

**Meeting 44 Summary
From Crisis to Recovery:
Preparing for Fall and the Long Road Ahead**

June 24–25, 2021

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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 the dialogue and decisions of educators throughout the state. This summary does not, however, contain the background and contextual information that might otherwise accompany a product created for the general public. For more information about the meeting and other Collaborative activities, please visit www.cacollaborative.org.

In June 2021, members of the California Collaborative on District Reform convened for the fourth time since the COVID-19 pandemic prompted the disruption of in-person learning in districts across the state. Although health concerns persist, widespread access to vaccines created conditions for students across the state to return to in-person learning in the fall. In preparation for this shift and the broader transition from crisis management to long-term recovery, Collaborative members and guests met over 2 days in June to consider the path forward. Using the language from a widely endorsed brief titled *Reimagine and Rebuild: Restarting School with Equity at the Center*, participants considered steps necessary for a “restorative restart” to school in fall 2021—one that embraces practices grounded in the science of learning and development to promote whole-person well-being as a precondition for academic progress.² The meeting began with participants hearing from teachers and students about the reality *from which* districts are building and then explored the immediate and long-range outcomes *toward which* they are headed.

Key Takeaways

A commitment to equity should anchor all recovery-focused activities. Throughout the Collaborative’s deliberations about recovery efforts, participants consistently emphasized the importance of attending to matters of equity. The pandemic has interrupted the academic learning environment, interpersonal interactions, and support structures for all

¹ Thanks to Mary Louise Baez, Marina Castro, and Candice Handjojo for managing technical aspects of the meeting, taking careful notes, and synthesizing key takeaways from small-group conversations to make this summary possible.

² *Reimagine and Rebuild: Restarting School With Equity at the Center* [Policy brief]. (2021, April). Policy Analysis for California Education. <https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/reimagine-and-rebuild>

students, but these disruptions have been most severe for students who were already underserved by their school systems and who were most vulnerable to the many negative impacts of COVID-19. Any efforts focused on returning to school must therefore explicitly acknowledge and address the needs of these students and their families. Building on this foundational focus on equity, additional themes emerged across the meeting discussions.

Practices and policies to address losses experienced due to COVID-19 must be meaningful and implementable. After more than a year of distance learning, districts and schools will consider implementing additional practices and policies in service of students who have not been in school for more than a year and may have gaps in learning in addition to social-emotional and mental health needs. These policies and practices should always be meaningful to both students and teachers and must “fit through the classroom door.” In other words, they must be implementable. Merely asking existing staff to put in extra work when they are exhausted and overworked will not be effective for the long term.

Attention to social and emotional well-being is essential for students and teachers to participate in a productive teaching and learning environment. Echoing a theme that has emerged repeatedly in Collaborative meetings throughout the pandemic, participants highlighted the need to prioritize social and emotional well-being. Mental and emotional health are essential preconditions for learning, yet many students struggled with motivation to engage during distance learning and experienced anxiety and trauma due to circumstances surrounding the pandemic. Participants further noted that these negative experiences were most pronounced among students who have historically not been well served by public schools. As part of a suite of strategies for ensuring social and emotional well-being, participants described relationships with peers and caring adults as an essential step toward recovery that can enable students and educators to better tackle concerns about unfinished learning.

Continued and expanded engagement with stakeholders can help districts better understand community needs and develop strategies to address them. During the pandemic, many districts have communicated with parents and other stakeholders more frequently and deeply than ever before. As school systems transition into a period of recovery, participants argued that schools and districts continue to expand efforts to engage stakeholder voices both when determining what schools and districts are building from and when deciding what direction to build toward. In seeking out voices of students, parents, community members, and other stakeholders, members and guests further advocated that schools and districts seek out and incorporate the voices of individuals who are not the loudest and are traditionally at the fringes.

A balance of strategic thinking and urgency is critical for addressing immediate challenges while dismantling deep systemic barriers to progress. Schools and districts continue to respond to urgent needs caused by the pandemic, and pressure from inside and outside school systems appropriately focuses attention on these pressing demands. However, participants also recognized the importance of allowing for the time needed to

implement practices and policies thoughtfully, gather and analyze data, and make adjustments as needed.

Districts and schools consider a broad array of data during this time of recovery to fully understand student needs and monitor progress toward meeting them. Evidence of progress is essential to a process of continuous learning improvement, especially as districts navigate new territory in their recovery efforts. Data on key outcomes can also play a role in assuring an array of audiences that relief funds are being well spent in schools. Qualitative data about the lived experiences of teachers and students during the pandemic and distance learning provide information that traditional forms of assessment data cannot. In service of these learning agendas, supplements to traditional forms of data can provide a fuller picture of student needs, the circumstances that shape those needs (what districts are building from), and their progress toward addressing those needs (what districts are building toward).

What Districts Are Building From: Understanding the Context of Teacher Work During COVID-19

As plans for the fall and beyond solidify, policies and practices to support students must “fit through the classroom door.” Therefore, as school and district leaders think about a restorative restart to the school year, it is important to understand how the adults who are in direct service to students have been shaped during the first year and a half of COVID-19. A panel of teachers, including two Collaborative members, described their experiences teaching during the pandemic so that state, district, and school leaders could better understand the circumstances in which teachers are preparing to return to school.

Teachers were exhausted and overworked

Without exception, every teacher on the panel shared that teaching during a global pandemic was exhausting in ways they did not even know were possible. One teacher remarked, “Our work began when we woke up in the morning, and it didn’t end until we went to bed at night. It was mental overload. There was absolutely no downtime.” Another teacher noted that the workload made it difficult to reflect on teaching and adjust as needed: “Once the boots hit the ground, there was no time to stop and think and reflect.”

One reason the teachers cited for the exhaustion was the need to fill multiple roles during the pandemic in addition to teaching. As one panelist explained, “We were teaching, but we were also social workers, nutrition specialists, and nurses.” Teachers also mentioned that the constant change and uncertainty that characterized their working conditions added to the level of exhaustion. As infection numbers fluctuated and tier levels changed, districts continued to alter the reopening plans.³ The constant adjustments added a level of stress for teachers. One teacher said, “Every time we got our feet underneath ourselves, the rug was pulled out again, and we had to change everything, again.”

³ Under the now-retired Blueprint for a Safer Economy framework, every California county was assigned to a risk-level tier: purple, red, orange, or yellow. Based on weekly COVID-19 positivity rates, counties and schools faced varying degrees of activity and capacity restrictions.

In addition, panelists described ways in which teaching virtually required reconfiguring—adding multiple steps to their typical practice. One teacher shared an example of taking attendance to illustrate the extra time required to teach in a virtual environment:

In the virtual world, it was running Zoom reports, and then you have to go in and check to see if you have email messages from students who notified you that they were not able to make it into the Zoom meeting because of technical issues. And you have to go into the virtual classroom to see if students completed assignments on that day, but because they had until midnight, you have to go back in the next day to check again. So, taking attendance for one class took a lot more time than it did in person.

Teachers increased connections with students and families

Although teaching remotely added complications to teachers' work, teacher panelists agreed that the virtual platform led to increased communication and connections with students and their families. One teacher pointed out: "It felt much more like a working relationship with families than it ever had in the past." The opportunity for online interaction lent itself to increased flexibility in scheduling meetings and conversations with families after work hours. In particular, the extended hours enabled teachers to connect with families for whom professional responsibilities and cultural barriers made it difficult to visit school sites during normal times.

Despite such positive shifts during the pandemic, teachers were quick to state that this level of communication and connection is not sustainable moving forward. Teachers made themselves available to families after traditional work hours to meet student and family needs that grew from the extraordinary circumstances surrounding the pandemic. Although families will continue to require access to support during nonwork hours even outside the COVID-19 context, panelists did not believe they had the time or mental energy to maintain this level of availability and interaction above and beyond the demands of a normal in-person school day.

Teachers' interactions with the broader school system and the community were fraught with conflict and a breaking of trust

Despite the reported increases in communication and trust in their individual relationships with the families of their students, some of the teachers also described conflict and lack of trust between teachers and parents. One panelist stated: "Teachers were being attacked by parents in board meetings, parents who didn't even know us, saying that we are ruining their children, that teachers don't care about the students, and that we don't care about students' mental health." Teachers described these characterizations as disrespectful, inappropriate, and demoralizing.

Some of the teacher panelists also shared that the breaking of trust extended to the relationship between the teachers and district leaders. During the pandemic, some of the teachers thought the district leadership often capitulated to the voices of the loudest

parents and meeting their demands rather than “blocking and tackling” for the practitioners working all day to support students and partner with their families. Teachers also expressed that these actions from the district leadership undermined the district’s commitment to equity. Instead of prioritizing the needs of the most vulnerable students, district leaders buckled under pressure from the loudest, most insistent voices, making districts’ principles of equity ring hollow.

What Districts Are Building From: Understanding the Context of Student Learning During COVID-19

The second session of the meeting included eight students from five districts who joined small discussion groups to describe their experiences of what it was like to be a student during the first 15 months of the COVID-19 pandemic and also to share their hopes for what school will look like when they return in the fall.

Participants grounded their discussion in the recommendations from the *Reimagine and Rebuild* brief. Motivated in part by findings that students were experiencing depression, anxiety, and stress, especially Black and multiracial students; that D and F grades increased for students of color during the pandemic; and that 160,000 California students were missing from enrollment numbers, the brief’s authors laid out a vision for a “restorative restart” to begin the 2021–22 school year. At the time of the meeting, the brief had approximately 50 endorsing organizations, including the Collaborative, and had been widely disseminated throughout the California education community. The brief itself identified five priority practices for districts and schools to help rebuild and heal in fall 2021: (a) center relationships, (b) address whole-child needs, (c) strengthen staffing and partnerships, (d) make teaching relevant and rigorous, and (e) empower teams to reimagine and rebuild systems.

Using this framework, the students shared insights about their experiences during the pandemic and the impact of their experiences and their hopes for the path forward.

Centering Relationships

The *Reimagine and Rebuild* brief recommends that district and school leaders prioritize the building and nurturing of relationships of mutual support and high expectations among students, families, and educators. The students echoed the importance of prioritizing and centering relationships, noting that limited online interactions among students, teachers, and counselors during distance learning made it difficult to build relationships with one another. For students who were not able to forge these bonds, motivation and grades plummeted. One student shared, “Having these connections is the true meaning of the power of people. The connections served as a safe space.”

Yet students mentioned that disparities across communities created differential opportunities to build relationships. One student mentioned that students in more affluent communities returned to in-person schooling earlier, leading to more opportunities for interactions and engagement. Students noted that if districts are to level the playing field and bring vulnerable students back into a sphere of success, the path forward should

emphasize relationships—even in the face of profound academic needs. As one student stated:

If you push off prioritizing relationships to focus on unfinished learning, it defeats the whole purpose. Centering relationships is the first stepping-stone—the first part of the bridge—so teachers can get to know their students and then move forward from there to address unfinished learning.

Students and meeting participants identified possible approaches school and district leadership could implement to prioritize relationships and better support students' social and emotional needs. For example, introducing block scheduling for middle and high school students could allow for more extended instructional time for students and teachers to develop stronger personal relationships. Also, building teachers' office hours into the school day could help remove barriers for students to clarify course content and also to seek out advice and forge connections. For students who take public transportation or have workplace or extracurricular obligations after school, altering school schedules could enable educators and students to prioritize relationships, especially for students who need these connections the most.

Addressing Whole-Child Needs

The *Reimagine and Rebuild* brief also recommends that district and school leaders prioritize whole-child needs by identifying the unique social, emotional, mental health, language, and academic needs of every student and developing plans to address those needs. Student guests noted that their experience of schooling during the pandemic left it unclear whether adults genuinely cared for students enough to see beyond the academic needs. As one person reflected, "Are they just reaching out because they have to or because they want to?" Students further noted that in the past, efforts to address whole-child needs did not feel authentic because student voice was not considered before policies and practices were developed. The insights shared by the students echoed those of the student panelists who attended the Collaborative's December 2020 meeting, particularly the feelings of frustration that grew from not feeling valued or supported by some teachers.⁴

The students made several suggestions for educators to foster a restorative restart that would address whole-child needs. The first was to promote a culture of learning that acknowledges and builds students' differing identities, given that each student brings different experiences, strengths, and ideas to the classroom. Another suggestion was to create spaces for peer-to-peer counseling. One student stated, "Young people coming together to talk about their issues and experiences is powerful and important."

⁴ For briefing materials and a summary from the meeting, titled *Race, Equity, and COVID-19: Navigating Crises and Building for the Future*, see <https://cacollaborative.org/meetings/meeting42/race-equity-and-covid-19-navigating-crises-and-building-future>.

Making Teaching and Learning Relevant and Rigorous

The *Reimagine and Rebuild* brief suggested that district and school leaders ensure quality teaching and learning by emphasizing equity; racial, cultural, and linguistic relevance; rigor; and the highest priority standards in the curriculum and instruction.

Students' comments about their experiences with learning during COVID-19 focused primarily on relevance, particularly as it relates to curriculum. Multiple students across the small groups mentioned that the White experience is central in the curriculum and students of color do not see themselves or their history in their lessons. Course content in which students can see themselves, their history, and their community could offer another way to make learning relevant and rigorous for students. One vehicle for helping students see themselves in their schooling experience is to employ a curriculum that integrates and celebrates the unique experiences of a range of students rather than viewing their experiences as deficits. As one student stated, "Even if you have the most amazing teacher who engages and connects with students, curriculum is still built around White history and puts students of color at a disadvantage because they don't see themselves in history." In support of curricula that more closely connect with student experiences and identities, all the students expressed their support for an ethnic studies graduation requirement.

Empowering Teams to Reimagine and Rebuild Systems

The *Reimagine and Rebuild* brief also suggests that district and school leaders lay the groundwork for long-term systemic transformation via collaboration and cocreation among racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse students, families, educators, and community partners.

Based on their experiences and insights, students shared their thoughts on the path forward to empower teams to reimagine and rebuild systems. Centering the voices of stakeholders, particularly those at the margins, might help school districts redesign the ways in which they operate in partnership with and in service of their communities. One student suggested an alternative approach to engaging stakeholder voices from the typical approach of assembling separate advisory groups made up of students, parents, and community members. This student instead advocated for districts to create an intergenerational working group of stakeholders to come to the table with their voices and help craft policies and practices: "I think we should just all work as partners, no matter the age. We should be inclusive and have everyone at the table instead of dividing everyone up. I think that can be super impactful."

Considering the Role of District and School Leadership in a Restorative Restart

In their reactions to teacher and student observations, meeting participants drew attention to two priorities for district leaders as they plan for a restorative restart.

Seek out teacher and student voices for inclusion in decision making

Comments across small-group and full-group conversations highlighted the importance of seeking and incorporating both teacher and student voices in discussions of practices and policies to support students in the classroom. As one meeting participant advocated, “The leadership has to intentionally create a dedicated, collaborative space to listen and then design policy in a way that’s truly equitable.” In addition to including these voices in decision making, Collaborative members and guests suggested taking deliberate steps to reach the voices of those at the margins through student and teacher surveys and other sources of data and outreach.

Attend to mental health issues

Given that both teachers and students are returning to the classroom after months of trauma and stress, participants emphasized the importance of district and school leaders prioritizing mental health and wellness. Teachers expressed that well-intentioned approaches, such as requiring teachers to participate in a wellness seminar, might be perceived as merely adding another thing to do on teachers’ plates, thereby adding new burdens without actually resolving problems. Therefore, district and school leaders should collect data to help identify what the needs are and where they lie to best determine how to provide supports.

Meeting participants provided a few examples for supporting the mental health and wellness of students and teachers, such as creating wellness centers on campus for students and staff as a safe space for emotional management and to talk to someone about anxieties and concerns. In addition, one district leader shared that their district is mapping the resources and partners in each school to determine where the deserts are in the system and to determine which schools in the district have access to mental health professionals and which schools are still in need.

Collaborative members also underscored the importance of offering top-down support from district and school leadership for a restorative restart. Prioritizing teacher and student mental health, wellness, and self-care is necessary, but one teacher expressed concerns that other district priorities and pressures may override individual and system attention to teacher and student well-being. They explained:

We fear we won’t be able to start this way because we are just going to be told to make sure that we start in a way that helps us catch up on the assessed curriculum that’s going to matter at the end of the year.

A commitment from district leadership to prioritize teacher and student wellness and mental health, combined with consistent messaging from the district that this is a priority, will help restorative restart efforts.

Making Strategic Use of Current and New Resources to “Do Now and Build Toward”

Due to federal and state COVID-19 relief funding, districts across the country have a staggering amount of additional funding to work with as schools reopen in fall 2021. Presentations and discussion in the third session of the meeting focused on how districts can invest financial resources now to address the immediate opportunities identified in Sessions I and II. Furthermore, discussion also addressed how districts and schools can invest those resources in ways that disrupt systemic barriers to student success while also setting districts up to thrive even after one-time relief funds expire.

The Context in Which Districts Are Operating

Currently, school districts have an opportunity to invest in programs and practices with the infusion of resources from the federal and state governments. California will receive \$1.6 billion in federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds and an additional \$355 million from the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER I Fund). An analysis from WestEd estimates that if the dollars are spread evenly over a 3-year period, the average high-poverty district in California will get approximately 20% to 28% of their pre-COVID-19 operating budgets in additional annual funding during this period. And although this infusion of resources presents an opportunity for school districts, it also presents a tremendous challenge to invest these dollars wisely. Because these additional resources have built-in funding cliffs, districts risk hiring personnel and establishing programs that they will be unable to sustain when they return to operating within their standard budget. The third session of the meeting focused on how districts could invest these one-time dollars to meet current challenges while also building for the future.

Seven Principles to Inform Investment Decisions

Education Resource Strategies (ERS) works closely with school districts to support the coherent and strategic allocation of funding in service of local goals. In its efforts to support districts with allocating ESSER funds, ERS has been promoting a mindset it describes as “do now, build toward,” in which system leaders address critical student needs laid bare due to the pandemic (“do now”), while simultaneously laying a sustainable foundation for lasting improvement (“build toward”). ERS has identified seven critical principles that can help guide districts in investing ESSER funds with a “do now, build toward” approach.

1. *Understand and quantify student needs.* The pandemic has created a host of challenges for students that range from unfinished learning to social and emotional health—with impacts likely to be greatest for districts’ most vulnerable students. To best identify the highest priority areas for programmatic and financial attention,

schools and districts need to consider a broad range of indicators—such as data on attendance, engagement, learning, and well-being, which are further disaggregated by student group, grade, and school—that will help system leaders understand the challenges and the root causes behind them.

2. *Invest in proven, high-impact strategies.* As districts aim to develop and apply best practices in an unfamiliar environment, investments may be more likely to produce intended results if they have a strong research base to support them. ERS recommends investments in research-supported strategies that fall into five categories for using resources: (a) empowering adaptable instruction, (b) time and attention, (c) teaching, (d) relationships and social-emotional support, and (e) family and community partnerships.
3. *Design new staffing and scheduling models.* In order to implement research-based, high-impact strategies, staffing models and schedules can help (a) dedicate more time and customized support to help students catch up on unfinished learning; (b) provide more time for teachers to assess student learning, plan engaging content, and determine additional supports to accelerate learning; (c) enable teachers to build relationships with students and their families; (d) allow for additional partnerships to meet students' social and emotional needs; and (e) expand the reach of teachers most equipped to support students with the greatest needs.
4. *Design for equity.* ESSER funds present districts and schools an opportunity to both address the immediate needs of students who require the most support and disrupt long-standing inequities. ERS suggests that in using the funds to design for equity, districts and schools should engage educators, students, and families to get input on how to target resources thoughtfully to disrupt patterns of inequity.
5. *Plan spending for long-term sustainability.* Because the ESSER funds must be spent within a limited period of time, districts must make decisions to invest one-time stimulus dollars in sustainable ways. The “do now, build toward” frame is especially relevant to this principle because districts will need to target near-term COVID-19 recovery needs while laying the groundwork for long-term system improvement.
6. *Create system conditions.* Given that many decisions about investing ESSER funds need to be made quickly, it is important for district leaders to create conditions for change in which strategic resource allocation can produce nearly immediate improvement in practices and results. By collaborating with state policymakers, teacher unions, school boards, and local communities, district leaders can make sure that conditions that enable resource shifts are in place before strategically shifting resources.
7. *Define success, measure, and adjust.* Although the principles and power strategies can provide a framework for districts to explore their investment decisions, no “one-size-fits-all” solution will meet every district’s individual needs. Furthermore, many of the approaches that educators employ are likely to be untested in this new environment and require refinement over time. System leaders must adjust strategies to their own local context, drawing on meaningful input from the community as well as reliable data on effectiveness. In using the ESSER funds for recovery and redesign, it is important for districts and schools to engage in rapid cycles of inquiry in order to continue to adapt and improve.

Investment Decisions in Practice: An Example From Hartford Public Schools

To help ground the conversation about resource allocation in the concrete realities of district decisions, a representative from Hartford Public Schools (HPS) joined the meeting to describe their plans for using ESSER funds during the 2021–22 school year and beyond. HPS worked closely with ERS in this effort in spring 2021, and their approach illustrates what the seven principles can look like in practice.

First and foremost, HPS organized all of its spending decisions around a clear understanding of the district’s goals and priorities in service to their students. The process began with more than 50 hours of focus groups and survey administration to multiple stakeholders, including students, families, staff, and teachers. This input helped the district quantify and understand student needs and was used to guide all subsequent budgeting decisions.

Drawing on stakeholder input, the district plan prioritizes academic and social and emotional recovery as the centerpiece of its approach, reflecting a belief that this emphasis is essential to move the needle for students. Supplementing this primary emphasis, HPS allocated fewer dollars for infrastructure, health and safety, and continuous improvement. To support academic and social and emotional success, the district identified the four areas for current investment that will also work toward sustainability by building on what the district already has in place, including deepening the work they do in the following specific areas:

1. *Expanded learning time:* The district will invest funds in expanded learning time and targeted support opportunities during and outside the school day as strategies for promoting students’ academic success. To identify the appropriate strategies, the district turned to research on high-dosage tutoring and found that when group size is small and frequency of tutoring is high and when content reinforces the curriculum used during the school day, tutoring can meaningfully accelerate learning. HPS has therefore chosen to invest \$11 million per year⁵ to achieve group-size reductions in school—including \$4 million per year earmarked for high-dosage tutoring for students with the highest needs—a commitment that reflects a deliberate investment in equity. Additional learning opportunities will take place through an expansion of summer school, intersession and Saturday opportunities, as well as evening school for high school students. The district also plans to support students academically by deepening Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) structures that are already in place through targeted group-size reductions and improved data systems.
2. *Improved instructional materials and supports:* The district plans to increase support for teachers and school leaders by adopting high-quality curriculum and materials, expanding the time for training and teacher collaboration, and expanding coaching and support for teachers and school leaders. These decisions help address

⁵ Across ESSER II and ARP ESSER, HPS will be investing a total of \$33 million.

immediate needs, but they also represent an approach to spending with an eye toward the future. Instructional materials can outlast the resources available through recovery funds, and investing in the capacity of district educators can elevate the quality of teaching and leadership beyond the spending timeline.

3. *Expanded wellness supports:* The district will invest to connect every student to an adult advocate by expanding wellness supports. They plan to do this by supporting student reengagement through a centralized reengagement team and flexible school-based grants, funding capacity building for family and community partnerships, expanding the district’s community school model to 13 schools district-wide, and increasing access to mental health services, spaces, and social workers. The community school model, in particular, builds on evidence about the effectiveness of wraparound services to leverage community resources, increase access, and provide a structure for families and community members. As a result, HPS is investing \$6 million⁶ to expand their Community Schools model and increase mental health partnerships within schools. The Tier 2 and 3 interventions offered through the district’s MTSS approach⁷ also serve to support students’ social and emotional needs, in addition to their academic progress, and because they offer increased supports to students with the greatest struggles, these investments will also help advance the district’s commitment to equity.
4. *Invest in human resources by cultivating a teacher pipeline:* Recognizing that any effort to help students thrive relies fundamentally on the educators who work with students every day, the district plans to cultivate a sustainable teacher pipeline. Recruitment and retention incentives for teachers to work in high-needs schools are aspects of an approach designed to build the quality of the teacher workforce in HPS. In this case, HPS is investing \$5⁸ million directly in equity-focused strategies—partnering with higher education and third-party organizations to expand the teacher pipeline, and increasing the capacity of the Office of Talent Management.

Reactions to the HPS investment plan

Collaborative members broke into small groups to discuss their reactions to the HPS investment plan. First and foremost, participants expressed appreciation for the district’s intentional and thoughtful approach to embrace the “do now, build toward” mindset. Nevertheless, they noted several challenges that districts must navigate as they determine the best ways to allocate resources. As will be the case in many districts, much of the planned work in HPS revolves around human capital by attracting and building the

⁶ Across ESSER II and ARP ESSER, HPS will be investing a total of \$8.6 million over 3 years.

⁷ MTSS is a system of academic and social-emotional supports that establishes a baseline program for all students, with increasingly targeted interventions and supports that respond to higher levels of student need. Tier 1 of the system typically spells out the best first instruction and other supports that all students receive. Tier 2 incorporates the extra supports that some students need, and Tier 3 provides for more intensive intervention for a smaller subset of students.

⁸ Across ESSER II and ARP ESSER, HPS will be investing a total of \$13 million over 3 years.

capacity of educators who can meet students' learning needs. Participants also expressed concerns about districts' ability to recruit the quality and quantity of individuals needed to carry out the plan. For these kinds of investments to achieve their potential, districts will need to assess the pipeline of available teaching talent, as well as develop approaches to attract new teachers.

Members and guests also brought up the importance of progress monitoring as a consideration for every district going through the financial planning and resource allocation process. Even when their strategies build from a strong evidence base and a thoughtful planning process, district leaders nonetheless need to understand how programs and staffing decisions are being implemented and whether they are producing desired results so that they can adapt appropriately. As one participant noted: "Progress monitoring too often gets left out of planning at every level—classroom level, site level, and district level. So, it's important to know what the goals are and have short cycle measurements for addressing progress."

Defining and Using Evidence for Improvement and Equity, Including Evidence From the Margins

The final session of the meeting focused on the importance of progress monitoring to measure and gauge effectiveness. First, evidence of effectiveness is essential to the process of continuous improvement within and across districts. With the influx of new funding, many districts will employ new strategies or expand approaches that worked on a smaller, experimental scale over the course of the pandemic. As they navigate this uncharted territory, district leaders will need information to help them understand if and how things are working and what to sustain, adapt, or discontinue. Second, participants noted that districts and schools will have to demonstrate that they are using the large amount of funds in ways that actually improve student outcomes. Collecting robust measures of improvement thus serves an external accountability purpose by assuring taxpayers that public funds are being used appropriately and effectively.

Many traditional measures of academic progress have been disrupted, from state assessment data to grades or other local benchmark assessments. Even in cases in which evidence has been collected, it may not include data from students who have been disengaged from the virtual learning environment. Thus, districts may lack critical information about the progress and needs of their most vulnerable students. In addition, many stakeholders have elevated relationships and well-being as important in a restorative restart, but school systems vary widely with respect to the measures in place to capture these aspects of the student experience. If schools and districts are to understand the full range of student needs during the pandemic recovery journey, they may need to be more expansive in the kinds of data they collect.

To help ground the conversation in a broader understanding of potential data sources and their uses, meeting participants used a framework from the book *Street Data: A Next-Generation Model for Equity, Pedagogy, and School Transformation*. Authors Shane Safir and Jamila Dugan argue that "street data," which are more layered and nuanced than the data

used historically in school systems, are a transformative, game-changing model that can be leveraged in the pursuit of equity and school transformation.⁹ The authors outline three distinct levels of data that schools and districts should combine to make important decisions:

- **Satellite data** encompass quantitative measures, such as test scores, attendance patterns, graduation rates, principal attrition, and parent participation rates. These data hover far above the classroom and help illuminate trends and point toward groups of students in need of attention. However, the authors argue that satellite data are insufficient because they are lagging indicators that fall into educators' hands after students have already left the classroom.
- **Map data** are closer to the ground and can include literacy levels and survey results that reveal parent or student satisfaction levels. Safir and Dugan argue that although map data provide a slightly richer picture than satellite data, they are not specific enough to drive equity-driven change processes.
- **Street data** are from the ground level where educators can observe, listen to, and gather artifacts from the lived experiences of stakeholders. According to Safir and Dugan:

Street data are the qualitative and experiential data that emerges at eye level and on lower frequencies when we train our brains to discern it. These data are asset based, building on the tenets of culturally responsive education by helping educators look for what's *right* in our students, schools, and communities instead of seeking out what's *wrong*.

Using the Levels of Data Framework to Dig Deeper Into Relationships and Well-Being

Because prioritizing relationships and well-being were a consistent theme in Collaborative meetings throughout the pandemic, participants broke into small groups to explore these issues through the lens of the Levels of Data framework.

Satellite Data for Relationships and Well-Being: Members and guests noted that satellite data to examine student well-being and relationships already exist in tools such as the California Healthy Kids Survey, which is the largest statewide survey of resiliency, risk behaviors, and school climate in the nation. This survey helps leaders begin to think about where there might be some potential issues, but the data are not specific or nuanced enough to develop targeted solutions.

Map Data for Relationships and Well-Being: In addition, members and guests noted that map data to determine student well-being and relationships also exist through school climate surveys and experience surveys that ask questions such as the following:

- Is there an adult at your school you can talk to about a serious concern?

⁹ Safir, S., & Dugan, J., (2021). *Street Data: A Next-Generation Model for Equity, Pedagogy, and School Transformation* (First ed.). Corwin.

- Is there a counselor who meets with you to talk about your GPA [grade point average]?
- Do teachers work hard to help you with your schoolwork?

Street Data for Relationships and Well-Being: Gathering street data to amplify and include the voices and experiences of students at the margins requires additional work. Meeting participants offered several ideas on ways to generate and collect street data to keep pulse on student and teacher well-being and the effectiveness of schools in prioritizing relationships. A taskforce of leaders and community-based organizations working in partnership with families, staff, and students could collaborate to engage the voices of all stakeholders, including those on the margins. Another source of street data could be generated by systematically conducting empathy interviews and focus groups to learn about students' stories and lived experiences. These data could result in a deeper level of understanding—and even an opportunity to build trust and forge relationships—than is possible from data collected by a survey. Finally, participants suggested that keeping track of students' extracurricular activities can help educators determine which students are and are not connecting to peers and adults outside the classroom.

Additional Insights and Questions About Street Data

After discussing the levels of data involved in gauging well-being and relationships, members and guests made a broader set of observations about street data. First, street data alone do not necessarily lead to equity. To center equity in collecting street data, educators must deliberately engage students and families whose voices are not typically heard. For example, students attending alternative high schools are often among the most vulnerable in the district, and their perspectives could help highlight the needs of students who are struggling and reveal strategies for meeting those needs.

Second, looking at street data alone is insufficient for school and district leaders to fully understand and identify the issues that need to be addressed. One member suggested that educators need to consider street data, map data, and satellite data collectively to really understand what is happening:

I think if you're starting at the street level, it would be harder to add it up to a problem as opposed to seeing the problem and breaking it down to its components at the street level to see what's causing it.

Third, in connecting the conversation about street data to the conversation about the influx of ESSER funds and gauging the effectiveness of investments, members and guests stated that schools and districts will need time to implement changes, track progress, and iterate. Pressure will soon mount from politicians and members of the general public for districts to demonstrate that pandemic relief funds have produced the intended improvements for students. Tension may therefore grow between granting schools and districts time for improvement using the vast financial resources allocated to schools while at the same time keeping schools accountable by demonstrating progress to the public. It is important for schools and districts to take the necessary time to spread the work over the next 3 to 5

years to be thoughtful about the work needed to be done to make equitable changes that result in improved opportunities for all students. According to one member, “It’s going to take time, and it’s going to need data.”

Next Steps for the Collaborative

The Collaborative will meet again in November 2021. For this meeting, we will return to our traditional practice of nesting our deliberations within the context of a host district. We plan to explore district strategies for understanding and addressing students’ social and emotional needs to create the conditions for their well-being and academic progress in the context of Garden Grove Unified School District. In the meantime, Collaborative staff will continue to develop publications as well as other activities that share key lessons and takeaways from our core meetings with the broader field of California educators.

Resources from this and previous meetings and updates regarding Collaborative members are available on our website at www.cacollaborative.org.