

Results and Research from the First Two Years

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Introduction

This report summarizes the first two years of work of the Massachusetts Education Partnership (MEP) and details the results of continuing research on K12 labor-management activity in the Commonwealth. The MEP is a consortium that brings together key labor and management education stakeholders to use state-of-the-art collaborative processes to advance student achievement and educator success. It is also engaged in ongoing evaluation and research on these subjects.

The MEP was formed in 2012. Its founders were motivated by the recognition that education leaders in Massachusetts had both the desire and the capacity to work together to pursue these objectives, in contrast to the approach taken in states like Wisconsin, where teachers, their unions, and the collective bargaining process were being attacked and blamed for the lack of progress in improving the quality of public services. To explore the potential for taking a more collaborative approach, a white paper was prepared that reviewed evidence on the effects of labor-management collaboration and innovations in other private and public sector settings.¹

Based on survey responses gathered from a cross-section of local school district superintendents, school committee chairs, and the leaders of local school district teachers' unions, the white paper made clear that many leaders felt that the quality of labor-management relations could be improved and that a more collaborative approach to advancing the interests of students and teachers could be developed. Discussion of this report with key education leaders in Massachusetts produced evidence of a shared desire to pursue methods to increase collaboration, linked to a commitment to improving student outcomes. Out of discussions with school superintendents, school committee presidents, and teacher union representatives came the idea of forming educational partnerships to focus on improving labor-management relations at district and local union levels.

Initial funding for the MEP was provided by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Foundation representatives responded positively to the idea of Massachusetts serving as a test-bed for using labor-management partnerships to drive school improvements and student achievement. Additional support was provided by the NEA Foundation, the Massachusetts Teachers Association, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Ford Foundation.

Vision and Goals

The founding members of the MEP agreed that the vision and goals for this new effort would be to:

- Promote student achievement and educator success;
- Increase teacher engagement and leadership;
- Improve the effectiveness of bargaining processes and relationships; and
- Advance policies and practices that sustain collaboration.

Today, the MEP represents a significant commitment by state and local education leaders representing both management and labor to work together to support education innovation. The MEP Governing Board includes leadership from the 22,000-member American Federation of Teachers Massachusetts, 110,000-member Massachusetts Teachers Association, 750-member Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, 2,200-member Massachusetts Association of School Committees, and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, along with representatives from four of the Commonwealth's most prominent education research institutions: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Northeastern University, the University of Massachusetts Boston, and the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy.

During the first two years of activity, Nancy E. Peace served as the MEP Executive Director and leader of the Interest-Based Bargaining Institute. Timothy Fitzgerald of Mutual Gain Strategies and Andrew Bundy of Community Matters served as Co-Directors of the District Capacity Project, which the Rennie Center administered. The Edward J. Collins Center for Public Management at the University of Massachusetts Boston served as the MEP's administrative home. As we move into the third year, the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy will serve as the administrative hub for MEP activities with Emily E. Murphy, Director of Programs, as the coordinator.

From the start, the MEP prioritized engaging and convening labor, management, community, and policy leaders through a variety of means. A growing web presence (www.masspartnership.org/) has helped establish and disseminate work accomplished through the MEP's two core initiatives—the Interest-Based Bargaining Institute (IBBI) and the District Capacity Project (DCP)—along with other relevant resources and supports. To deepen their practice, the facilitators of both initiatives have created a Community of Practice network that meets periodically to share experiences and deepen their knowledge and skills in working with districts and local unions. The MEP also hosts an annual statewide conference on key reform issues (e.g. extended learning time, school-based innovation, educator evaluation, peer assistance and review, Common Core standards, Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers). Each conference has attracted between 200 and 400 participants. In the past two years, the MEP has directly engaged 115 school districts serving roughly 505,000 students, or almost one-third of all school districts and half the students in the state.

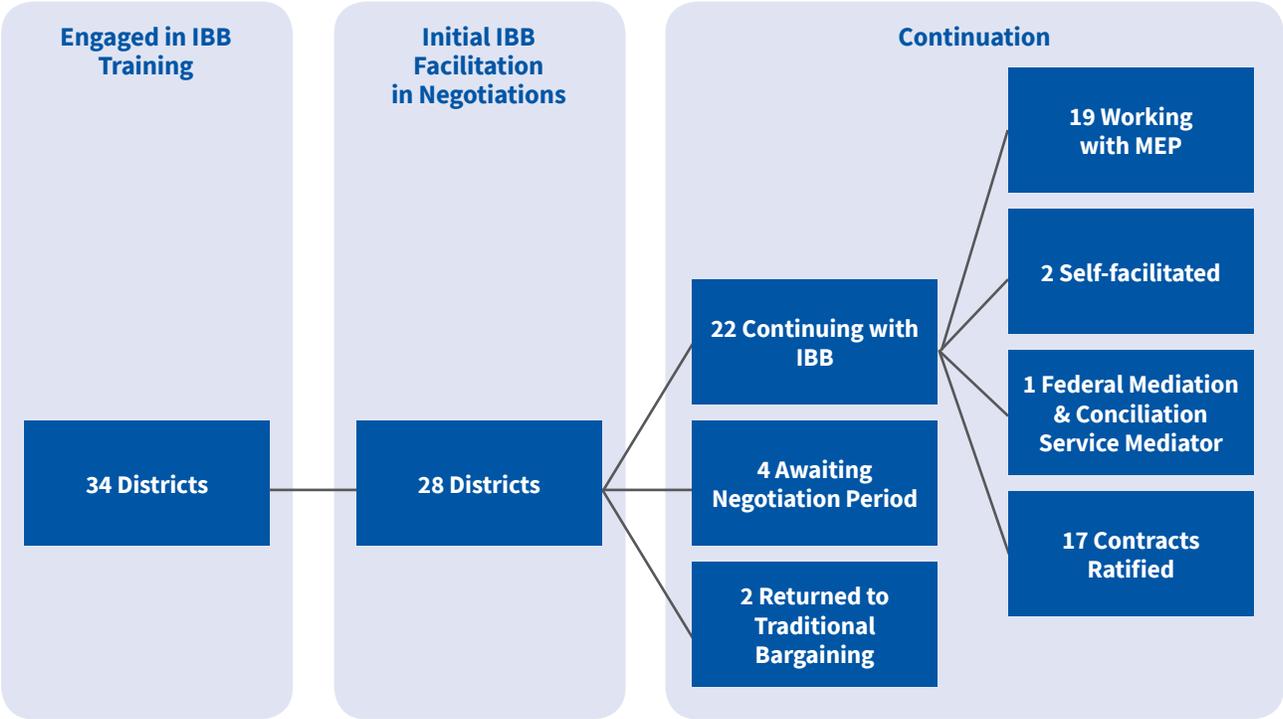
Activities and Outcomes

IBB Training and Facilitation. The Interest-Based Bargaining Institute (IBBI) offers training and technical assistance to school district labor-management bargaining teams engaging in contract negotiations. This work is designed to move management and labor leaders from a positional, often adversarial, bargaining process to one grounded in a full exploration of the parties' shared and competing interests.

One of the first tasks taken up by the MEP was to recruit seven experienced IBB trainers and facilitators to provide IBB training and facilitation to districts and local unions requesting these services.² To do so, this group developed a new, streamlined curriculum for IBB training in school contexts. Drawing on decades of experience across MEP partners from the Massachusetts Department of Labor, the Massachusetts Teachers Association, the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the curriculum enables school districts and unions to engage effectively in an interest-based approach to their contract negotiations. In an effort to encourage widespread use of these practices among interested parties, the curriculum is open source and can be easily adapted to a variety of contexts.

As shown in Figure 1, to date the seven IBBI instructors, along with Nancy Peace, have worked with 34 school districts serving approximately 98,000 students, providing training in interest-based bargaining to help improve the quality and outcomes of contract negotiations. Of those 34, 28 communities went forward with the MEP/IBBI facilitation. Twenty-two of the 28 continued the IBB process after the initial MEP/IBB facilitation. Nineteen of the 22 hired one of the MEP/IBB facilitators, two self-facilitated and one used to a Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service mediator to facilitate their negotiations. Two communities that started with IBB switched to traditional negotiations. To date, districts trained by or working with the IBB Institute have ratified 17 contracts using IBB practices.

Figure 1. Districts involved in IBBI



All told, in less than two years of MEP work, roughly 10 percent of all school districts in the Commonwealth have actively participated in IBBI, and fully 15 percent have made inquiries or participated in MEP informational workshops and learning opportunities. An analysis of the effects of IBB on negotiations is provided in the section below reporting the results of the MEP 2014 survey.

DCP In-District Facilitation. The District Capacity Project (DCP) builds the capacity of school districts to drive improvements in student achievement. The purpose of DCP’s work is not to negotiate contracts or engage in bargaining, but instead to help leaders to accomplish mutually desired innovations by changing how they work together. By learning and mastering effective labor-management collaboration and teaming practices, each DCP team—including the superintendent, union president, a school committee member, teachers and administrators, and sometimes community partners—works with a DCP facilitator to:

- Co-design and implement initiatives to advance student learning and success;
- Increase teacher engagement in leadership of school and district innovation efforts;
- Improve problem solving, decision making and fidelity of implementation;
- Develop skills, structures, and policies that can sustain collaborative practice over time.

Using collaborative teaming and interest-based practices, a DCP team works to identify strategies that address student learning and advance the effectiveness of teachers. Teams draft an MOU that establishes principles to guide their work; they engage in training sessions focused on relationship-building and collaborative planning; and they jointly develop a work plan, timeline, and project goals that will lead to concrete improvements in district, school and educator practices, and in student success.

DCP facilitators help teams work through difficult issues, maintain focus on specific goals, and assess progress toward goals.³ The long-term goal of DCP is to advance student achievement and teaching effectiveness by building teaming practices that sustainably increase school and district capacity.

As of July 2014, the DCP has worked in seven of Massachusetts' school districts; DCP teams represent 5,000 educators who serve 68,000 mostly urban students. Many of the Commonwealth's hardest-to-reach students reside in these districts where, on average, 76 percent of students are from low-income households, 33 percent are receiving special education services, and 69 percent are from racial or ethnic minorities.

In their first two years, DCP teams have:

- Launched and expanded a teacher leadership program that increases teaching and learning capacity within multiple schools while boosting compensation for outstanding educators (Leominster);
- Involved more than 2,600 families in planning a dual language immersion school for a multi-lingual student body that will also serve to attract and retain an economically diverse community of school families (Brockton);
- Trained several hundred teachers and administrators, at the district level and in every district school, in the use of practical tools for engaging in dialogue, making better decisions, and forging innovative cultures and teams (Malden);
- Reinvented a district's professional development system (Boylston Elementary);
- Conducted extensive research on collaborative best practices, established a record number of collaborating labor-management teams within schools, and introduced a teaming protocol and toolkit for use through the district (Berkshire Hills Regional School District); and
- Overseen the first full year rollout of a new educator evaluation system, using skills for engaging in difficult conversations learned through DCP to critique and improve on the system's design, training components, tools, software, and implementation (Springfield).

The DCP and IBBI are envisioned as closely aligned activities. A significant outcome of both MEP initiatives has been to lead participating teams toward further collaborative activities. For example, success in designing and implementing a DCP-supported project can solidify a sense of trust and shared understanding that leads to the use of interest-based bargaining in future contract negotiations. Similarly, participating in an IBB training and using IBB in one's negotiations can impress upon district teams the value of collaborative work, and lead them to consider using this approach away from the bargaining table. Remarkably, five of the seven DCP districts have participated or plan to participate in IBB training—and all but one attribute that decision to their prior work with DCP. The exception is a district that had completed contract negotiations using IBB when it first learned about DCP in 2012 and then applied to DCP so as to continue this approach in their day-to-day leadership work.

Communities of Practice. Evidence from the field indicates that the hands-on involvement of effective facilitators markedly improves the focus and impact of labor-management innovation. DCP's facilitators are all well-versed in interest-based practices, strategies for effective team building, and collaborative problem solving. These skilled former educators, trainers and systems leaders have developed a community of practice to build skills and refine practices. In the past year, DCP facilitators have convened ten communities of practice sessions. Similarly, IBB trainers have a community of practice that has met periodically to compare experiences, assess the effectiveness of the curriculum, and make adjustments, as appropriate.

Statewide Conferences. The MEP has hosted three statewide conferences in its first two years. Each attracted educators from between 70 and 80 school districts as well as scholars, policymakers and education thought leaders who shared information about major education policies and initiatives. Each conference included updates on MEP activities and information on how to participate in them, speeches from national education experts⁴ and panel discussions with state and local education leaders.

Each also featured focused workshops with district and local union leaders sharing their experiences in addressing key educational initiatives. Workshops covered topics such as Common Core State Standards (CCSS), expanded learning time, educator evaluation, Innovation Schools, tools for 21st century teaching, interest-based bargaining, and district capacity-building projects.

Website. With the goal of educating union and management leaders about the potential benefits of working together in a collaborative manner, the MEP created a website (www.masspartnership.org) that serves as a repository for articles, news stories and videos, showcasing effective collaborative work both at the bargaining table and in the day-to-day operation and culture of schools and districts. In an effort to increase accessibility and manage content more effectively, the MEP website was redesigned in October of 2013 and now features materials created both within and outside the MEP. These resources are meant to inform website visitors about interest-based collective bargaining, the value of labor-management collaboration, and the rewards/challenges of teachers working collaboratively to pursue various initiatives, including educator evaluation, peer assistance and review, Innovation Schools, and other reform initiatives that benefit from a collaborative approach.

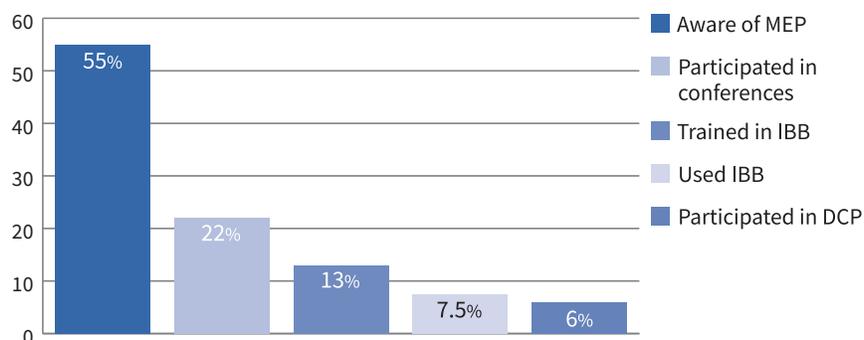
In tandem with our growing online presence, the MEP’s activities have reached audiences well beyond our original projections. Currently the MEP database includes approximately 1,110 active contacts. This, combined with the larger Rennie Center database, allows our work to spread beyond the original projected scope and increases our ability to collaborate with, and have an impact on, other state, regional, and national labor-management initiatives. The MEP sees tremendous benefit in connecting its work to a larger national conversation on the effectiveness of collaborative processes for driving reform. This includes connecting to ongoing and emerging work in places like Illinois, New Jersey, and California and through established initiatives, such as the Teacher Union Reform Network (TURN), as well as by building new regional and local networks in Massachusetts and throughout the Northeast. Engaging regional allies in the MEP will continue to increase our overall impact, promote the benefits of collaborative practice, and provide economies of scale in convening, networking, and dissemination activities, helping to produce and sustain scalable reforms.

MEP Education Leader Survey

In March 2014 we conducted a statewide survey of district superintendents, school committee leaders, and local union leaders to capture the extent of their awareness and involvement in MEP activities and to assess the effects of our activities on the parties and their labor-management relationships. It did not seek to evaluate our DCP activities, since a separate study is being carried out for this purpose. Some of the questions repeated ones asked in a 2011 baseline survey prior to the creation of the MEP. Responses were obtained from 372 individuals: 65 superintendents, 213 school committee leaders, and 94 local union officials. This sample, which more than doubles the size of the baseline survey, serves as the largest survey of education leaders’ views on the current labor management relations. The results of the survey, along with comparisons to the 141 respondents from the 2011 baseline survey, are summarized below.

Extent of MEP Activities. Figure 2 summarizes the degree of penetration of MEP activities to date. Fifty-five percent of respondents indicated they are aware of the MEP. Just over 20 percent have participated in one or more MEP annual conferences, 11 percent have used the website, 13 percent have received IBB training, 7.5 percent received facilitation in negotiations, and six percent are active in the DCP. Thus, in two years we have managed to reach a majority of the survey respondents. Awareness of the MEP on the part of school committee members is lower and is a priority for improvement in the years ahead.

Figure 2: Awareness of MEP Activities



Changes in Perceptions of Collective Bargaining and Labor Management Relations. Two questions were asked that allow comparisons with responses from the 2011 survey. Responses on both show significant improvements in the views of the parties toward the effectiveness of collective bargaining and the quality of their labor management relationship.

Forty-two percent of the respondents now see collective bargaining as a means for improving school performance, rather than an obstacle to it, compared to 36 percent in 2011. As shown in Figure 3, school committee leaders, superintendents, and union leaders all reported higher scores on this question. The greatest increase in this view was among union leader respondents.

Figure 3. Efficacy of Collective Bargaining

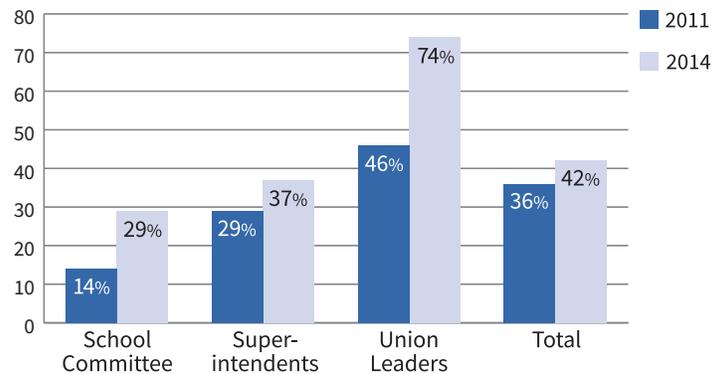
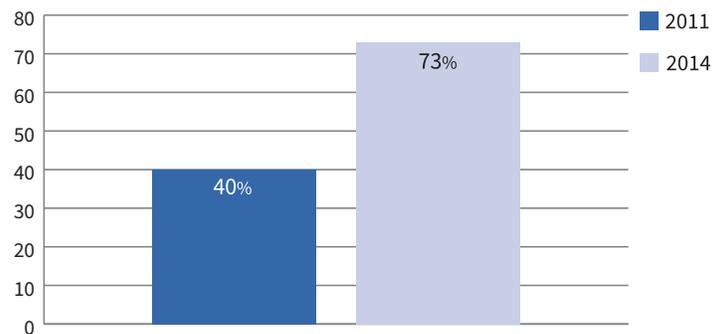


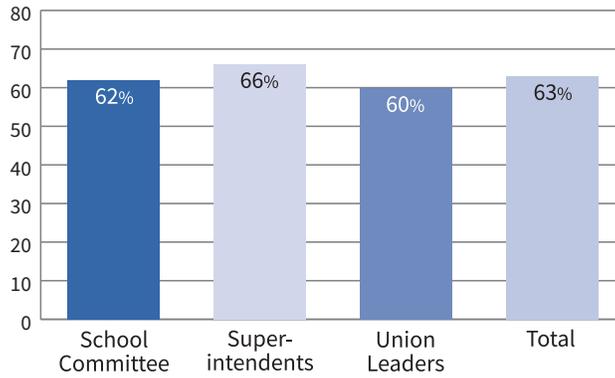
Figure 4 reports that fully 73 percent of the parties are confident that their labor management relationship is sufficient for improving school performance, compared to 40 percent in 2011. Moreover, these high levels of confidence are shared across the parties (union leaders 79 percent; superintendents, 77 percent, and school committee members 68 percent).

Figure 4. Confidence in Labor Management Collaboration



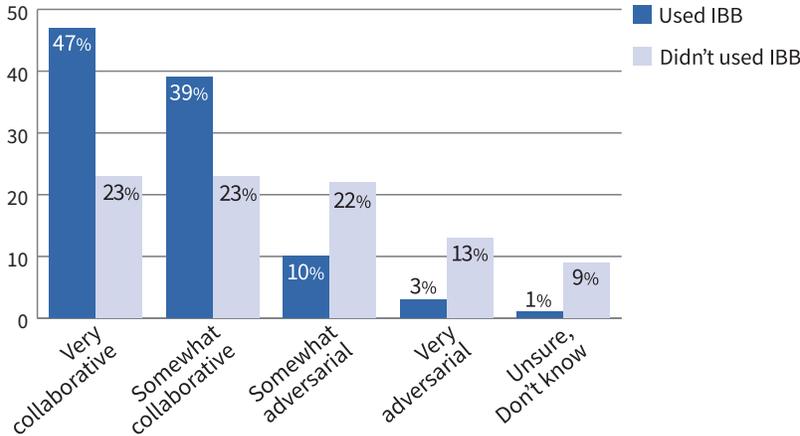
As shown in Figure 5, for all categories of respondents, over 60 percent describe their most recent collective bargaining contract negotiations as somewhat or very collaborative rather than adversarial. While we do not have comparative data on this question from the 2011 survey, this result, taken together with the comparative data in Figures 3 and 4, suggests that the environment for labor management relations in education in Massachusetts is appreciably more positive today than it was before the MEP began its work.

Figure 5. Collective Bargaining Now Seen as Collaborative Process



Effects of IBB. The data presented in Figure 6 show that use of IBB tools in negotiations (either as a result of MEP training or training from other sources) is associated with significantly more collaborative negotiations than those using traditional negotiation methods.

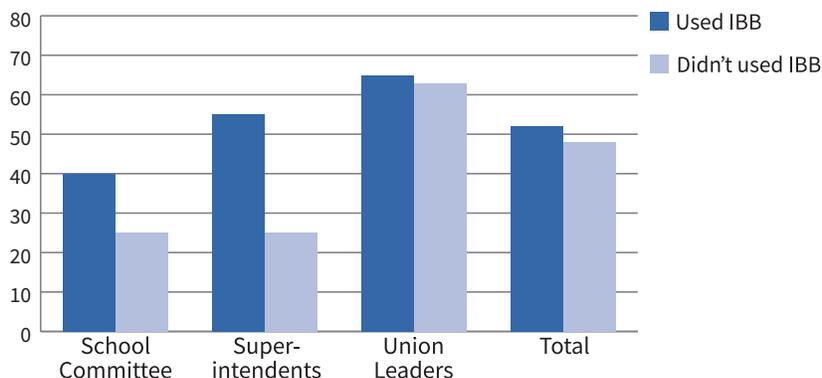
Figure 6. Use of IBB Tools Associated with More Collaborative Negotiations



Among those using IBB, 47 percent rated their negotiations as very collaborative, more than double the proportion of those not using IBB. Further, those *not* using IBB were more than twice as likely to experience their negotiations as adversarial, and four times more likely to characterize them as very adversarial. This difference remained significant in further analysis using multivariate tests controlling for differences in the socio-economic characteristics of districts. Moreover, the same significant relationships were found when comparing those districts/union locals that received MEP IBB training and that followed up by using IBB in contract negotiations to districts that did not use IBB. Those trained by the MEP and using IBB reported significantly higher levels of collaboration in bargaining than districts/local unions that who were not trained or were not using IBB.

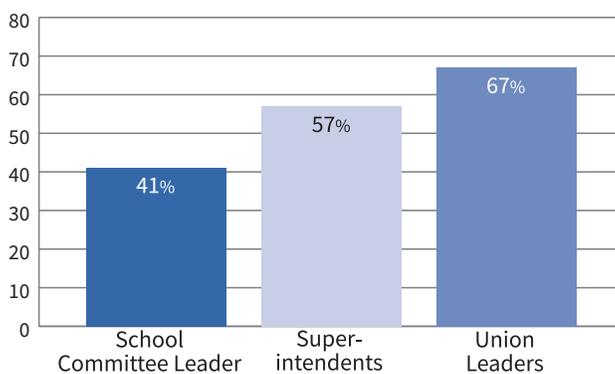
As shown in Figure 7, a higher percentage of those using IBB view collective bargaining as adequate for improving school performance compared to those using traditional bargaining methods. Fifty-eight percent of superintendents using IBB rate collective bargaining as adequate compared to 26 percent using traditional methods; school committee members report similar results—41 percent compared to 27 percent. Union leaders, however see no significant difference in the two approaches to bargaining as means for improving school performance. These results also held up in multivariate analyses that controlled for district socio-economic characteristics. Compared to districts that were not trained and did not use IBB, districts that were trained in IBB by MEP staff and that used IBB in negotiations reported more positive but not significant effects on ratings of collective bargaining as adequate for school improvement; they also reported more positive and significant effects on the adequacy of the overall labor management relationship for improving school performance.

Figure 7. View Collective Bargaining as Adequate for Improving School Performance



As suggested above, use of IBB goes beyond the number of parties trained specifically by the MEP. A number of local unions and districts have been trained by staff of the Massachusetts Teachers Association and/or various private consultants. Fifty-three percent of the respondents indicated they have used IBB in some recent negotiations. Figure 8 illustrates the percent of school committee members, superintendents, and union leaders indicating involvement with IBB in recent negotiations.

Figure 8. Used IBB in Recent Negotiations



This is a strong experience base on which we can build to further expand and increase the value of IBB. There is clearly room for improvement. When looking at those respondents that used IBB, we find mixed satisfaction with the experience. Figure 9 data indicate 44 percent were satisfied with their IBB experience and only 17 percent were dissatisfied. Thirty-eight percent were more equivocal, giving IBB a neither satisfied nor dissatisfied rating. (Rounding to whole numbers explains why these do not add to exactly 100%). However, as reported in Figure 10, 90 percent indicated they either would “definitely” or “maybe” use IBB again in future negotiations, compared to only 10% who said they would not.

Figure 9. Satisfaction with IBB

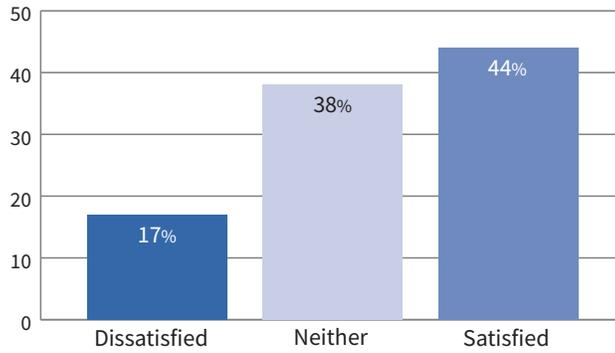
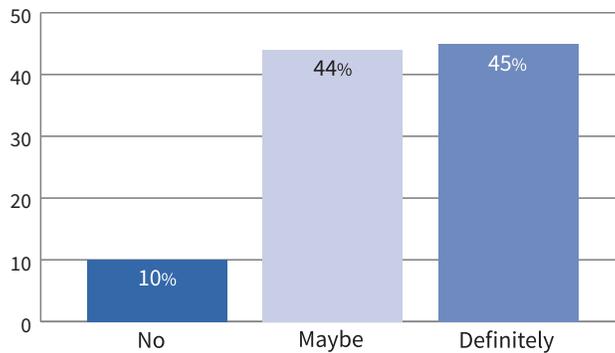
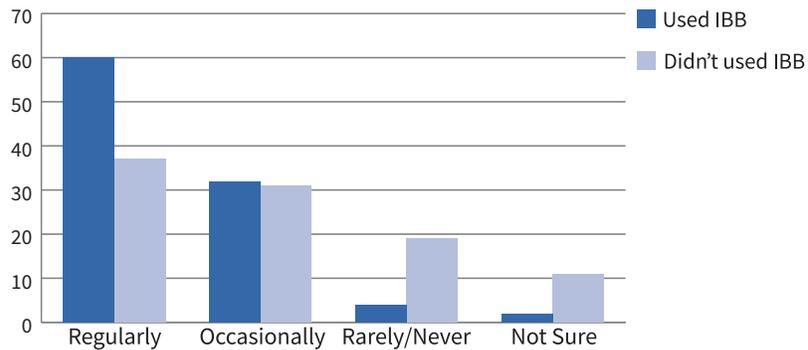


Figure 10. Would Use IBB Again



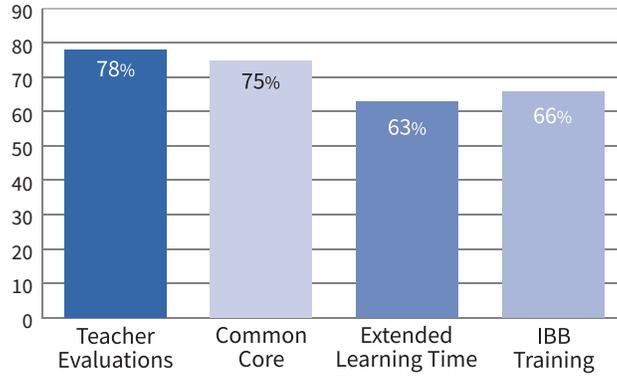
There is also positive carryover of IBB from the formal negotiations process to on-going interactions during the term of agreements. The data in Figure 11 show that 60 percent of IBB users indicated their local union and district leaders meet regularly to discuss leadership issues during the terms of their agreement compared to only 37 percent of those who did not use IBB.

Figure 11. Regular Collaboration Following Collective Bargaining Agreement



MEP Priorities for the Future. A final set of questions asked about priorities for future MEP activities. It is encouraging to see, as the data in Figure 12 indicate, that there is strong interest in MEP programming. Seventy-eight percent are possibly or definitely interested in participating in a seminar on collaborative teacher evaluation systems; 75 percent in seminars on implementation of the Common Core; 66 percent in IBB training and 63 percent in seminars on expanded learning time.

Figure 12. Interest in Further MEP Programming



Summary

In summary, the first two years of the MEP saw improvements in labor and district leaders' views of collective bargaining and collaborative labor-management relations as vehicles for improving student performance. There is considerable use of interest-based bargaining in education in Massachusetts. Much, but not all, of this has been supported by MEP training and hands-on facilitation. Those using IBB report their negotiations to be more collaborative, report more ongoing union leader-superintendent engagement during the terms of their agreements, and are more likely to view their labor-management relationship as well-positioned to support improvements in school performance. Between 60 and 70 percent of those engaged in the MEP want to continue participating in one or more MEP activities in the next year. While the MEP has reached a majority of the responding districts/union locals in some way or another, a lot more remains to be done.

Conclusions and Future Directions

In its first two years the MEP has strengthened dialogue among state government, districts, and union leaders. It has engaged labor, management and/or policy leaders in 115 Massachusetts districts in one or more of its activities. It has disseminated information and research evidence on how collaborative labor-management processes are being used across the state and nation. The MEP survey results demonstrate that perceptions of the value of collective bargaining have improved (or criticisms of collective bargaining as an obstacle to school improvement have declined). The use of interest-based bargaining is both quite widespread and successful in improving collaboration in both negotiations and in on-going union leader-superintendent relationships. The MEP's District Capacity Project (DCP) is providing intensive support for teams addressing high-priority education improvement initiatives in seven districts. Both the Interest-Based Bargaining Institute and DCP are demonstrating the potential of this type of intensive training and facilitation for improving the culture of teacher-administrator relationships and enabling labor-management teams to achieve improved outcomes for students and for educators.

Yet there is still significant work to be done. Achieving the Partnership's long-term objectives requires growing beyond its two core initiatives and establishing a platform of services to support local leaders in learning, sharing, and developing improved practice, especially through greater interaction with one another. It will also require more focused efforts to bring our collaborative tools to bear on high-priority initiatives such as expanding learning time, improving educator evaluation processes, and implementing elements of the Common Core State Standards. More generally, the tasks for the future include building a sustainable MEP that continues to expand its reach and impact across districts and local unions in Massachusetts, and working in partnership with others to extend these innovations to neighboring New England states and across the nation. By doing so, perhaps the core vision and belief of the MEP—that collaborative labor-management relations are critical drivers for improving student achievement and school performance—will become the national norm and standard practice in public education.

Endnotes

- 1 Barry Bluestone and Thomas A. Kochan, "Toward a New Grand Bargain: Collaborative Approaches to Labor-Management Reform in Massachusetts." Boston: The Boston Foundation, October, 2011.
- 2 IBBI trainers in the first two years have been Carol Doherty, Timothy Fitzgerald, Michael Gaffney, John Hanson, Robert McKersie, Mary Ellen Shea, and Ronald Suga.
- 3 DCP facilitators in the first two years have been Andrew Bundy, Carol Doherty, Elaine Fersh, Timothy Fitzgerald, Mel Myler, Mary Ellen Shea and Ray Shurtleff.
- 4 Speakers in the plenary sessions of the conferences included Jo Anderson, U.S. Department of Education; Susan Moore Johnson, Harvard University Graduate School of Education; Greg Anrig, Vice President, The Century Foundation and author of *Beyond the Education Wars: Evidence that Collaboration Builds Effective Schools*; Mitchell Chester, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education for Massachusetts; Peter McWalters of the Council of Chief State School Officers and former Commissioner of Education in Rhode Island; and members of the MEP Board of Directors.

Acknowledgements

The Massachusetts Education Partnership is supported by grants from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the NEA Foundation, the Massachusetts Teachers Association, and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The Edward J. Collins Center at the University of Massachusetts Boston served as the administrative home for the Partnership in its first two years. The Rennie Center for Research & Policy recently assumed responsibility for the Partnership. We appreciate the financial and administrative support provided by each of these organizations. Special thanks to Emily E. Murphy, Rennie Center’s Director of Programs, for her assistance in the production of the report. We also thank Amanda Achin and Hye Jin Rho for their assistance in administering the survey and analyzing the results. The views expressed in this document are solely those of the authors.

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