

June 11, 2021

Dear Collaborative members and guests,

We look forward to seeing you all on June 24-25 for our fourth meeting during the COVID-19 pandemic. This convening comes at an important time of transition, as districts pivot from confronting the wave of pandemic-induced crises to navigating the long road to recovery. Opportunities for in-person classroom instruction have expanded substantially since we last met, vaccination efforts have enabled the relaxation of many health-related restrictions, and recovery funds from the federal and state governments are introducing much-needed resources into school systems. Despite these reasons for optimism, we recognize the enormity of the challenges facing our students, families, educators, and school systems—many of which have been the subject of our recent deliberations. These challenges have both immediate manifestations tied to the pandemic conditions and deep roots within our schools and communities. Borrowing a lens from Education Resource Strategies and focusing on specific issues raised by our district leaders, we will thus explore what districts are building *from*, what they are doing *now*, and what they are building *toward* as they seek to disrupt deep-seated inequities and build more effective school systems for all students.

Meeting Overview

As has become our practice during the pandemic, we will meet virtually in four sessions.

Session I: Understanding the Landscape for Returning to School (Thursday, 8:30-10:30)

The meeting will begin with an exploration of the context in which districts are currently operating. Drawing on the personal experiences of participants and the insights of a panel of teachers, we will consider what school systems are *building from* as they prepare for a return to school. Through a combination of individual reflection, panel discussion, and small group conversation, we hope to both identify promising practices that can provide a foundation for further improvement efforts and foster a clear understanding of the pressures and constraints that shape possibilities for progress.

Session II: Balancing Priorities to Prepare for the Fall (Thursday, 2:00-4:00)

In the afternoon, we will turn our attention to what district leaders can *do now* and *build toward* as they design and implement their recovery approaches. We will ground our conversation in a widely endorsed framework that lays out priorities for the first weeks and months of school called *Reimagine and Rebuild*—a framework that several Collaborative members were actively engaged in creating. Through a text-based discussion that builds in insights from students and emerging plans from our district leaders, we will explore how best to operate within the current context to prioritize, sequence, and align approaches to meet immediate needs while dismantling barriers to equitable opportunity.

Happy Hour (Thursday, 5:00)

Following the first two meeting sessions, we invite you to join us for a virtual happy hour. Having tested this approach during our March meeting, we are adding some more structure this time around to create space for building new relationships across our members and guests.

Session III: Making Strategic Use of Current and New Resources (Friday, 8:30-10:30)

At the state and federal level, COVID-19 relief funding has introduced substantial new financial resources into school systems. The third session will explore how best to use new funding strategically in a way that aligns to district goals and fosters sustainability. We are excited to welcome guests from Hartford Public Schools and Education Resource Strategies, whose insights and examples will introduce new perspectives into the group while anchoring our discussion in the concrete work of districts.

Session IV: Defining and Using Evidence for Improvement and Equity (Friday, 2:00-4:00)

The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted the collection of many traditional measures of progress, while simultaneously fostering an expanded recognition of what constitutes data. We conclude our meeting with small and full group discussion about monitoring progress for both learning and accountability purposes that can foster continuous improvement and justify future public investment in schools.

Format

We have again planned the agenda and the readings in recognition of the continued demands on your time and mental and emotional energy—many of which come from seemingly endless hours on Zoom calls. No session will last more than 2 hours, and there will be a break of 3 ½ hours between the morning and afternoon sessions of each day. We have also worked to build in a variety of formats, emphasizing time to work in smaller breakout groups to maximize opportunities for more interaction.

Please note that because staff will be engaged in additional administrative responsibilities for this meeting, we plan to record all the sessions—but only to inform our summary and not to share out with anyone outside of staff. Our usual norms of confidentiality will apply to this meeting.

Preparation and Dropbox

On Dropbox and on the website, you will find two main folders.

1. The “Important Meeting Information” folder contains this cover letter, the agenda for the two days, our meeting norms, and other relevant information. ***Please look through these informational materials before arriving at the meeting.***
2. The “Readings” folder contains four sub-folders. ***Please read the articles in the “Priority Readings” folder before the meeting.*** We have identified four short pieces as priorities, each connected to one of the four meeting sessions. The remaining subfolders contain additional materials organized by meeting session. We encourage you to look through these as your time permits.

Please let us know if you have questions or concerns. You can reach Joel by email (jknudson@air.org) or phone/text (650-924-0373); Jennifer is also available at joday@air.org or 202-262-4987.

We wish you all a relaxed and hopeful weekend.

Warmly,



Joel Knudson
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