Meeting 20 Summary
21st Century Learning for All: Closing Opportunity Gaps

January 10-11, 2013
San Jose, California

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Note: This meeting summary was developed as a resource for members of the California Collaborative on District Reform. We are making this document publicly available in an effort to share the work of the Collaborative more broadly to inform dialogue and decisions of educators throughout the state. However, it does not contain the background and contextual information that might otherwise accompany a product created for the purpose of public consumption. For more information about the meeting and other Collaborative activities, please visit www.cacollaborative.org.

The 20th meeting of the California Collaborative on District Reform used the context of San Jose Unified School District (USD) to expand and deepen two areas of focus that have permeated much of the Collaborative's activity in recent years: 21st century skills and closing opportunity gaps. Meetings on Linked Learning in Long Beach, on workforce preparation in Menlo Park, and on site leadership in Fresno have all emphasized the need for students to build the knowledge and skills that will enable success in college and today's careers. Twenty-first century skills are a key component of San Jose USD's strategic plan; the meeting provided an opportunity to examine exactly what these skills are and how educators can best foster them and capture evidence of student mastery. In addition, attention to equity underlies the Collaborative's approach to any area of educational improvement; San Jose USD's efforts to identify and address opportunity gaps enabled members to explore ways in which systems can remove barriers and enable all students to acquire the knowledge and skills they need. Meeting participants then used these two areas of focus to dig more deeply into challenges of system change and to consider implications for current state policy issues.

Exploring the San Jose Context

Presentations from San Jose USD administrators described a superintendent listening tour and the subsequent creation of the district's strategic plan. The presentations not only established the context for the district's reform efforts, but laid the groundwork for deeper conversations about 21st century skills and opportunity gaps.

A Listening Tour to Identify the District's Strengths and Needs

Superintendent Vince Matthews began his tenure in fall 2010 with a listening tour that included community meetings and visits to every school in the district. That tour, combined with a review of student data, revealed that while overall achievement levels were laudable and contributed to San Jose USD's reputation as a high performing district, they masked uneven subgroup performance. Furthermore, the skillset of students leaving the San Jose USD system did not meet the needs of Silicon Valley employers. District leaders also identified decreasing levels of engagement as students progressed through middle and high school. In addition, district leaders described a culture where teachers and administrators considered themselves representing and serving an individual school, but not the broader district. Thus, while the district was operating from a strong foundation, leaders identified several areas where growth was necessary to fully prepare its students for postsecondary success. As one district administrator explained, "We had islands of excellence, but we weren't a system of excellence."

A Community-Developed Strategic Plan

In response to the concerns identified through Superintendent Matthews's listening tour, and in an effort to identify a clear direction for the district moving forward, San Jose USD embarked on the careful development of a five-year strategic plan. District leaders wanted to ensure that the strategic plan actually drove the district's decision making, and that it reflected the priorities of the community. Therefore, they sought input from the business community, staff, students, and parents, both at the beginning of the process (to generate ideas) and when early versions of the plan were complete (to ensure that it reflected the input of each stakeholder group). The San Jose USD Board of Education approved the strategic plan in May 2012; the district is roughly six months into implementation. The two primary areas of focus for the Collaborative meeting directly reflect the two central priorities of the strategic plan: preparing all students for 21st century opportunities, and closing opportunity gaps between different subgroups of students.

Understanding and Developing 21st Century Skills

San Jose USD has committed to ensuring that all students are prepared for society and work in the 21st century. Meeting dialogue addressed two questions: (1) What are 21st century skills, and (2) how can educators build them in the students they serve?

What Are 21st Century Skills?

University of California at Berkeley Professor David Pearson joined the Collaborative meeting to share work from the National Research Council (NRC) Committee on Defining Deeper Learning and 21st Century Skills. Noting the wide range of skills and titles used to define contemporary job and life demands—a cacophony of ideas that he described as a "veritable Tower of Babel"—Pearson shared one of the key outcomes of the committee's work: a definition of deeper learning. Distilling the essence of various perspectives on the concept of deeper learning, the committee defined it as "the process of learning for transfer." Moreover, the committee identified three intertwined domains of competence that compose 21st century skills. The cognitive domain includes elements of reasoning and

memory, the intrapersonal domain includes elements of self-management and conscientiousness, and the interpersonal domain includes expressing ideas and interpreting and responding to others' messages. Within each domain sit clusters of competencies that collectively cover the full range of 21st century skills.

The San Jose USD strategic plan likewise identifies and articulates the rationale behind several key 21st century skills, which the plan identifies as "The Five C's." The district seeks to develop competency in (1) critical thinking and problem-solving skills, (2) creative thinking skills, (3) communication skills, (4) collaboration skills, and (5) global citizenship. As it relates to global citizenship, the San Jose business community in particular emphasized global literacy and the ability to speak a second language as key demands of the modern workforce. Although the classification scheme differs from the taxonomy used by the National Research Council committee, it reflects many of the same principles. More importantly, both approaches move beyond buzzwords and clichés to clearly articulate the knowledge and skills that students will need for postsecondary success.

In addition to identifying the rationale behind and components of 21st century skills, Pearson also spoke about the literature linking key competencies and adult outcomes. The NRC committee found this research base underdeveloped and primarily correlational, especially for the intrapersonal and interpersonal domains. Pearson therefore emphasized the need for expanded research, as associations between particular competencies and desired outcomes will be critical in designing educational approaches and interventions that can best equip students for success. Nevertheless, he did say that from the existing research, the single most important cluster of skills associated with the intrapersonal and interpersonal domains related to conscientiousness. More specifically, a tendency to be organized, to be responsible, and to demonstrate traits of initiative and perseverance correlated strongly with desirable educational, career, and health outcomes. Conversely, the element most consistently associated with negative outcomes in adulthood was antisocial behavior.

How Can Educators Help Students Develop 21st Century Skills?

Subsequent meeting dialogue explored areas in which educators can help students build the competencies critical to college and career success. These areas included early childhood education, leveraging academic standards, expanding attention to intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, and attending to issues of assessment and teacher capacity.

Early Childhood Education

Although conversations around 21st century skills often focus on secondary education and students' more proximal preparation for postsecondary activity, participants emphasized the need to begin building 21st century skills with early childhood education. Indeed, the emphases on self-regulation and oral language development that drive much of the instructional activity with young children are consistent with the intrapersonal and interpersonal domains highlighted in the NRC report. California's expansion of educational opportunities through the transitional kindergarten program presents an opportunity to begin developing these skills at an earlier age. Participants also felt that early-grades

education should include exposure to the world of work; such exposure need not wait for high school internship opportunities.

Academic Standards

Dialogue also addressed the degree to which 21st century skills map onto new academic standards. The Common Core State Standards and their emphasis on communication and preparation for college and career can provide a vehicle for building these skills. In particular, Pearson drew attention to the Common Core's demand for students to participate actively in conversation as an area of importance for educators. In addition, participants indicated that some hooks exist in the Next Generation Science Standards for developing intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. These connections may be especially important, as they enable educators to build on existing efforts in pursuit of 21st century skills.

Despite the opportunities that new sets of standards present, disconnects do exist. Meeting participants noted the Common Core's limited emphasis on intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. In addition, oral communication is particularly important to the business community; while the Common Core focuses on listening and speaking skills, educators face challenges in allocating the time necessary to develop and assess these skills. Finally, despite an emphasis on reading and writing across subject areas, the Common Core (and the anticipated assessments coming from Smarter Balanced) and the Next Generation Science Standards still tie student expectations closely to subject areas. While organization by subject area follows a long tradition in K-12 education, these distinctions do not exist in the business community. True workforce preparation is likely to require cross-disciplinary work and demands for transfer that our existing systems may be poorly equipped to support.

Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Skills

Meeting participants also addressed the challenge of ensuring that intrapersonal and interpersonal skills receive appropriate attention relative to cognitive skills. Our current high stakes accountability environment focuses heavily on the cognitive domain. Some participants highlighted behaviorist disciplinary approaches like positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) as an attempt in some places to develop intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. Efforts around restorative justice likewise seek to identify and build competency in students' self-regulation and interactions with others. However, such approaches frequently target only those students who have already demonstrated behavior problems. In addition, approaches like PBIS can be implemented poorly, and can be too narrowly focused if conceived only as a means of addressing behavioral issues. Meeting participants argued that attention to intrapersonal skills must incorporate approaches to building and supporting intrinsic motivation.

While conversation focused on the need to develop intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, some meeting participants argued that this expanded emphasis should not come at the expense of academic growth. Cognitive skills remain central to students' educational development, and demand continued attention. The research base in the area of

intrapersonal and interpersonal skills is weaker than it is for cognitive skills, meaning that research efforts may need to overemphasize these areas to develop a more robust knowledge base. Nevertheless, educators should take care not to shift their focus in ways that rob students of opportunities for necessary cognitive development.

Assessment

All of these observations have implications for assessing student progress towards developing 21st century skills. Assessment in the intrapersonal and interpersonal domains presents a particular challenge since limited items and tools exist to do it well. In addition, contemporary approaches to student learning have increasingly sought to align assessment with instruction such that assessments more closely capture students' command of what has actually been taught in the classroom. However, if the goal of our education system is to encourage *learning for transfer*, as the NRC report recommends, then such close alignment may work against that ultimate goal. Rather, a range of items or tasks might be necessary, with some asking students to do exactly what they were taught and others asking students to apply their knowledge to very different problems or novel situations. It remains to be seen whether the forthcoming Smarter Balanced assessments will promote the type of learning for transfer championed in the NRC report.

In the face of assessment challenges, expanded attention to the entire range of 21st century skills also presents an opportunity for innovation and system learning. The temptation may exist to align state efforts entirely with the Smarter Balanced assessments, but as one meeting participant suggested, "The state can learn from local innovation." For example, Long Beach USD has engaged with its business partners to develop a local assessment that can produce a certificate identifying students as prepared for the world of work. This and other local efforts can provide examples of capturing, and can inspire further efforts to capture, student preparation for success; the state can play a critical role in identifying, disseminating, and even adopting these promising local practices.

Teacher Capacity

Observations about 21st century skills also have strong implications for teaching and teacher quality. Teachers need to build capacity to teach a broader set of skills. This is particularly true against the backdrop of high stakes accountability that has led many educators to narrow their curriculum and adopt compliance-oriented approaches to their work. The increased class sizes and reduced instructional time that have resulted from California's fiscal crisis present still greater challenges for teachers, who will be called upon to accomplish more with their students. As schools turn to develop a more expansive set of competencies that students need for postsecondary success, meeting participants also stressed the importance of mindset and the belief that *all* students can achieve. This attention to equity in building student knowledge and skills drove the transition to the meeting session on identifying and addressing opportunity gaps.

Identifying and Addressing Opportunity Gaps

At the core of San Jose USD's strategic plan is the expectation that all students graduate with the 21ˢᵗ century skills they need for today's society. A critical barrier to accomplishing this goal, however, is the gaps in opportunities that prevent some students from achieving success commensurate with their effort and abilities. In recognition of this challenge, the identification and closure of opportunity gaps forms the second pillar of the district's approach. As they developed San Jose USD's strategic plan, leaders consciously moved beyond typical conversations about *achievement* gaps, which can implicate students as the root cause for disparate performance. Instead, district leaders emphasized the responsibility of adults to recognize and fix the systemic inequities that provide some students with greater *opportunities for success* than their peers.

Meeting participants acknowledged that conversations about equity are both incredibly challenging and deeply important. As one person reflected, "It always leads to a conversation about power—who has power, and who is willing to give up power. It is a constant, every day, every minute conversation, and it needs to be." Dialogue also highlighted the need to recognize gaps among many different types of students. Race and poverty are critical dimensions along which adults must examine disparate opportunities, but tremendous gaps exist for English learners and special education students as well. District efforts must be attentive to all kinds of gaps wherever they exist.

Meeting dialogue also identified some considerations that can help conversations about equity happen more effectively. A culture that focuses on all of the district's children (on *our* kids) rather than on an individual classroom or school (on *my* kids) can facilitate shared commitment to equity. Meeting participants also emphasized the critical understanding that equity does not mean that everything is going to be equal; some students will need more resources and supports to access the same opportunities as their more advantaged peers. Finally, any work on equity must build on a foundation of trust. If individuals are to buy in to any improvement effort—especially one in which they perceive diminished resources for their own personal interests—they need to believe that leaders will continue to support them while consistently acting in the best interests of children.

Examples of Opportunity Gap Indicators

Conversations about *achievement* gaps routinely draw on the disaggregation of easily available student outcome data. Indicators of *opportunity* gaps, in contrast, may be more difficult to obtain and interpret. To explore the ways in which districts might track disparities in student opportunities, meeting participants examined tools (or artifacts) being used in various Collaborative member districts. These tools fell into three rough categories. First, student outcomes artifacts reflect gaps in academic success among different subgroups of students, and therefore represent trailing indicators of opportunity. Second, resources artifacts track disparities in access to such things as community resources, high quality teachers, and college preparatory courses. Third, practices and processes artifacts reflect differences in areas like the quality of instruction, learning

environment, grading practices, and disciplinary practices. Meeting participants broke into three small groups to discuss the following district examples:

Student Outcomes Artifacts
- San Jose USD shared preliminary work in measuring 21st century learning that included student survey items and education technology standards for students that the district is working to align with its own teaching practices.
- Student survey items from the *Study of Deeper Learning Opportunities and Outcomes*, being conducted by the American Institutes for Research, seek to measure particular constructs related to 21st century learning.
- Oakland USD's student credit counts and California High School Exit Exam rates, disaggregated by school, grade, and subject, serve as indicators of whether students are on track to graduate from high school on time.

Resources Artifacts
- Los Angeles USD shared its strategic staffing tool, a resource to help principals match their most effective teachers with students who need the most support.
- San Francisco USD tracks the extent to which students are on track to meet the A-G requirements for University of California/California State University admission, disaggregated by subgroup, as a reflection of access to college preparatory courses.
- Oakland USD uses an online mapping tool that combines student demographics, academic outcome data, and community resources to determine whether specific subgroups of students are receiving equal access to a wide variety of school and community resources.
- Garden Grove USD crosswalks students' A-G progress in high school with eighth grade California Standards Test performance to identify students who have demonstrated that they have the ability to succeed but have not been placed in courses that facilitate college preparedness.

Practices and Processes Artifacts
- Tools from Oakland USD for conducting instructional rounds help district leaders track the quality of classroom instruction that various groups of students receive.
- Oakland USD also shared data on chronic absences and suspensions, broken down by school and student subgroup, that it uses to identify systemic gaps in students' opportunity to learn.
- Student survey items from the *Study of Deeper Learning Opportunities and Outcomes* include constructs about opportunities to engage in deeper learning in the classroom.

Themes Related to Opportunity Gap Indicators

Small groups were tasked with working towards a broader set of indicators that districts might use to capture opportunity gaps. The groups offered some examples toward this goal, such as using college acceptance, matriculation, remediation, persistence, and completion rates as better measures of college preparedness, or tracking enrollment and completion of A-G courses as measures of students' access to curricular resources. However, as the

conversation was only a first step in this direction, this summary focuses not on these specific examples, but on the themes that emerged across the small groups and in the full group discussion that followed.

Indicators Must Be Appropriate and of High Quality

Observations about the opportunity gap indicators themselves highlighted the importance of quality and appropriateness. First, effective intervention requires the tracking of both leading and trailing indicators: leading indicators can help leaders identify the causes of disparities and address those root causes in a timely fashion, while trailing indicators provide critical information on progress towards intended goals. (Some indicators might serve both purposes. For example, third-grade reading performance can serve as both a trailing indicator of instruction for grades K-3 and as a leading indicator of probable performance in subsequent grades.) Meeting participants also emphasized the importance of ensuring high quality with any artifact. If information is to be actionable, it must be an accurate reflection of what is actually taking place in classrooms and schools. Finally, sharing of tools across systems can be an important means of learning, but widespread use of any given indicator may not be appropriate. District leaders must identify the indicators that are most appropriate for their local context and that will give them leverage to act.

Some Key Indicators Still Need to Be Developed and Made Available

Meeting participants also observed that most of the currently available indicators are focused on cognitive domains, and insufficiently address the intrapersonal and interpersonal skills that are critical to 21st century learning. This gap highlights the need to create space for innovation and sharing of new ideas. Dialogue also emphasized the point that except in the rare cases where they are developed at the local level, few currently available indicators draw across systems of K-12 education, higher education, health and mental health, and justice. Because many opportunity gaps are rooted in societal challenges that extend beyond the realm of education, addressing those gaps is likely to require more robust data systems and expanded data sharing across agencies than currently exist.

The Purpose of Indicators Is to Spur and Guide Action

Though sharing examples across districts plays a useful role in generating new ideas, meeting participants warned against the temptation of adding too many new measures. Fundamentally, indicators of opportunity gaps must enable leaders to act in ways that improve students' education; an overload of information may not be appropriate or helpful. As one meeting participant observed, "The work is extremely hard. We shouldn't make it extremely complicated." Another individual cautioned, "It's easy to bureaucratize the super-important work." Simply mandating new reporting requirements can lead to a compliance mentality where teachers and administrators simply ride out a new wave of reform without taking advantage of new ways to improve their practice. Participants also emphasized the importance of adaptability, so that leaders can adjust, eliminate, or add to a system of indicators in response to their usefulness and the evolving needs of the system. Underscoring all of these observations was the recognition that indicators alone will not solve problems. As district leaders embrace new ways of identifying challenges to equity,

they must consider how to translate these indicators of opportunity gaps into practice that meets the needs of all students.

Supporting and Compelling Organizational Change

Expanded attention to developing 21st century skills and increased focus on eliminating opportunity gaps requires changes in the ways adults in the system approach their jobs. Organizational and cultural change must take root in the central office and must extend to every school and classroom in the district. Meeting participants therefore took time to explore the process of district change, with an emphasis on a question posed by San Jose USD leaders: *How do central office administrators change their approach toward staff to support and compel a dramatic positive change throughout the system?* A consultancy panel featuring district and school leaders from San Jose USD enabled the group to understand some of the priorities, challenges, and lessons learned in the district's efforts to date, as well as to engage in general discussion about the process of changing adult behavior. The following themes emerged both from this session and from other dialogue throughout the meeting.

Emphasize Communication

Meeting participants emphasized the need for extensive and persistent efforts at communication. As one individual explained, building a district-wide approach requires "keeping it simple and messaging it over and over and over." In addition to simplicity and consistency, meeting participants emphasized the importance of recognizing and reacting to where people think they are, and of communicating in a way that does not assume that the outcome has already been decided. For San Jose USD leaders, this meant affirming community pride in the district that was based on perceptions of a high-performing system, as well as two-way communication during their public engagement efforts to ensure that stakeholders saw their perspectives reflected in the strategic plan.

Comments also suggested that visibility and transparency are critical components of communication efforts. One participant emphasized the need for senior district officials to be present in schools; another talked about creating a "high touch" central office. This direct involvement with individuals in schools helps leaders deliver unfiltered messages to administrators and teachers that do not get watered down or distorted as they pass from person to person. Equally important, however, direct outreach to schools keeps district leaders attuned to the responsibilities and realities of life in schools, which both enables them to make better-informed decisions and helps create the perception in schools that leaders are acting in their best interest. Both elements help combat the "this too shall pass" mentality that often characterizes on-the-ground reactions to new improvement efforts.

Ensure Coherence

Meeting participants also underscored the importance of coherence among district initiatives and across levels of the system. Improvement efforts will be more successful when they build on work that is already taking place, and when all system efforts are closely aligned. In San Jose USD, the strategic plan has been an important tool for

monitoring and driving coherence. District leaders explained that having the plan makes it easier to have conversations about whether existing or new initiatives are consistent with what the district is trying to accomplish, and therefore whether and how to continue them.

Meeting participants also highlighted the importance of school board commitment to district initiatives. District leaders who have full support to pursue strategies of improvement may encounter fewer obstacles to sustaining and deepening efforts over time. San Jose USD leaders in particular attributed early successes in implementation of their strategic plan in part to a stable and supportive board. Indeed, the plan's emphasis on equity, particularly the elimination of opportunity gaps, builds directly on a San Jose USD Board of Education policy from May 2010 (BP 0210) seeking to ensure that the principles of equity and inclusion are integrated into all district policies, programs, and practices.

Address Issues of Human Capital

Any district change efforts fundamentally rely on the willingness and ability of individuals in the system to carry out that change. Systems and processes for recruitment, hiring, and placement must reflect district needs and serve as a key means of pursuing the district's overall goals. As one individual asked, "How do we transform [the] human resources [department] to be a place that strategically manages talent as opposed to pushing paper?" In identifying the right people to carry out change, meeting participants regularly pointed to the importance of mindset in hiring and placement decisions, particularly a belief that all students can learn and a willingness on the part of the adults to admit and learn from mistakes. One district leader described the district's hiring priorities by explaining, "We're trying to tap into the *mindset* of the individual [in recruitment and hiring] because we believe we can work on the skill [after the individual is hired]." The conversation reflected a continuing theme in Collaborative discussions, reprising considerations of "will versus skill" that also emerged from our Fresno meeting on school leadership in June 2012.

A second set of observations also built on conversations from the Collaborative's Fresno meeting. District leaders often lack the luxury of picking from a deep pool of candidates to meet staffing needs. They must therefore work to build the bench of potential leaders by identifying promising individuals and building capacity within the system. If district improvement efforts rest on the ability of teachers and leaders to faithfully implement new approaches, the central office must enable these teachers and leaders to do so.

Engage Teachers

Any district improvement effort ultimately seeks to improve outcomes for children, and the success of any approach will ultimately depend on the individuals with the most direct influence on those children, their classroom teacher. Meeting participants therefore emphasized the importance of working directly and extensively with teachers on efforts at change. Several individuals observed that teachers have often been conditioned to duck new waves of reform, recognizing that many new initiatives are short lived and simply get replaced by the new "flavor of the month" in relatively short order. Communication and capacity building efforts therefore become particularly important with teachers. Meeting participants emphasized the need for district leaders to not merely inform teachers of new

efforts, but to empower them to lead and develop new ideas. Networks can represent a great opportunity to build engagement, share best practices, and learn from one another.

Consider the Role of the Central Office

While each of these specific roles compels action from the central office, meeting dialogue also explored the purpose of the central office in leading a district. One individual reflected,

> There are things that the district office can't do. We can't teach the kids and we can't run the site. ... The only work that makes a difference is at the school, so we need to think about what schools need from *us*. What purpose do we have, and how do we make sure we serve that purpose?

Additional comments expanded on this point by emphasizing the importance of having a service mentality towards schools. Discussion also reiterated an earlier point about developing and deepening a district culture of shared interests and meeting the needs of all students. A unified approach to meeting the needs of *our* children (as opposed to *my* children) begins with and is modeled by the central office.

Extending Dialogue to Questions of State Policy

The meeting concluded with discussions that extended to two issues of state policy: California's new accountability system and ongoing education finance reform efforts.

California's Education Accountability System

From questions of 21st century learning, opportunity gaps, and adult change at the district level, discussion transitioned to the state's system for holding schools accountable (California's Public School Accountability Act). In part, this transition represented a logical next step from earlier meeting dialogue. If our school systems are focused on building 21st century skills and closing opportunity gaps, how should that be reflected in our state accountability system? The transition also responded to the current state policy environment. With the passage of Senate Bill 1458—which opens the door to altering the structure of the state's Academic Performance Index (API)—an opportunity exists to provide input on the design of the state's accountability system. The legislation allows for substantial flexibility, and Collaborative members' perspectives could help state leaders develop a system that promotes and reflects district realities as well as state priorities for student learning.

To ground the discussion, meeting participants reacted to a set of candidate indicators that could potentially serve as elements of the state's accountability system. The indicators reflect the early thinking of a group of educational stakeholders that includes researchers, support organizations, and district leaders involved with the California Linked Learning District Initiative. These candidate indicators fall into the categories of persistence and completion, equity, experiential learning, college and career readiness, and post-secondary transition. Small group discussion enabled meeting participants to explore these categories in detail before the entire group reassembled to identify some larger themes.

Several themes emerged from the wide-ranging discussions of potential indicators. One of these was the need to consider perverse incentives and individuals' ability to game the system. For example, one of the candidate indicators for college readiness is the percentage of students graduating from high school who meet A-G requirements by earning a "C" or better. Educators may engage in grade inflation to increase the percentage of students meeting this benchmark, thereby improving school and district numbers. However, if students have received artificially high grades, the indicator will cease to reflect their actual levels of college preparation, and may in fact do those students a disservice when they move on to college. Echoing a theme from the discussion of opportunity gap indicators, the conversation also highlighted the need to ensure the quality of any data point that the state formally incorporates.

Beyond reactions to the specific candidate indicators, meeting participants voiced several more fundamental reactions to a new accountability system. First and foremost, they posed the question: what is the goal of the accountability system? Different stakeholders may provide different answers, and it is not clear that consensus exists at the state level. The goal must be clear, and the system that emerges should enable districts to make progress towards that goal. Second, meeting participants suggested that many of the candidate indicators might be best determined and addressed at the local level. Returning to the theme of simplicity, some individuals advocated for a system consisting of a very limited number of state-level measures. These measures could be supplemented by additional measures that local districts could opt into for the purposes of transparency, but not necessarily for accountability. Such a system could promote the goals of simplicity, adaptability, and ability to use information to meet student needs, without the dangers of excessive burden and compliance-driven activity that often characterize educational accountability systems.

While meeting participants expressed reservations about an overly complex set of measures in an accountability system, they identified other ways in which the state can facilitate the flow of information and the process of improvement. Following the lead of the NRC committee in defining the set of 21st century skills, the state could take a leading role in defining what those skills are in relation to the Common Core and Next Generation Science Standards. The state could also vet for quality the innovative practices taking place in districts to assess 21st century skills, and facilitate sharing of these practices across jurisdictions. In the same vein, members suggested that the state could collect and distribute learning progressions and developmental rubrics related to these skills that might help districts take more risks. Finally, the state could facilitate the connections among data systems to provide more comprehensive information on the challenges and successes students experience.

Ultimately, meeting participants reacted against a narrow conception of a state accountability system that seeks merely to identify the correct data points for use in assessing school progress. While meeting dialogue recognized the potential value of many current and potential measures, participants encouraged the state to consider the ways in which data can be used to best facilitate the work of school improvement in California.

California's Educational Funding System

The meeting concluded with a discussion of the Collaborative's ongoing engagement in efforts to achieve state school finance reform. The Collaborative and its member districts have continued to advocate for a new funding system that enables local flexibility and pursues goals of equity by distributing resources according to student need. Letters to state leaders, op-eds in local newspapers, and participation in Governor Jerry Brown's stakeholder working group on school finance reform have enabled Collaborative members individually and collectively to weigh in on the policy process; the governor's proposal for a Local Control Funding Formula (released on Day 1 of the Collaborative meeting) reflected many of the priorities espoused by the Collaborative's district members.

Meeting participants expressed particular interest in the reaction of advocacy groups to the governor's proposal. Specifically, several participants noted the relative silence from Hispanic communities, who stand to benefit from the increased funding proposed in the Local Control Funding Formula. By way of explanation, some emphasized that advocacy groups need to see hard numbers they can trust. General principles and vague promises are likely to have little sway over these groups, especially if they come from districts with whom a weak level of trust exists. Outreach and communication efforts that come from trusted authorities and feature concrete numbers will be critical in building understanding and mobilizing support.

Meeting participants also discussed the role Collaborative members can play in moving finance reform efforts forward. Collaborative staff continue to work on profiles of participating districts' fiscal practices, as well as a brief that highlights districts' use of increased flexibility in recent years and identifies important considerations for a new funding policy. Continued contributions to op-eds in partnership with Children Now can help communication and education efforts; board resolutions and other signals of approval can also help demonstrate support from a range of educational stakeholders. Issues of framing are also important. Moving the conversation away from one that focuses on winners and losers—especially by emphasizing the governor's focus on introducing new money and not taking money away—can help address some of the criticism that undermined efforts in the 2012 budget cycle. Framing also needs to help manage expectations. Press around Proposition 30 and the governor's budget proposal have highlighted new money entering the education system, but perhaps with insufficient acknowledgement that much of this money will go to paying deferrals and will emerge only over a period of several years. By showing next year's funding levels, rather than five-year projections, the state can help temper expectations that might otherwise lead a variety of stakeholders to lay claim to new resources.

Collaborative staff will work to bring together representatives from school districts and the advocacy community. Representatives from both groups have been generally supportive of finance reform efforts, and principles of equity have driven Collaborative members' engagement with the issue. However, some tension has emerged between (1) the advocacy community's desire for assurances that additional funds will go towards meeting the needs

of the low income and English learner students that generated them and (2) district leaders' desire for flexibility to allocate resources in ways that best meet their students' needs. By bringing these two groups together to explicitly address areas of both agreement and difference, the Collaborative can play a role in identifying a possible common ground that can improve the Governor's funding proposal's prospects for success.

Next Steps for the Collaborative

The next Collaborative meeting will take place in Oakland USD and will explore the district's approach to building a community school system, and within that the Quality School Review process. In the meantime, for ongoing information about the Collaborative, resources from this and previous meetings, updates about Collaborative members, and information on upcoming events, please visit our website at www.cacollaborative.org.