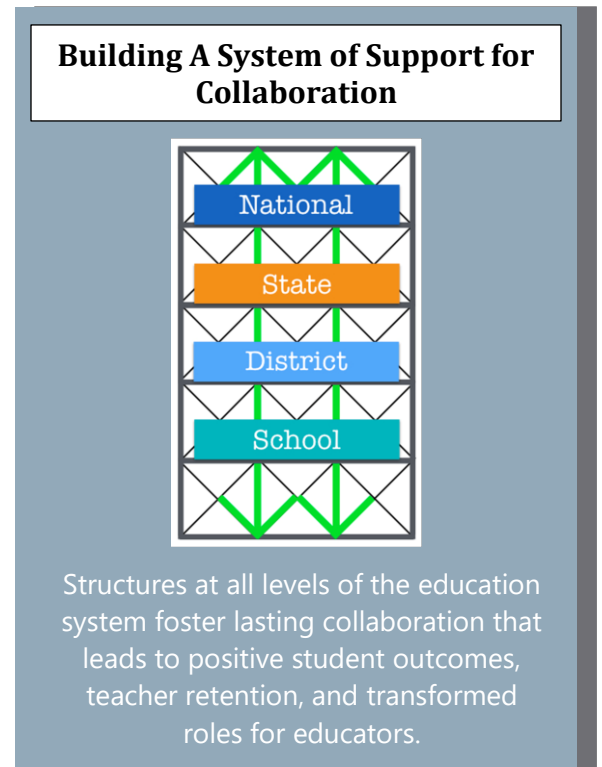
This call to action is not merely inspirational, but is based on decades of research showing the benefits of school-level collaboration on student outcomes, and on a rich and growing body of evidence showing the promise of district-level collaborative partnerships as a strategy to enhance school transformation. Specifically, when principals distribute school leadership, organizational trust among educators increases, and they are more likely to engage one another as mentors, coaches, and advisors on professional issuesⁱ. This increase in engagement and collaboration raises the social capital of those involved, which is associated with increases in student performanceⁱⁱ.

When collaboration is strong in schools and districts, researchers have found **greater goal alignment** between educators and administrators, **increased educator efficacy, stronger mentoring relationships** between educators, and perceptions by staff that **the principal and education association representative are both trusted professional resources**ⁱⁱⁱ. School boards and district and school administrators have critical roles to play in fostering the forms of distributed leadership and collaboration in schools that lead to these positive outcomesⁱⁱⁱ. The identification of shared, student-centered goals and commitment to work together to achieve them serves as the first step in creating a culture of collaboration. The communication structures that are built to enable effective collaboration around these goals not only fortify the relationships that the adults in school systems have with one another, but can also be sustained beyond the initial short-term projects and used for continuous improvement efforts. The local education association also plays a particularly critical role in establishing and supporting collaborative structures within this partnership: the education association's democratic governance and web of building representatives is a "natural network" of educators that not only represents the collective wisdom of those closest to the students, but also can easily identify educators with expertise in district-level priorities and support the district in increasing shared leadership at the school levelⁱⁱⁱ. Research suggests that **when decisions are shared by administrators and educators at all levels, the resulting culture is so nurturing to the educator and student that, even in high-poverty schools, teacher turnover and low student achievement can be mitigated**^{iv}.

Shared decision-making does not imply one group relinquishing power and authority to another, and not all decisions in an education system are appropriate to be shared. For example, certain personnel and budgetary decisions will always reside in administration, while governance decisions will reside among the school board who is accountable to the public that elected them, and decisions about pedagogy will continue to be made by classroom educators. However, stretching the boundaries of which district and school-level decisions can be made jointly, particularly around issues such as instructional practices, mentoring, and student performance, results in positive outcomes for school climate, student achievement, and teacher retentionⁱⁱⁱ – outcomes valued by all education stakeholders.

Working together is not a new concept; many district leaders throughout the nation have strong, productive relationships with their local education associations. We have seen, however, that these relationships are often built on the charisma of individual leaders, and when those leaders leave, the collaborative initiatives wither away. What is new about this Call to Action is the commitment from each partner organization to **intentionally foster and support lasting structures for collaboration at all levels**, so it becomes a part of how we all operate and is sustained at a systemic level, beyond any individual's tenure. The collaborative partnerships we seek will create structures for all stakeholders to contribute expertise toward specific shared goals, appropriate to their roles in the education system. Such partnerships offer district and school administrators a meaningful way to tap into the knowledge base and mobilized network of the education association and its members for the benefit of schools and students. In this new era, district administrators and education associations will no longer see each other as opposing sides, fighting for power over limited resources. These partnerships acknowledge the important role of each set of stakeholders in student success, and each stakeholder commits to one another's success as they work together to maximize resources and implement policy and program changes to increase the effectiveness of their public school systems.

The promise of this strategy is undeniable, and it has taken root in key places around the country, particularly in districts in California, Illinois, and New Jersey. Partnerships between NLMP organizations, universities, and/or nonprofits in these states have established consortia to support districts in using collaborative processes to strengthen programs and policies, and address students' needs. In recent years, districts participating in such consortia have successfully used collaborative partnerships to identify and implement reading and math curricula for targeted populations, to improve school schedules to allow for increased professional learning time, to explore and integrate social-emotional learning opportunities into students' school lives, and more. The ABC Unified School District in California, through one of the longest-running and most comprehensive collaborative partnerships in the country, has seen dramatic and sustained increases in student achievement over time, with formerly-troubled schools now labeled Schools of Excellence and district leaders nominated for national awards. Put simply, **this strategy works**.



We share responsibility for achieving our shared goal – strong public schools that meet the needs of the children and families they serve. **Leading together on this goal requires a system that is designed for collaboration and shared leadership. It is time to create this system.** We, as national education stakeholders, call upon educators, in their respective organizations, to engage in student-centered education partnerships. To that end, we call for three immediate changes in the ways that we as education stakeholders relate to each other:

- 1 Start Somewhere: Begin Collaboration on Shared Goals
- 2 Build Sustainable Structures for Local-Level Collaboration
- 3 Include Parents and Community in Education Transformation

We are asking leaders and members at all levels of each NLMP organization to commit to join with the other education stakeholders, develop the collaborative systems necessary to support and sustain this new era in education, and create structures that will support this collaborative work. We also ask our members to come together at the state level to provide technical assistance for districts or schools as needed and to facilitate opportunities for districts engaged in collaborative partnerships to learn from one another.

- 1 The first step in developing a collaborative process is simply to “start somewhere.” Stakeholder groups identify shared student-centered goals, then work collaboratively and share decision-making in the improvement processes to achieve them. For example, in the initial collaborative project, the education association might use its network to bring forward educators’ most pressing concerns for their students, and to identify members whose expertise on those issues is highly respected by their peers, while the district administrators might carve out time for a collaborative committee to be established, and offer data on performance, climate, or other issues. If helpful, external partners from universities or non-profits can aid in selecting change theories and in using best practices for collaboration around school transformation.
- 2 Simultaneously or after “starting somewhere”, collaborative partnerships will need to create a rich web of communication and collaboration structures between stakeholders at all levels of the local school system. This includes regular meetings between district department leaders and educators appointed through their association, as well as the establishment of school level leadership teams, professional learning communities, and committees to address specific issues or topics.
- 3 Schools do not operate in a vacuum; they are part and parcel of the communities they serve. As such, collaborative education partnerships will be even stronger if they include the knowledge, resources, and passion of parents and community members in efforts to transform local school systems. Parents want the best education possible for their children. And, community leaders know that the local economy is bolstered by a top-notch education system that attracts businesses to the community and that prepares a homegrown workforce. Creating opportunities for these stakeholders to join in the transformative work will benefit everyone.

The time is right for collaboration to become the new normal – for educators, administrators, and other stakeholders working together on student-centered goals to become the usual way that education decisions are made. We call upon the local-level leaders in each of our respective organizations to join with one another and with all the education stakeholders in their communities, and immediately embark upon collaborative efforts to address the district’s most pressing concerns for students and schools. Begin with one project, and use it to build lasting partnership structures that will survive the test of time and position your district to solve whatever challenges it faces. And, we call upon the state-level leaders in each of our respective organizations to join with one another and with other coalition partners to support these local-level partnerships. Just as our organizations have shown they have the mobilization strength, the unity, and the will to push up on the system and insist on improved public education funding, these same structures can be used to ensure that support is channeled down to those closest to students and families. Through shared responsibility and collective leadership, we will ensure that every student, in every district, is afforded the lifelong benefits of attending a great public school.

Stakeholder Roles in the Collaborative Partnership Process

	District and School Administration	Education Associations/Unions	School Boards	Other Stakeholders
<p>1</p> <p>Start Somewhere: Begin Collaboration on Shared Goals</p>	<p>Open the decision-making table to other stakeholders</p> <p>Make district- and school-level data on performance, climate, and other issues available to collaborative committees</p>	<p>Use the association's network to identify, position, and support knowledgeable educators to collaborative committees</p> <p>Identify educators' most pressing concerns for their students and schools, and raise them as possible issues on which to collaborate</p>	<p>Set the tone: Establish an expectation for collaborative decision-making</p> <p>Provide resources for training and ongoing support in collaborative processes, relationship-building, and subject-matter expertise</p>	<p>Universities or Non-profits: Training in change theory and improvement processes</p>
<p>2</p> <p>Build Sustainable Structures for Local-Level Collaboration</p>	<p>Establish standing meetings with association leaders and district-level committees on key issues/topics</p> <p>Ensure that there is a district leadership team and school leadership teams, with expectations for shared decision-making</p>	<p>Identify, position, and support knowledgeable educators to collaborative committees</p> <p>Maintain strong two-way communication structures between the workforce and the educators serving in decision-making roles</p> <p>Establish standing meetings between the association leaders and the district PTA council, and between building reps and PTA presidents at the school levels</p>	<p>Provide funding and support for collaborative processes to occur as a regular part of participants' professional lives</p> <p>Ensure that your district's collaborative partnership has the opportunity to network with other education partnerships working on similar projects, or in a similar context, for sharing</p>	<p>Universities or Non-profits: Facilitation of improvement processes and convening of collaborative networks across districts and states</p> <p>Community/Parent Groups: Establish a liaison to the local education association and work together to set priorities that both parents and educators agree upon</p>
<p>3</p> <p>Include Parents and Community in Education Transformation</p>	<p>Work with the local PTA Council to invite parents to participate on district-level committees</p> <p>Encourage principals to include parents on the school leadership team, and on issue-based school committees</p>	<p>Establish strong two-way communication structures between the association and other stakeholder groups at district and school levels</p> <p>Use members' closeness to parents to identify parents to participate on school and issue-based committees and help prioritize issues raised by both educators and parent groups</p> <p>Develop and foster relationships with community partners, and elevate shared goals</p>	<p>Identify and connect with local community groups and ensure they have a place within your collaborative partnership</p> <p>Ensure that there are ample listening structures for the elected school board to hear from constituents about the community's priorities for their school system</p>	<p>Community/Parent Groups: Offer services, expertise, and participation in collaborative decision-making to improve schools in your community</p>



The National Labor-Management Partnership (NLMP) is a working group comprised of the American Association of School Administrators, American Federation of Teachers, National School Boards Association, and the National Education Association, which together represent the professional voices of educators, school board leaders, and district superintendents.

The NLMP was founded in 2011 to acknowledge and promote a unified philosophy: Improving student learning and equity require strong, consistent, and sustained collaboration among parents, teachers, school boards, superintendents and administrators, business leaders, and the community. And such improvements require that we all take responsibility for the well-being of the students in our charge.

As a national-level partnership, the NLMP supports local-level transformation, including greater shared responsibility and leadership toward the educational outcomes we seek.

References:

ⁱ Louis, K.S.; Leithwood, K.; Wahlstrom, K.L.; & Anderson, S.E. (2010). *Investigating the links to improved student learning: Final report of research findings*. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota.

ⁱⁱ Leana, C.R. (2011, Fall). *The missing link in school reform*. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*.

ⁱⁱⁱ McCarthy, J.E. & Rubinstein, S.A. (2018). *In progress*.

^{iv} Rubinstein, S.A. & McCarthy, J.E. (2011). *Reforming Public School Systems through Sustained Union-Management Collaboration*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.

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