

All for One, One for All?

**Early Career Teachers' Experiences with their Teachers' Union
in an Urban District**

**Emily Kalejs Qazilbash
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Introduction

Today's teachers' unions are often viewed as having more influence on public schools than "any other group in American society" (Moe, 2001, p.151) because of their ability to shape policy and practice from the top down through the political process and from the bottom up through collective bargaining. Additionally, unionized teachers find strength in numbers; teachers are one of the largest groups of organized employees in the United States¹. Membership in the two major teachers' unions, the National Educational Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), is currently 4 million, almost 90% of the nation's teachers (Kahlenberg, 2006).

Collective bargaining for teachers became mandatory in some states during the 1960's, providing new muscle to formal teachers' associations, which had previously lacked such power. With this authority, teachers bargained for such rights as safe and adequate working conditions, a competitive salary, and other benefits. The cohort of teachers who were responsible for negotiating current union-management contracts are retiring, and newer teachers who have benefited from rights guaranteed by the contracts first authored 40 years ago are being hired to replace them. Many of these teachers belong to a new generation, and most of these teachers will join a union. These new union members "have the power to change teaching, to change public education, and to change the unions" (Kerchner & Koppich, 2004, p. 216). However, little is known about what these early-career teachers think about the priorities being set by today's union leaders and the subjects addressed in current contracts. In light of the expectations they

¹ Kahlenberg (2006) says that teachers are second, behind postal workers.

have for their own career in teaching and their experiences with the union so far, what role do these teachers think that unions should play in public education?

Second-stage teachers' experiences with their union

In order to help us anticipate the direction of unions' work in the future, this paper explores early-career teachers' current perceptions of unions. This perspective is valuable because shifts in union priorities might, in turn, alter the way public schools operate. I conducted an exploratory study of how twelve early-career teachers in one district describe their experiences with and expectations for their teachers' union. I also investigated how these teachers said they formed their views. I chose to interview early-career teachers who had between 4-10 years of experience, those "second-stage teachers" (SSTs) who have had enough time to observe and interact with their union to have formed opinions.

For my interviews, I chose teachers in a district where the union leaders have taken steps that generally would be regarded as reform-oriented (Johnson & Kardos, 2000). This site provides a "best case scenario" in that, if any group of early-career teachers are looking towards the union as a change agent, this group might be. As is evident in its mission statement², this local union aims to simultaneously address bread-and-butter issues and professional concerns "by advancing necessary changes in existing structures through collective bargaining and the legislative process in an effort to make these practices a sustainable part of our school system." The MTA mission statement begins with a focus on student learning:

The Middleton Teachers Association (MTA) believes that supporting students to learn and reach their fullest potential in all areas of their lives should be at the center of everything we do. Furthermore, we will be a

² A copy of the entire Mission Statement is found in Appendix A.

member-driven organization dedicated to protecting employee rights, advancing the economic wellbeing of our members, upholding high professional standards, increasing student academic achievement, and improving the quality of public education as a whole. The Middleton Teachers Association serves a dual role as both a professional association and a labor association.

Literature context

In 1962, labor activists won a significant victory when President Kennedy issued an executive order permitting federal employees to bargain collectively (Murphy, 1990, p. 214; Goldhaber, 2006, p. 144). Currently, 34 states and the District of Columbia mandate bargaining if a majority of teachers vote for union representation. An additional 11 states permit school boards to bargain with teachers but do not require it. In 5 other states, collective bargaining is explicitly illegal. Each local union in the states where bargaining is mandated or permitted usually belongs to one of the national affiliates, the NEA or the AFT; in the district where this study takes place, bargaining is mandatory and the local union is affiliated with the NEA.

Since each local union bargains independently with its school board, locally-elected union leaders across the country have the autonomy to set their own agenda. Some local unions are more traditional than Middleton's, focusing only on the "bread-and-butter" concerns of salary, benefits and working conditions. These "traditional" unions have also focused on their role in "job protection unionism," (Kerchner, Koppich & Weeres, 1997, p. 99). Kerchner, Koppich and Weeres explain that in this type of traditional unionism, "the role of labor is to protect an individual's right to a specific position. In teacher unionism, this has traditionally meant vigorous defense of the members involved in discipline and dismissal proceedings. The union's role and legal obligation is not to make an independent judgment of a person's fitness or capability, but

to vigorously represent him or her in the series of adversarial proceedings required by procedural due process” (p. 99).

Union leaders who have embraced the tenets of reform unionism work together with management, sometimes even taking the lead, to study, design and implement new programs which provide teachers with new leadership opportunities, new pay structures, and new programs for peer review. These “reform” unions are attempting to organize around “the quality dimensions of teaching work” (Kercher, Koppich & Weeres, p. 99) The mission statement of the Teachers Union Reform Network (TURN), a collaboration of a number of progressive local unions from across the country, departs significantly from the priorities of traditional unionism, stating:

Teacher Unions must provide leadership for the collective voice of their members. Teacher Unions have a responsibility to students, their families and to the broader society. Teacher Unions are committed to public education as a vital element of our democracy. What unites these responsibilities is our commitment to help all children learn³.

The district president in this study is part of the TURN network and has endorsed these ideals.

With the current turnover in the teaching force, an increasing number of union members are newer teachers. There is scant research about what these early-career teachers think of teachers’ unions, but the research that does exist suggests that their views differ from those of the teachers who came before them. The non-profit organization Public Agenda (2003) surveyed X # of teachers to ask them about their views on XXX. Their research concludes that new teachers think differently about unions than veteran teachers, but the study does not explain what accounts for these differences. For example, Public Agenda reports that newer teachers are less likely than veteran

³ From TURN website, www.turnexchange.net

teachers to think that the union is absolutely essential (30% to 57%) and are less likely to be actively involved in the union (20% to 46%). The authors report that the reasons for these differences “are not transparent” (p. 34). Other sources cite union-related apathy among the newer teachers, who belong to “Generation X” (Blair, 2002). Because there is a dearth of research on teachers unions (Moe, 2001; Hannaway & Rotherham, 2006) and virtually no research on the experiences of newer teachers in unions, there are still many unknowns. Exploratory research suggests that today’s newer teachers differ from veteran teachers in that many hold different expectations for their work and work environments (Johnson & PNGT, 2004; Peske et al., 2001).

There are many potential explanations for these reported differences in how previous generations of teachers and this one view teaching as a career. Research indicates that teachers entering the classroom today often do not plan to make teaching their life-long career, as did many of the teachers approaching retirement (Peske et al., 2001; Johnson & PNGT, 2004). Another professional difference between the two generations of teachers is that newer teachers seek more collaboration with peers, increased opportunities for professional development and varied roles in teaching (Peske et al., 2001).

It is not yet known what teachers believe the role of the union should be in a changing educational landscape. With the introduction of *NCLB* in 2001, the responsibilities of teachers have become increasingly complex (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). Teachers are required to align their teaching with standards, and students must pass challenging high-stakes exams. Requirements measuring teacher quality also affect this generation of teachers. How, if at all, do newer teachers think that teachers’ unions

should be involved in the issues of student achievement and teacher quality emphasized in *NCLB*?

Reform unionism will not take root and spread until SSTs, the largest group of new union members, begin to believe in the possibilities of an expanded scope of union responsibilities, a scope that requires them to work together not to secure wages and working conditions, as was the case in the 1960s, but to prioritize new union goals of advancing student achievement, professional growth for teachers, and studying new ways to organize the profession.

Findings

In the context of a progressive local union that seeks to change how the career of teaching is organized, SSTs interviewed in this district still had traditional expectations for their teachers' union. These expectations were focused around the "bread and butter" priorities of securing salary, benefits, and protection. In addition, they have a very individualistic orientation to the union, in that they primarily consider the advantages the union provides for them as individual teachers. They believe the responsibility of the union is to provide assistance to individual teachers and not that the role of the union is to treat teachers as a group as "all for one, one for all." These SSTs do not suggest that the union's role is to capitalize on the strength of a group of teachers for the greater good of the profession or to make changes that will benefit students. It is not that these reform goals are not important, according to the SSTs interviewed. Rather, they do not think the union is responsible for working to increase student achievement or make fundamental changes in teacher quality. Indeed, they cannot imagine what that might look like in practice.

These findings contrast with reports suggesting that SSTs are apathetic about unions (Blair, 2002) or that SSTs say they are unnecessary (Public Agenda, 2003). The interviews suggest that these SSTs have complicated, conflicting and often negative thoughts and beliefs about unions which have resulted from the fact that they perceive that the union treats all teachers equally. Thus, these SSTs are more comfortable approaching their union as individuals, asking what the union can do for them to provide protection, guarantee salary, and help them find information that they need. They still support the union's existence because they see it continuing to play an important role in securing gains in bread-and-butter issues. They are skeptical of their union's role in school reform. In fact, SSTs in this study were by and large not aware of the reforms enacted by the union president, although these reforms were championed by the one building representative in the study. Those teachers who did know about some of the reforms advanced by the union leader have not changed their beliefs about the role of unions.

Middleton

For this exploratory study, I chose to conduct interviews in an urban district where the recently-elected union president was considered to be a reformer, more progressive than traditional in his views about the role of unions in public education. The Middleton Teachers Association's (MTA) commitment to reform is apparent in its mission statement (found in Appendix A), which delineates a dual focus, detailing goals as a professional association as well as a labor organization.⁴ Middleton, like other

⁴ As found in Middleton's mission statement, an example of a "professional" goal is to "identify, promote, and support best instructional practices in our public schools." An example of a "labor" goal is to "represent, organize, and mobilize all of its members with equal vigor to improve the quality of their economic and professional lives." See Appendix A.

reform-oriented unions, focuses both on reformist goals advocating for the professionalization of teaching as well as traditional goals ensuring good pay and working conditions. Reform unions work to change the structure of schooling and the manner in which teachers are involved in creating educational policy and practice, not just lobbying for good pay and protection within the structure as it exists.

Jim Hall, the president of the MTA, is progressive and reformist, very different from the stereotype of most traditional local union presidents in the US. His members appear to support his agenda, since at the time of these interviews, Jim had been re-elected four times.⁵ In his five years as president, Hall had initiated a number of changes in the union's priority and focus. In partnership with the superintendent, he had altered the district's evaluation system, creating a more nuanced rating system for teachers. He had hosted forums on student achievement, recruiting teachers of color, and retaining new teachers. These forums were advertised and open to all teachers and district administrators and aimed to promote dialogue and to lead to policy changes at the district level. These initiatives expand the traditional scope of union activities. While still working to secure a high salary and good benefits for his members, Jim stated that he would not protect teachers if administrators had conducted procedurally correct evaluations and concluded that their teaching was unsatisfactory⁶.

⁵ At the time of the interviews, Jim Hall was still president of the MTA. By the time I finished writing this paper, however, he had resigned his position to assume another one in the state union office.

⁶ April 4, 2003. Memo from Jim Hall to MTA members in which he clarifies the answers to questions he has received from members about grieving evaluations. "Grieving the content of an evaluation is difficult unless it is pure fabrication of the administrator makes reference to things that are not properly part of the evaluation process. An arbitrator is not going to rewrite an administrator's evaluation. ... If you believe that your administrator has violated the process or timeline, we can file a grievance based on failure to follow the process and/or timeline. Also, interview, March, 2006, as part of the Education Sector study on recently-elected union presidents.

Middleton is a diverse, semi-urban district with a student population that is 36.8% African American, 15.1% Hispanic, 10.9% Asian and 35.2% Caucasian. The district's special education population, at 21.9%, is much larger than the average for the state. The district has many English Language Learners; 31.1% of students speak a first language other than English. Although almost half its students qualify as "low-income"⁷ the city has invests heavily in its public education system. With a per-pupil expenditure of \$13,363⁸, the district occupies a top spot among public school districts in the state for education funding. Parents are generally involved in their children's education, often having very high expectations for their schools. Teachers in Middleton are generally well-educated and well paid, with an average salary of \$66,485, compared with the state average of \$53,529.⁹

Middleton is a unique district with a unique union president. It provides an opportunity to study teachers who have been exposed to union priorities and initiatives that move beyond the traditional bread-and-butter concerns. Unlike teachers in most other districts, the SSTs in this study have encountered a style of union leadership that expands the agenda of traditional unionism. Having had time to experience these reforms, these teachers might reflect on their reactions to the changes.

I chose this district because I want to understand the range of views that early-career teachers in Middleton might have. Because this is a small, interview-based study in a district with a distinctive union president, the findings are not generalizable to

⁷ DOE website

⁸ (2004, from DOE website <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/home.asp?mode=o&so=-&ot=5&o=373&view=all>),

⁹ Retrieved on January 28, 2007, from http://www.boston.com/news/education/k_12/articles/2005/07/03/teacher_raises_surpass_us_rate/

districts with different union contexts. However, they can generate hypotheses about the views about unions early-career teachers in different contexts might have.

Study Design

This exploratory study examines the experiences that twelve second-stage teachers in one urban district reported having with their union, the activities in which they observed their union engaged, and their hopes for what their union would do in their school and district. Learning if these early career teachers see “possibilities” within their union, or if they think that the union brings “paralysis” to schools (Johnson, 2004), can provide valuable insight to further research, policy and practice.

My study is guided by the following research questions:

- **What views and expectations do second-stage teachers in one urban district have for their teachers’ unions?**
- **How did they form their opinions?**

In constructing my sample, I sought participants who had different levels of involvement in their teachers’ union. I purposively chose a sample that includes SSTs who were actively involved, such as a building representative and a participant in meetings focused on recruiting and retaining teachers of color, as well as SSTs who were not actively involved in the union at all. The sample was as diverse as possible by gender, race, school and experience, with all teachers having between 4-10 years of experience. I interviewed current teachers or specialists in four K-8 schools and in the district high school. Chart #1 displays information about each participant.

Chart #1: Participants’ demographic information, self-report

Participant Pseudonym	School	Grade / subject	Race / Ethnicity	Gender	Years Teaching	Mid-career entrant?
Nellie	Central High School	9, 10, 12 History	White	Female	6	Yes – 4 years, various jobs
Henry	Central High School	9-12 Math	White	Male	5	No
Rosemary	Central High School	9-12 History	African-American	Female	7	No
Andy	Johnson Park	6-8 Science	White	Male	4	No
Estelle	Johnson Park	6-8 Math	White	Female	9	Yes – 1.5 years, various jobs
Cynthia	Booker T Washington	Kindergarten	White	Female	7	Yes – 8 years teaching in infant daycare
Elizabeth	Booker T Washington	4	White	Female	9	No
Stephanie	Highland Town	7 Humanities	White	Female	6	Yes – 2 years, various jobs
Jill	Highland Town	3 / 4	White	Female	5	Yes – 3 years as a mortgage consultant
Maria	Highland Town	K-7 Learning Disabled	White	Female	10	No
Sara	Highland Town	5-6 Language Arts	White	Female	10	No
Audrey	Eisenhower	5/6 Special Education	African-American	Female	6	Yes – 12 years as a mental health counselor

I assembled my sample in consultation with representatives of both the teachers’ union and the district’s administration, who provided me with lists of teachers with 4-10 years of experience. From that group, I chose teachers representing different years of

experience within the 4-10 year range as well as different levels of involvement with the union, as can be seen in chart #2 below, which shows increasing involvement from left to right. All participants were members of the union; although membership is high in the district because of the state's law on agency fee, this doesn't necessarily mean that they endorse the union.

Chart #2: Participants' involvement in their union, self-report

Participant	Have you voted in an election for union officers?	Have you attended a union meeting?	Have you served as a building representative?	Have you been on the negotiating team?
Nellie	Yes	No	No	No
Henry	Yes	No	No	No
Rosemary	Yes	No	No	No
Andy	Yes	No	No	No
Cynthia	Yes	No	No	No
Audrey	Yes	Yes	No	No
Elizabeth	Yes	No	No	No
Stephanie	Yes	No	No	No
Jill	Yes	No	No	No
Maria	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Estelle	Yes	No	No	No
Sara	Yes	Yes	No	No

Interviews and Data Analysis

Interviews, 45-60 minutes long, were conducted in person. Each interview was recorded. I piloted the interview protocol¹⁰ before using it. I wrote a thematic summary immediately after each interview, describing major points discussed.

All interviews were transcribed. I coded interviews based on thematic codes drawn from other research as well as from ideas formed while reviewing the transcripts. I then looked across interviews to understand more about the range of opinions held by

¹⁰ Included in Appendix B.

these SSTs, and I wrote analytic memos that later informed my written findings. I worked to address issues of validity by discussing my emergent theories, based on analysis of transcripts and analytic memos, with the members of the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers.

Discussion

The SSTs interviewed for this study perceive that their union's purpose is to provide bread-and-butter guarantees for them, rather than to be a collective voice for teachers intent on changing schools or the profession. Participants report that this is what they expected and what they have observed their union doing. They have some concerns about the union practices they see – mainly, providing protection for members whose teaching practice is, in their view, unsatisfactory. They currently do not characterize their union's work as “reform,” and they are uncertain whether a union should organize around reform principles. Three main themes, which emerged from the data, provide the organization for this paper:

- As they entered the classroom for the first time, these second-stage teachers brought pre-conceived notions about unions, which set their expectations for what the union would do for them as individuals.
- What they observed their union doing did not fundamentally challenge their expectations, and these SSTs continued to expect their union to provide protection for them when needed and to negotiate their salary. These SSTs did, however, concern about what they saw as their union's uniform treatment of all teachers, sometimes at the peril of students' education.
- On the whole, these SSTs did not think the union's appropriate role was to address “reform” or “professional” issues. They could not conceptualize what such a reform role would look like, and they were relatively content with the fact that the union helps them out individually.

Early expectations

Notions before they joined

When asked to reflect on their views of unions from before they started teaching, these SSTs said that their thoughts about unions were primarily formed when they were growing up by what they had seen on TV and in the movies, or what they had heard their parents discuss. Unless they had relatives who were unionized teachers, these SSTs' pre-teaching views of unions were about blue-collar labor unions. For example, Elizabeth said that most of her ideas about unions were formed by the 1979 movie *Norma Rae*, in which Sally Field plays a textile worker who leads a movement to unionize others in her factory where working conditions were insufferable. She said that "growing up, I think my parents, or my father, said negative things about unions. It was like a corrupt organization." Cynthia described her previous ideas about a "Jimmy Hoffa-type union," but could not recall any other images of unions. In a previous job as a paraprofessional, Maria said, she knew "there's a union, but I didn't know it was there for me. I knew nothing about what it was. I just knew unions were something you saw them fighting about on TV. That's all I knew."

Sara said she had always considered that unions were for blue-collar workers which, in her mind, diminished the status of unionized teachers. She said that, although she did not recall conversations with her family, she "had the negative impression that unions were for blue collar workers, so unions kind of put teachers in that category." Other participants in this study had a general sense of the history of labor unions, but not teachers' unions in particular. As Kahlenberg (2006, p. 9) points out, "teaching was a white-collar endeavor, made up mostly of college graduates who considered unions to be for blue-collar workers of less educational attainment. 'what kind of professional joins a union?'"

Other SSTs recalled conversations at the dinner table about unions. Andy's mother, a school secretary in Middleton, was part of the teachers' union. He said,

She is part of the teachers union, so I always saw it in a positive light. ... I was aware of [the union] as a collective entity that sort of advocates for the teachers because ... growing up I was always under the impression that teachers were underpaid for what they did, and that the union was the entity that was always fighting to see that they were justly paid. And I always saw money as the biggest factor in what a union did.

Henry, who talked about unions with his father, who had a non-unionized job with a transit authority, said he also remembers thinking that "it was the work that they had done that really secured my salary, and that was the biggest impression I had going in."

Most participants remarked that they knew very little about unions before they started teaching. Asked what she knew about unions before starting teaching, Jill said,

no clue. I never really cared about history, so the union was just an organization that helped the workers get what they wanted and what they deserved. I thought it was something that helped people not get fired. My knowledge is the same as an eighth grader's. My parents never were part of a union. I didn't really know much. Still don't.

Several participants, when first contacted about the study, warned that they knew very little about their union and did not have many views about it. However, over the course of the interview, all of these participants were able to respond to the questions about their union, and often at the end remarked, as Jill did, "I guess I know more about our union than I thought I did! I'm much more opinionated than I thought!"

Why they joined

Teachers in Middleton, as in many other union districts, have an option to elect not to join the union but instead to pay an agency fee. All new teachers receive a union membership packet when they are hired explaining that they need to either join the union

or pay the agency fee and spelling out their choices and the procedures for opting out¹¹. The agency fee in Middleton, as is usually the case, is almost as much as the union dues themselves.¹²

None of the teachers interviewed knew what they would have had to do to if they chose not to join the union, and several did not remember getting any information from the union about the opt-out procedure. In fact, two of the SSTs interviewed did not even know they had a choice and were intrigued and amazed to learn during our interview that they could have chosen to pay an agency fee instead of joining. Other teachers said that, while they had known they had a choice, they were too busy during their first year to find out how to exercise that right. The only teacher who had actually asked the union for information on opting out was Nellie. She said, the agency fee

is \$450. So it's not that different [from regular dues]. ... So really, you didn't have a choice. And I chose to pay because I didn't have time to figure out how not to. Even though I actually do have all the materials on how not to, but it's a huge packet. ... [I]f you don't say anything, you're in. It would be a real conscious choice to not [become a member.] Otherwise, you just don't have time to get out of it.

Audrey and Estelle also chose membership over paying the agency fee. "It makes sense to join," said Audrey. "so you might as well pay a few extra dollars, or however much – you know, comparatively speaking, it's not that much more to have the full benefit of what a union may be able to do for you." Similarly, Estelle said,

I joined the union because it looks like my option was to not join and pay 80 percent of the dues and get nothing. And I do understand that if I don't join the union, I'm leaving myself somewhat unprotected. I don't have a way to file a grievance, or at least, I'm not sure what ...¹³

¹¹ The opt-out procedures are included in Appendix C (not there yet – need to add).

¹² Get exact rates - add.

¹³ This is an incorrect understanding. Even if a teacher opts out of union membership and elects to pay the agency fee rather than union dues, she will be protected in case of a contract violation. Most teachers

Other teachers expressed similar sentiments. Sara said that although she had not thought about joining the union prior to her first year of teaching, she did join because “you have to go more out of your way to not join it, so I had no reason to do that.” Likewise, Andy said, “I had already assumed I was going to do it [join the union as a first-year teacher]. I was under the impression that it’s a pretty standard thing to do and that most people do not opt out of the union. You’re kind of seen as the black sheep of the teaching establishment, I guess, if you do that.”

Only two of the teachers interviewed said that they joined thinking that the union was a positive influence in the lives of teachers. Henry said that he was willing to join because “I knew that the union had secured my salary.” Maria wanted to join because “I wanted to be part of a group that could make sure that teachers knew things that I didn’t know along the way. Maybe it’s a misplaced sense of nurturing but I want to help new teachers.”

These SSTs said they entered the profession expecting combative, confrontational relationships between labor and management. Most of them reported that they had very traditional views both about what a union does and should do, that is, focus on securing salary and providing protection. When choosing to join the union, they say that they did so in order to take advantage of individual benefits that they might need later on, such as advocacy in salary negotiation and protection in the face of potential legal threats, but not because they were drawn to a collective purpose or looking forward to being part of a unified group of teachers.

interviewed made statements indicating that they believed that they would be leaving themselves completely outside of union protection if they elected to opt out of union membership.

The SSTs in this study reported joining the union routinely as a first-year teacher, signing their membership card and accepting that dues would be deducted from their paycheck. They asked few questions. They said that deciding not to join would make an anti-union statement that they did not want to make. It was more important for them to have the union as “insurance” than to state that they did not want to join.

Cynthia said that she joined at once for the protection the union would offer. She did not think about it ahead of time, and she did not consider the option of not joining. She did not even read the information the union gave her. Likewise, Stephanie described how she joined: “I didn’t decide to join it ... it didn’t seem like it would hurt me to join, just in case something came up, and it just seemed like the logical thing to do.”

Early experiences engender ambivalence

Early observations

These SSTs generally reported seeing their union advocating for teachers, by negotiating their salaries and protecting them in a number of ways. Many mentioned that they joined the union because they anticipated needing these supports and expected the union to provide them. But they also mentioned being conflicted about these benefits.

After several years of teaching, these teachers perceived that the union primarily benefits veteran teachers rather than newer teachers. As Nellie said, “I noticed the union was working really hard for older teachers, to make sure that they got good retirement benefits. But new teachers, I thought, didn’t get a whole lot of stuff. ... The union doesn’t so much care, negotiating wise, about newer teachers, because people on the negotiating team tend to be older people, and they would come first.”

The stories of protection that participants told were mainly about the few veteran teachers who, as Rosemary said, “are kind of burnt out.” Similarly, several participants said that the salary scale benefits teachers who have put in more years, as it is backloaded with bigger jumps in salary for more veteran teachers. As Nellie explained, the salary scale rises incrementally for the first few years, making it difficult for her to buy a house as a young teacher. Cynthia said that the union seems to spend a lot of time and resources ensuring that teachers have a good retirement package: “I get flyers in my box about retirement seminars it seems every day.”

This focus on pensions seemed remote to them. Some participants mentioned that they might get involved in the union later, when their priorities are more aligned with those of experienced teachers. However, they did not mention working with union leaders to change what they saw as the priorities of the union – protection, salary, and retirement benefits.

Reactions to observations

These SSTs mentioned having conflicted feelings about the union’s advocacy for all teachers. They appreciated that such advocacy benefited them and they valued the protection and guarantee of salary. However, they said that the union treated all teachers the same – even the “poor” teacher down the hall – and this was a concern for them. They reported that they were bothered by the collective nature of the union in which they perceived that all teachers were protected and paid on the same scale, even if they did not work hard.

Protection: the benefits

Overwhelmingly, SSTs said that they needed protection. Each one of the twelve teachers interviewed used that word while explaining why they felt the need for a union and what they saw the union doing. They used the term to encompass many types of guarantees, all focusing on individuals, such as from protection from untrue accusations by students, parents, and administrators, and a safeguard against being asked by principals to do too much.

Some teachers mentioned the need to be protected from false accusations that might be brought up by students, themselves. Andy, for example, said that during pre-service training his cooperating teacher warned him to be careful about his relationships with his students. He said,

Well, as a young teacher, they always tell you to be very aware of any kind of perceived sexual misconduct or allegations of such. And that's ... that's probably the major kind of thing that you're most aware of, cause you're not that much older than the kids, and you're still sort of learning how to navigate around their social perceptions of what's going on.

Jill reported that the union president had been helpful in protecting her from harassment by the parents of a student in her class. She said, "And Jim came in, and sat down with me, and kind of gave, again, that 'I'm here for you – this is what I see. This is, you know, kind of some suggestions I can give you. You know, I'd be happy to come in when the parents come in, so that you have my support' kind of thing ... you know, just that friendly support sending me emails." Jim's immediate and informative response to participants' email messages consistently led the SSTs to feel that they were being well-supported.

One participant, Stephanie, thought her administrator had unfairly evaluated her teaching. "I had a concern around my evaluation. I had some disagreements with it and I

had some concerns as to where it was coming from. ... So I called the [union] president and I said 'I don't know where this is coming from, what is going on, what am I supposed to do?' And he said 'Well, we can meet with your evaluator.'" Stephanie felt that the union president was an important buffer between her and her administrator, who she felt was using "borderline abusive language."

Some teachers pointed out that the union helped them define an acceptable amount of work, and know what expectations were going "above and beyond" that standard. Andy said the union

...helps you know what things are your rights and you should be asking for from your principal in terms of compensation, when you're asked to go sort of above and beyond. And it helps you know what 'above and beyond' means, because as teachers, you know, we all go above and beyond, but then there's a certain point where you're like, OK, this is way out of bounds.

Similarly, Stephanie told of enlisting the union's help to reduce the amount of time some teachers had to devote to dismissal. Explaining that she initially had felt "petty" complaining about 5-10 minutes of extra work, she said she realized it accumulated and cut into her own after school time, which she often devoted to lesson planning.

Protection: drawbacks and ambivalence

SSTs also described witnessing or hearing rumors about the negative effects of the union's protections, usually because they perceived that the union protected poor teachers. Several also mentioned having conflicting views about the fact that the union shelters a teacher's workday, putting guidelines on how much teachers work. Sometimes they referred to other teachers they felt "nickel-and-dimed" their time, as if they were punching in and out, like blue-collar workers. Sometimes they confessed that they, themselves, worked less than they might have without a contract, because the contract's

definition of a work day allowed them to leave school at the prescribed time, without guilt. Despite these reservations, on the whole these teachers felt that these protections were important and they could not envision dismantling the system that provided them.

Many SSTs mentioned that their thoughts about unions had evolved, observing that they needed the union to support them differently as a first-year teacher than they would as they got older and had a family or contemplated a move to an administrative position, where they would not be a union member but would be supervising teachers who were. Many felt that they had acquired a more nuanced view of some of the aspects of the union. Sometimes these changes in thought were due to having witnessed or heard about something the union did that struck them as problematic. Their hopes for their union, however, still were not centered on what the union as a collective body might do to change education. They still appreciated the union benefits that made a difference in their lives.

Protection from going “above and beyond”

As a new parent, Sara said that she had a new perspective on the parameters that the union places on the hours she worked. The union contract stipulated that teachers in her elementary school could leave the building at 2:40 pm¹⁴. With nine years of experience, Sara said she could get all of her work done at school during her union-guaranteed preparation period and in the time before and after school. She said,

I sort of like it, you know, I like someone putting parameters on and saying you know what, you only have to work until 2:30. But I also think that it does do a certain amount to deprofessionalize teaching. I think in a place where there wasn't a contract, I wouldn't think about what I was required to do. I would do what I knew needed to be done. And I know that would be hard, having a kid, because one of the things I like about having a contract is I can say, you know what, I am allowed to leave at 2:30 and so I'm going to and I'm going to get home and be

¹⁴ Page 7, Article 5, “Teaching Hours and Teaching Load,” MTA contract

with my kid. ... It's sort of a love-hate relationship with the contract. Sometimes I think I would do a better job if I didn't have a contract saying I only have to work until 3.

Although she did not currently limit her workday to the hours her contract allows, Stephanie anticipated that in a couple years, when she hopes to have children, she would want this protection from having to work longer hours. "And now as I'm thinking about sort of the middle of my career, thinking to myself, well, how many nights can I legitimately be free? And thinking, at some point, when I have a family, I'm not going to have that many nights free. To me, that really does matter."

Protection for all teachers

These SSTs perceived that all teachers – including “poor” ones – are provided union protection. Many had heard stories, “legends,” one called them, of teachers who have been, as Sara said, “paid to sit in a broom closet and teach brooms for years.” Often they started with a variation of, “I heard about this one teacher who ...”. Several participants qualified their reports of these cases by saying that they did not know the details. Nellie’s report, which lacked specific facts, suggested that these stories traveled like rumors. She said, “There are some people who are sent to the high school to be fired because they couldn’t get fired some other way. Things like that. I don’t know how that works. But they can’t be fired, that’s what I hear.”

Many of those interviewed expressed uncertainty about how to judge the protection of these incompetent teachers. As Jill said,

[I]f a poor teacher ... has served their time and can't get fired, I mean that is something that I think sucks about having the union. Granted, at the same time, if I were that poor teacher, I'd want to know I'd still have that security of the job. But I think we are not able to get rid of certain teachers because of the union.

Estelle understood the role of the union to be a protector of all teachers. As she said,

I do understand that from the union's point of view, it's a hard thing. You have to defend all the people that are part of your union. But on some level, I think they need to start taking a harder stance against teachers who aren't doing their jobs, because the majority of teachers don't just do their jobs – they do more ... it's a calling, it's a career, it's beyond just a career.

Estelle believed that whenever the union protected all members without regard to their quality of teaching, all teachers were reduced in stature.

Henry saw an inherent conflict between the union's mission and the education of students. He said that this insight was most likely the result of discussions he has had as part of his administrative master's degree program in which many professors and students speak of the union as a roadblock to reform. Henry said he was of two minds, but he thought the union's goals and the teacher's goals were in conflict: "If you're a teacher, I think you take an oath to defend and promote the learning of your students. And that's not the union's number one goal, period." That said, Henry concluded, "I can't imagine doing away with unions because of the state it was before unions existed. My grandmother was a teacher in a one-room schoolhouse. She taught K-12 in one room, and had to get a lot of her own supplies, and I'm sure she was paid next to nothing." Like many of the participants in this study, Henry was ambivalent about the role the union played in his school and yet could not imagine a world without it. He observed:

As poorly positioned as they can seem sometimes, or awful for defending a poor teacher, I don't know any other model or way to either limit them more or do away with them at all and not end up with what you have in a privatized industry where teachers are paid less and really taken from granted.

Stephanie expressed the ambivalence voiced by others about what they perceived as union priorities. Nonetheless, she was sympathetic to teachers who had taught for

many years and believed that they should have job security after so much time, regardless of their performance in the classroom.

You have teachers who have been in the system who joined 30 years ago, who, their entire world has changed around them. They were teachers 30 years ago and they have enjoyed [teaching], and so to say that they're a poor teacher now is not necessarily a fair judgment, because what if 25 years ago this was like the most amazing teacher that there was. ... I think the union needs to protect teachers ... Should it be pushing older teachers out the door? Absolutely not. A person has dedicated 30 years to it. Yeah, maybe they're not exciting students anymore. However, this person also realizes that their entire life has been based around this career and they have invested something in it, which is not just their heart, but has a major financial repercussion on their life.

Fighting for their salary

These teachers appreciated their union's work to secure their salary. They said they see their union fighting for their contract, and that contract negotiations are mainly about making sure teachers get the money they deserve.

Specifically, the SSTs interviewed like the salary scale "game," as Elizabeth called it, in which they accrue credits and move up each year they teach in the district. Seven out of the 12 teachers say that they are uncomfortable with the idea of a merit pay plan, in which teachers could earn extra money based on their performance in the classroom. They were comfortable with the salary scale in Middleton and appreciated the union's role in defending it and keeping salaries rising.

One teacher, Andy, said that his union dues had more than paid for themselves, given that his salary had risen from \$36,000 to \$44,000 in his first four years through a combination of negotiated raises and his moving up steps and lanes. Estelle said, "I understand that I'd probably be working for a good \$20,000 a year less if I didn't have a union, because the school district's purpose is to get us to work as much as possible for as little money as possible."

Conflicted feelings about their salary scale

Even though they rejected the idea of merit pay, many teachers mentioned that they were bothered by the fact that they were paid the same as the teacher next door who might not be working as hard as they were. Nellie said that it was frustrating to her, and that a salary scale that took effort into account would provide a much-needed pat on the back. She said, “It would just be nice to have some recognition or differentiation through salary. And also, you might be able to get rid of some of the people who aren’t capable and aren’t trying as hard as they could.”

Estelle concurred. She said, “... I could be working next door to a teacher who works half as hard as I do, yet gets the same raise that I do. I mean, we are all working for the same rate.” Later she said that, “everyone’s going for the same raise, so, even if I work 20 percent harder than somebody else, we’re getting the same amount of money.” Estelle called this guaranteed salary for those who don’t work very hard an unfair “protection.” The participants who mentioned being frustrated that the money they earned was not tied to their effort did not suggest that their salary should be tied to their students’ achievement.

Although Andy was happy to be making such a good salary, he also recognized that because the union worked to secure a salary for all teachers he could not negotiate a higher salary for himself. Because he was a science teacher who prided himself on being well-educated, he felt he was “worth more” than other teachers in his school. He said,

Another disadvantage is that ... I don’t mean to sound like I have an ego about it, but the caliber of education which I have had to receive in order to teach and master my subject was higher than that of, or more intense than that of, many other subjects that teachers have to teach. ... So one disadvantage [of the salary scale] is that another teacher whose education might not be equal to mine would still be making the same or more money than I do. And so in that case, education

is kind of standardized across the board, and the school you went to, or the field that you studied, is not given any special concern.

Andy still conceded, however, that overall he benefited more from having the union negotiate his salary than if he had tried to negotiate what he thought he was worth.

When asked about their thoughts on merit pay, a reform that Middleton had not yet attempted but was being discussed in districts across the country, many of the SSTs said that such a system would likely be unfair with salary levels being determined by limited indicators of test scores or potentially-biased principals' evaluations. Several agreed that, even if they thought they were paid less than they think they deserved, the protection and advocacy that the union provided while negotiating salary was worth the trade off. This is a very traditional stance.

Thus, these teachers expressed conflicting thoughts about their union. They saw some negative effects resulting from the collective elements of the union, such as the uniform pay scale and across-the-board protection of teachers, and several mentioned that collectively the union deprofessionalizes teaching. However, they also appreciated the personal benefits, such as having the work day defined and protection against real and perceived threats. Therefore, they were not inclined to recommend that the union be abolished.

These SSTs' early observations of their union at work reinforced their pre-teaching expectations of unions, confirming that a union most importantly offers advocacy for them by providing protection if they need it and by negotiating their salary. These perceptions primarily came from talking informally with their building representatives, or talking with their union president, Jim, when he visited schools or when they have contacted him about a problem. These participants said that their views

did not come from attending meetings, reading the union's literature, or participating union activities. Most do not attend such events or read the literature or emails put out by the union. Because these SSTs have not been much involved in union activities and because what they observed day to day generally confirmed their traditional view and expectations of unions, their initial expectations and previous perceptions remained relatively unchallenged.

Thoughts on the union's role in school reform

When asked whether the union should address issues beyond protection and salary, matters such as designing professional development or focusing on student achievement that are considered "reformist," participants were unsure and they equivocated. Even though their union has been responsible for several accomplishments that most observers would consider reform initiatives, these SSTs did not report that their union's actions were focused on student achievement and teacher learning.

Additionally, participants were not yet comfortable with calling for their union to rearrange union priorities to make them more reform-oriented. Some of this hesitancy is most likely due to the fact that most of these SSTs are not involved in union activities. Perhaps because they expect the union to serve them as individuals, they are generally uninvolved in and uninformed about union activities designed for the whole organization. However, their uncertainty also indicates a breakdown in communication from the union leaders to the members, as teachers either did not know about the reform-oriented mission statement and priorities of the union president¹⁵, did not believe them, or did not

¹⁵ This mission statement is not in the union contract. It is published separately, as part of the union by-laws.

consider them to be reformist. With one exception, all participants expressed some confusion about the idea of their union taking a role in school reform.

The vision from the top

Only the building representative, Maria, was enthusiastic about the “new” direction of the union under Jim’s leadership. She spoke passionately about the union’s work promoting school reform. Her position as building representative bridges the gap between the union leadership and the teachers at the school site. She was responsible for educating teachers about the union’s work, and taking concerns of teachers in her school back to the meetings of union leaders.¹⁶

During her interview, Maria spoke frequently about the new mission of the union. She said,

They’re not just a union ... not just an organization that’s focusing on what the teachers need. They’ve expanded. They’ve gone beyond that. We’re here not just for the teachers but we’re here for the kids, and the families, and the community, and everything. They’re more encompassing.

This perspective was not expressed by any of the other participants, who were not involved in the union and thus had little knowledge of union activities.

As a member of the union’s executive board, Maria had worked with Jim to write the union’s mission statement. Through Maria’s comments, it appeared that she had been acclimatized to a new way of thinking about unions. The rest of the teachers in the study had not yet been exposed to many such conversations about the new mission statement, did not read the union’s literature, and had not learned about this new culture. Thus, they held onto the ideas they grew up with and expected and had observed. The union they knew focused on protection, salary and benefits, which made sense to them.

¹⁶ See Appendix D for job description for Faculty Representative as delineated in the union bylaws.

Even Maria, however, talked a great deal about the union's role as a protector and defender of teachers. "They are hard-fought-for rights. ... Everything was fought for, you know. Fought for by fighting the administration all of the time. ... [I] make people aware that [they] have certain rights in the contract." Although Maria referred often to the union's new mission statement, she also emphasized the union's role in securing bread-and-butter concerns.

The union's forum on the achievement gap

Maria cited the work that the union did on closing the achievement gap as one of the initiatives that pushed the union's agenda beyond traditional goals and activities. Although 10 out of the 12 SSTs interviewed were aware of the meeting sponsored by the union on the achievement gap, none of them attended. They gave a variety of reasons for not attending, such as having a young family or having too much to do for their own students in their own classrooms. Many participants thought that this conversation was an important one to have, however, and it is unclear if they would have attended had the superintendent, or their principal, or a university – rather than the union – convened such a meeting. Some teachers admitted that it was hard for them to attend any meeting that didn't directly affect their own work in the classroom. Stephanie said, "the achievement gap is just the buzzword in Middleton. It's not that I think it's inappropriate [that the union get involved], it's just what people talk about, and talk doesn't often change anything."

The union had held other forums on educational issues. Audrey was involved in a series of union-sponsored meetings on recruiting and retaining teachers of color, since that issue was very important to her. She thought the meetings were interesting and that

the resulting document, including suggestions for the district about how to increase the number of teachers of color, was a good one. However, even though she participated in this reform-oriented union event, Audrey still characterized her union as traditional. She compared her experience in the MTA with that of the teachers' union in Washington, D.C., where she taught prior to Middleton, saying, "they're the same, except that DC is bigger." It is interesting to note the significant differences in mission and reputation of these two unions¹⁷. In addition, union leaders in Washington, D.C. were indicted recently for fraud¹⁸. To Audrey, though, it seemed all unions were the same.

"Hypothetically, it sounds good."

The SSTs seemed to almost dismiss the reforms that the president had initiated. This may be because these efforts did not fit into their view of a union as a very traditional organization meant to provide services for them as individuals. These reforms seemed peripheral to the SSTs, even though the union leaders were trying to make them central. Although they had conflicted feelings about some of the "traditional" services the union provided, these teachers did not suggest that the union should shift its focus to that of a more "reform" union. In general, they could not envision having a union that would address school reform efforts. As a result, with the exception of Maria, these SSTs had made no effort to support the reforms instituted by the president. As Sara said,

It's funny, you know – I feel like I've heard about places where the unions bring the teachers together and talk about vision and talk about, you know, really do play that part in reforming schools and school culture and school organization. I don't know why I see that being so far-fetched in this situation. I don't know why.

¹⁷ Put mission statements of these two unions next to each other in the appendix.

¹⁸ Check and add citation and more information.

Throughout her interview, it seemed that Sara, who repeatedly expressed her “ambivalence” about the union’s role, wanted to imagine a new role for the union.

However, she couldn’t conceptualize what that would look like. She said,

I can envision something like where the union actually puts forth what they see as good instruction and good teaching and, you know, moving towards that. But I think that would be so hard to come to, cause if a union’s supposed to represent its constituents, and there are so many different viewpoints, I don’t know how you could come up with that.

She said she would like to see the union

... helping teachers become the best teachers they can be. And so if that looks like professional learning, if that looks like providing opportunities for growth, heck, providing opportunities for sabbaticals, things that can rejuvenate teaching ... the unions could be at the forefront. I mean, it would be so cool if unions were out there trying to figure out what does make teacher better teachers. ... I don’t see it happening now, and I think in a very theoretical world I could see that happening.

She said, “they could do research and see what teachers want. But I’m not sure what that would get us.” Sara’s puzzle about how to move the union to a more reformist agenda stalled when she considered how it would help her as an individual.

When asked about union involvement in school reform or professional matters, the SSTs indicated that they were open to the idea, at least theoretically. Yet they did not currently view their union as involved in reform initiatives, even though it was. Most of those interviewed made statements about how it would be nice if their union cared about things like student achievement and improving teacher quality, but they also expressed confusion and doubt that such efforts would be effective. Hypothetically the idea of a reformist union sounded good to them, but these SSTs had not gone to events that might help them be open to more possibilities. As a result, they were not informed and did not believe that the union’s new agenda was real.

“Information, not change”

These SSTs did not expect the union to do more than answer their personal questions or help them fight a straightforward contract violation regarding class size or scheduling. Study participants frequently brought up examples where they want to the union to get information or help them personally. This was the type of information one might expect a human resources office to provide, such as clarifying maternity leave, identifying courses that provided professional development points, and interpreting a contract provision about tuition reimbursement. Each time they received an answer from someone at the union – and they always did, usually from the president himself – the SSTs reported feeling satisfied with what they got.

However, as Rosemary said, “often all I get is answers, but not change.” To her, this meant that the answers she received usually clarified her rights, though if the answer she received from the union was “no,” no practice or policy would change. She viewed the union as having answers to current policies and contract questions, confirming the status quo. Furthermore, Rosemary and other participants said that, even when violations of the contract were corrected, that change was not imposed over time. For example, Rosemary said that the union may help reduce the number of different classes she had to prepare for one year, but the next year she would again be assigned too many different classes and have to appeal to the union to get it changed again. The union could apply a band-aid – make a change for the short term – but not change how things worked in their schools.

Thus, these SSTs saw the union as having limited power. Union officers could answer questions about policies and help them clarify what they needed to know. Occasionally, the study participants had asked Jim to help them fight a straightforward

contractual violation – class size, number of preparation periods, unfair evaluation – that improved their individual situation. However, they had not expected their union to fundamentally change their work environment or experience in it. Nellie said she saw the need of the union only in practical day-to-day concerns: “I don’t really see the value of unions, except that Jim personally helped me with my schedule this year.”

The SSTs in this study frequently told stories about the union’s commitment to securing adequate work conditions but, when asked, could not recall a situation in which the union was substantially concerned with reform. Henry provided an example about the union’s involvement in planning for his school’s new extended day program. However, within this new structure of thinking about schooling, the union focused its work on ensuring adequate pay and preparation time for the teachers in that school, not in redesigning the day for teaching and learning. In his view, the union focused on very traditional bread-and-butter concerns. Notably, though, Henry did not have other suggestions for how the union might be better involved.

Should the union set a reform agenda?

Other teachers expressed hope that everyone involved in education – including the union – would focus on student learning, but they did not know how that would actually happen or if the union would have the power to bring about such changes. As Nellie said,

I think if everyone focused on how to help kids learn, that people would be more happy. But I don’t know if those are things that the union could do. ... it’s the sloppiness of how things are done around here, and I don’t think really a union or a contract could really make our school more efficient and organized. ... the other things that they [administrators] need is to have a little vision or think ahead. I don’t see how a union could really do that. ... I mean, there’s potential for anything I guess. But I don’t see that.

Many of the teachers wished that the union would help fix problems that they saw as part of their school's culture and structure. As Nellie remarked,

Maybe the union could be more useful if they really created a forum where teachers could speak to each other more, because we're pretty isolated the way that it is right now. And the union doesn't provide that kind of forum at all, I don't think, even though maybe through its meetings. I don't really know.

Henry said,

My colleague next door is retiring this year. He said he remembers meetings and just a general community level of unionized teachers that was very different years ago than it is today. That can be just as much an indictment of today's society than it is of the union. ... They could try [to bring it back.] I know they don't do so much of it right now.

The participants' comments were laden with the sentiment that they wished the union could help fix these basic problems in their school and school culture, though they still could not imagine that the union had the inclination or the power to do so.

Conclusion

Second-stage teachers in this study said that they generally observed their union doing what they expected it would: settling their contract, securing their salary, providing them protection if needed, and giving them information and advice when they sought it. They appreciated that they were protected from potential and actual threats from students, parents and administrators. That they knew that their salary would be secured through negotiations. In most cases, these SSTs received the services from the union that they had expected to receive, and they were generally pleased with what they got.

However, most participants expressed ambivalence about the role the union played in their school and their profession. Participants were ambivalent about the protections that the union provided for teachers they perceived to not be working as hard as they were. Several were disturbed that this uniform protection "deprofessionalized" the teachers'

work. This frustration and ambivalence about the union's role as a protector of teachers seemed to cause these teachers to feel that the most comfortable role for them in the union is as an individual, asking for help in their individual situation. They do not, as a group, look to the union to advocate for change, either in the organization of the union itself or in the schools where they teach. In fact, the individuals in this study were not involved in any substantial way with union activities.

These teachers did not feel part of "the union," as is evidenced by the fact that they were not well-informed about the union's mission, goals and priorities. In fact, if these participants learned more about the new mission statement and priorities that their union's leaders have set, they might be surprised to see that the union's stated priorities are not so far from their own.

Back in the 1960s when they won the right to collectively bargaining, teachers came together in unions to fight for what they saw as priorities of the time – fair treatment and adequate pay and working conditions. Today, the context of schooling has changed so that the necessary battles focus on teaching, learning and school reform, but today's teachers do not see the union as the vehicle to improve the schools.

The cellular, isolated nature of teaching and schools helps to explain this stance that the SSTs brought to their understanding of unions. Their views are shaped by the fact that day to day, they work among other teachers, but seldom closely with them. Research suggests that this group of teachers also have expectations for their career that differ from those of their veteran colleagues in that many of them expect to be teaching only a short time. This expectation may diminish their need for a union.

The SSTs in this study saw unions in simple, traditional ways. Their views of unions appear to be shaped as much – and perhaps more so – by the expectations they had for their union prior to entering teaching as their experiences with the union once they had a classroom of their own. Therefore, the SSTs in this sample saw only two possibilities for the future of teachers unions, either that the union would continue to protect all teachers, as they perceive it currently does, or that the union would be abolished, in which case no teachers would be protected. They could not imagine a more nuanced stance with the union as an organization that focused on a range of professional issues. Therefore, they seemed to be willing to accept the “bad” with the “good” so that they, as individuals, could benefit from the protection and services that they perceived the union was providing. It is interesting to note that none of the teachers interviewed, despite their frustrations and condemnations of the union, wanted to dismantle the union. Some participants said that, theoretically, they could envision a more professional union, but they were not sure what that would look like.

In this uncertainty and ambivalence, there is an opportunity for the leaders of the MTA – as well as other unions in the country – to capitalize on their newest members’ frustrations. As Estelle explained, she is

realizing that we do all need to work together. You know, keeping the students as the number one focus, education as the number one focus ... and dealing with the people who nickel-and-dime their time. That’s not a professional way to be. ... that just seems very blue collar, that I punch in at an hour, and I punch out at an hour. We want to be treated like professionals, and we need to work together over this.

Although these teachers did not enter schools looking to the union to provide a place for collective action and professional community, after a few years of teaching, they say they recognize that the profession of teaching is in need of a renovation. Though they cannot

yet visualize a union focused on professionalization, union leaders intent on communicating with this newest generation of teachers could capitalize on a group ready to make a change. It might be difficult to successfully deliver this message to newer teachers while simultaneously keeping many veteran teachers happy, but the gains from bringing together such powerful groups of teachers will certainly be worth it.

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Appendix A

MTA Mission Statement

In the bylaws

Adopted by the MTA Executive Board on March 7, 2005

The Middleton Teachers Association (MTA) believes that supporting students to learn and reach their fullest potential in all areas of their lives should be at the center of everything we do. Furthermore, we will be a member-driven organization dedicated to protecting employee rights, advancing the economic wellbeing of our members, upholding high professional standards, increasing student academic achievement, and improving the quality of public education as a whole.

The Middleton Teachers Association serves a dual role as both a professional association and a labor association. As a **professional association**, the MTA will identify, promote, and support best instructional practices in our public schools. The MTA will identify best practices by holding informed and structured conversations with its members. We will put educators at the center of the debate about what constitutes quality public education, equity and achievement. The MTA will promote best instructional practices through educating its members and the community at large. The MTA will support best practices by advancing necessary changes in existing structures through collective bargaining and the legislative process in an effort to make these practices a sustainable part of our school system. Key issues which have already been identified are:

- Closing the achievement gap
- Providing high quality professional development
- Recruiting and hiring highly qualified staff
- Supporting staff in their early years to improve retention
- Ensuring that staff have workloads and schedules that allow time for collaboration on classroom instruction and assessment
- Developing multiple career paths for members

As a **labor organization**, the MTA will represent, organize, and mobilize all of its members with equal vigor to improve the quality of their economic and professional lives. We will continue to advance and improve the professional lives of our members through the collective bargaining process. At the local level, the MTA will work proactively with administration to resolve conflicts at the school and district level. On state and national issues, the Association will maintain a visible presence in our schools and community in order to educate our members and the community at large regarding their impact on our public schools. Furthermore, the MTA will develop coalitions for the purposes of advancing the interests of our members and public education in general.

Appendix B

Interview Questions – Union Pilot Study

Teachers in the decade after tenure (years 4-10), currently teaching in the Hawthorne Public Schools

I'm interviewing teachers to help me get a sense of how early-career teachers like you experience their unions. This includes learning about how you are involved with your union, if at all, and your opinions on what your union does. I'm also interested in what you think the role of unions in public education should be and specifically what you see as the role of the Hawthorne Teachers' Association with its current president.

GENERAL THOUGHTS ABOUT UNIONS

1. Before you started teaching, did you have views of what a union was?

If so, what were they?

What did you expect your teachers' union to do?

2. According to the contract, you don't have to join the union. If you don't join the union, you still have to pay a monthly fee called an agency fee. Did you decide to join the union?

Why or why not?

3. Now, in your school and district, what does your union do?

What are examples of issues that your union has supported or not supported?

- Are these issues ones that are important to you?
 - If not, what issues would you like your union to address?
 - If yes, are there other issues that you would like to see your union address?

4. Tell me a little bit about your involvement in your union. Do you play any role?

When did you enter this role?

Why?

INFLUENCE OF THE UNION / THE CONTRACT

I'm interested in the influence of the union and the role you see some specific contract stipulations playing in your school. Basically, I want to get a sense of how you see the contract playing out in practice.

5. Just so I get a general understanding of how familiar you are with your contract, can you tell me a little bit about if you've read it and if you refer to it?

I've been looking through the contract, and I noticed that one of the provisions in the contract deals with class size, stipulating that there are certain upper limits to how big classes can get.

6. In practice at your school, how, if at all, do you see the contract affecting class sizes?

Do you think this is an appropriate type of issue to be addressed in a contract?

7. Another provision details professional development requirements. How, if at all, do you see the contract affecting your professional development time and activities?

Do you think this is an appropriate type of issue to be addressed in a contract?

8. How, if at all, do you see the contract affecting the work of your principal?

Do you think it should?

9. How, if at all, do you see the contract affecting who is assigned to teach in your school?

(Ask here or later, depending on answer) Some people criticize unions because they defend poor teachers. What is your reaction to that?

10. What do you think about Hawthorne's current pay scale?

Hawthorne has a fairly standard pay scale, using degrees and graduate credits to determine a teacher's salary. There's been a lot of talk across the country about performance-based pay, paying teachers based on some measure of student performance.

11. What do you think about the idea of performance-based pay?

12. What role, if any, do you see your teachers' union playing in school reform?

I'm defining school reform as playing a part in the professionalization of teaching or in improving student achievement.

13. Have you ever brought a concern to the union at your school or at the district level?

What was your concern?

What happened?

14. Have you ever filed a grievance with your union?

If yes, would you be willing to describe that situation and the resolution?

If no, what would it take for you to consider filing a grievance?

Do you know others who have filed grievances? What do you think of these situations?

15. What, if any, do you see as benefits of being a member of the teachers' union?

16. What, if any, do you see as disadvantages of being a member of the teachers' union?

UNION PRESIDENT'S LEADERSHIP

I know from the reading I've done that the current president has changed the teachers' evaluation instrument and organized forums on closing the achievement gap.

17. First, I'm just curious if you knew about these two recent developments.

18. What do you think about the fact that your union addresses these types of issues?

19. What do you think of the new evaluation instrument?

20. Did you attend the forum on the achievement gap? Why or why not?

Do you think this is an important thing for the union to be doing?

CONCLUSION

21. What should the role of the union be? What types of events should they focus on? What should their focus be? What should they do for teachers? What should they do for students?

22. Has being a teacher with this particular union leader changed the views you held of unions before you started teaching?

If so, how?

23. Is there anything else that I haven't asked you about that you'd like to add?

Appendix C

Preamble to the Washington Teachers Union (Washington, DC)

In the Preamble to previous contracts, DCPS and the WTU declared fidelity to the goal of creating a partnership to advance the objective of providing “the best possible, comprehensive, efficient and effective learning environment for all students in the District of Columbia Public Schools.” In spite of their best intentions, the parties have failed to achieve this goal in the majority of DC Public Schools. Numerous factors conspired to subvert the fulfillment of their promise. The absence of consistent school system leadership, the lack of a clear, definitive master education plan with standards and a curriculum, outdated infrastructure in systems and procedures at central office, poor working conditions in schools, an ever growing “we teachers/they administrators” attitude that was allowed to fester, are but a few examples. These deficiencies and others have caused parents to lose faith in the school system and to remove their children from DC Public Schools. These deficiencies, no doubt, have also contributed to a decline in the quality of education received by DCPS students. The mistrust and lack of effective communication between teachers, principals, and central office administrators have resulted in an enormous number of grievances filed against DCPS; and, these grievances have consumed a tremendous amount of system time and money.

Indeed, the mistrust was carried into the collective bargaining process by the respective teams from DCPS and the WTU. It is largely responsible for the prolonged delay in completing this contract. We had to work through it and get to a point where we were willing to “risk” trust. Once that point was reached, we were able to recommit ourselves to developing a collaborative relationship to accomplish the purposes described in the Declaration of Education, namely, to “provide high quality teaching and learning in every classroom in every school.” To that end, we have agreed on the development of Pilot Schools to experiment with new approaches to providing instruction; the implementation of a Career Ladder, that permits promotion of the systems’ most accomplished teachers so they can be used to mentor new teachers, work on curriculum design and provide professional development. We have agreed, also, to modify the grievance procedures to include meaningful mediation in an effort to decrease the quantum of grievances, facilitate proactive intervention and resolution to potential labor – management conflicts and reduce the distractions that imperil quality education for DCPS students. Beyond the individual merit of each of these initiatives, collectively, they represent a commitment by the WTU and DCPS to jointly engage in the struggle to rebuild public confidence in the educational product offered by DC’s public schools. We, too, want to be a part of a system of education that offers real promise to DC students. Our obligation is to make it happen. Of course, the race to this goal is more than a sprint. It will take focus, perseverance, stamina, strategy and real determination to get there. But by this agreement, we hope to signal that we’re on the right track.

Appendix D
From the union bylaws

C. Faculty Representatives

1. Teachers (Unit A). Each school/building shall have one (1) Faculty Representative for each twenty-five (25) Unit A members or part thereof. Each school building shall have at least one (1) faculty representative. For the purpose of [MTA] representation, all Office of Special Education (O.S.E.) and special subject area teachers: e.g. Arts, Music, Science, Physical Education, World Languages, Media Specialists, etc. will be counted as regular staff members of the school to which they report on Mondays. Unit A Faculty Representatives will be elected by elections held in their schools at the beginning of the school year prior to the first [MTA] Executive Board Meeting of the year. It shall be the duty of the incumbent representative, or temporary chairperson, whichever the case may be, to conduct by secret ballot, the election of the incoming representative(s) in his/her own school. Names, addresses, telephone numbers and school assignments must be submitted to the President by the September Executive Board Meeting.

D. Duties of the Faculty Representatives

1. The Faculty Representative is the representative of the Association in their school building.
2. The Faculty Representatives shall be responsible for distributing association communications to the members of all units in their buildings or category where applicable, for keeping members informed and shall further act as liaison in their buildings or categories to the Executive Board.
3. Faculty Representatives shall assist in the formulation and processing of grievances.
4. Faculty Representatives shall attend all meetings and notify members of general meetings and other [MTA] activities.