The local school district is the employer; the bargaining unit is the district

The local union and school board negotiate local contracts. (State union has no formal role.)

Key labor relationship: local president and superintendent (many shared interests)
K-12 Unionism and Collective Bargaining: Distinctive Features

• Bilateral and interest-based bargaining are used

• Term Contract (2-5 years); revised, but rarely rewritten; may be “living”

• Contract cover wages, benefits, layoffs and transfers, hours, working conditions (often broadly conceived)
K-12 Unionism and Bargaining: What We’ve Learned

- Industrial unionism has limited value in school improvement. ( Strikes are uncommon.)

- Reform unionism is challenging to introduce and sustain.

- Most districts today use a hybrid approach to bargaining
  - Bilateral bargaining for wages
  - Interest-based bargaining for solving problems or developing programs.
Local contracts cover similar issues, but vary widely in response to local contexts.

Over time, some contracts get longer and “stronger,” but others do not.

Local districts often bargain beyond the legal scope defined by state statute, venturing into matters of policy. Rarely contested.

Many contract provisions are difficult or impossible to enforce.

Grievance procedures have limited value in resolving complaints.
K-12 Unionism and Bargaining: What We’ve Learned

- Collective bargaining has raised teachers’ wages by about 10%.

- Teachers’ professional status has risen over 40 years, but gains are often offset by public views of unions as self-serving.

- Teachers’ voice in policy and practice has increased in many districts.
Over time, traditional union priorities (seniority, standardization, centralization) are less prominent.

Productive school reforms (pay reform, peer review) often are jointly managed and emerge from collaborative labor-management relationships.