



Lessons from AFT Labor–Management Case Studies

Collaboration is not the absence of conflict but the presence of a path forward.

1. Committing to change requires an existing level of trust that working together works—resolving issues that can be barriers to true partnership is critical before attempting to make large-scale changes.
2. Where the trust necessary for partnership doesn't exist yet, the union and the district can take deliberate steps toward bridging information gaps, addressing pressure points and discussing each other's priorities. This can create inroads to forming partnerships.
3. Transparency and mutual accountability are critical to successful partnership work. Partners must be comfortable voicing their own perspectives and calling each other out; they must know that this will not cause them to be shut out of future conversations or decisions. There must be an understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities.
4. Partnership takes time to do it right. When both entities have decision-making power, it takes more time to reach decisions. Our experience tells us that when you consider multiple perspectives, it results in a system that is right for the people it affects. Over time, the union and the district should develop a track record of collaborative successes by planning and executing programs together.
5. Since true partnership takes time, set realistic timelines when you are creating new systems, but ensure there are benchmarks so you can see progress toward the goal.
6. There must be a connection between the partnership's work and the work of the educators. There must always be a focus on educator support and engagement. All educators need to understand why the union is working in partnership and how it benefits them in their daily work. They need to be able to work with it and understand it.
7. Communication with educators matters. Use all means to communicate about new joint work.
8. Leaders in both the union and the district must be committed to a different kind of labor-management relationship to move the district forward.
9. The union and the district need to develop a mutual trust of each other's expertise on educational issues. Unions should build an educational issues foundation rooted in best practice and research, and informed by member feedback.
10. Get help from the national AFT when a national perspective would help facilitate connections. The national AFT can offer targeted assistance to support the district and the union.