
Labor Management Collaboration: Rockford's Journey



The journey of collaboration from a strike to consistent collaborative work between administrators and teachers of Rockford Public School (RPS) was sparked by progressive management and union leadership. It was assisted by a third party partner, the Consortium for Educational Change (CEC), and resulted in significant impact on trust and student outcomes.

A Problematic History

Over the past several decades, the challenges of the Rockford Public Schools were entwined with the economic and social turbulence in Rockford, the third largest city in Illinois. As with many towns in the midwest dealing with the economic woes of a declining industrial manufacturing sector, Rockford has also struggled with building economic and social stability and retaining community leadership.

In the post-millennial years, RPS saw this manifest in the form of leadership inconsistency in its district office and a strained relationship with the local community. The 11-year period between 2002-2013 saw eight superintendents pass through Rockford, blurring the vision and direction for its schools and rattling the confidence of educators, staff, and their union leaders.

Relationships between the Rockford Education Association (REA) and the district were also difficult and tumultuous. This tension culminated in a nearly year-long collective bargaining process and a two-day strike in March 2012.

Rockford Public Schools

- RPS is a school district in Illinois with 47 schools and 28,000 Pre K-12 students.
- RPS is the largest employer in Rockford with approximately 4,700 employees.
- The REA has 1,900 members and has received an NEA grant to prepare future union leaders.
- Mission: "Collaboratively engage all students in a world class education"
- Vision: "Be the first choice for all families"



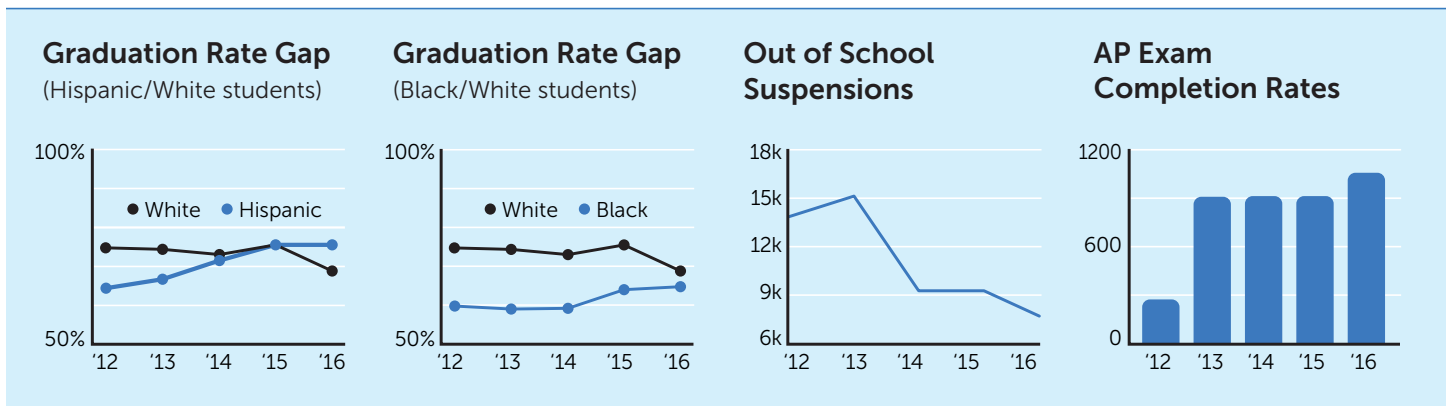
Timeline of Key Events



Partnership for Improvement

RPS had an opportunity to move in a different direction in 2013 with a new superintendent, Dr. Ehren Jarrett, and new REA leaders, Dawn Granath and Paul Goddard. Together they quickly turned to CEC as an external partner for assistance in strengthening working relationships in the hope that building stronger ties among the union, school board, administration,

and community partners would translate into a more consistent and quality education for Rockford's children. Early assistance was provided by CEC for a Peer Assistance and Review Process (PAR) and a teacher evaluation process to meet the Illinois Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA). They were followed by broad initiatives with significant outcomes.

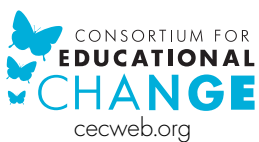


System Assessment and Strategic Planning

As transformation of relationships and educational processes required an inclusive and broad approach, CEC conducted a System Assessment to collect data on district measures on Learning, Collaboration, and Results. Then a district-wide Strategic Planning process was undertaken. The consensus process of creating the plan with maximum buy-in from multiple stakeholders was as valuable as the concise plan itself.

Interest-Based Bargaining

CEC trained and facilitated RPS and REA teams in interest-based bargaining (IBB), a dispute resolution strategy that moves negotiating parties toward consensus on mutual gains. A two-year settlement was reached in August 2015, but work on important and complex issues continued through work teams. These teams were trained in interest-based strategies and worked under the leadership of union and management co-chairs to make recommendations for the next round of negotiations.



CEC provides schools, unions, and districts with a systemic and collaborative approach to their unique challenges by building their internal capacity for continual improvement and offers a full range of customized consulting and coaching services and training programs. To learn more about partnering with CEC, call 630-495-0507.