

Cowen, J. (2008). Bargain-based schooling: Teacher unionization and American education.

### **Abstract**

The central research questions of this study concern the role of teacher unionization in American public education. The project draws on nationally representative samples of school districts, schools, and teachers---including unique supplements to publicly available data. The extent to which teachers and school districts engage in bargaining is primarily a function of the states in which these parties are located. Contrary to claims of some union critics, teacher tenure and employment protection are primarily provided for by state statute rather than contract negotiation; all but two states whose teachers do not bargain nevertheless have strong tenure laws.

Bargaining agreements tend to emphasize teacher compensation and working conditions over other employment issues such as evaluation and dismissal. The primary result of collective bargaining appears to be an increase in the share of district resources devoted to teacher salaries and especially fringe benefits. Different district characteristics appear to influence student achievement. For example, higher salaries are associated with higher achievement levels in non-bargaining districts, while no such returns are evident in bargaining districts. Schools in bargaining districts are less likely to use salary incentives to fill teaching positions in understaffed areas such as math, science and special education classes. Unionized teachers appear more satisfied with salaries, workplace conditions, and the professional climate of their schools than non-unionized teachers. Unionized teachers are, on the other hand, less likely to report satisfaction with job security.