

November 19, 2021

Dear Collaborative members and guests,

We look forward to seeing you on November 29-30 as districts continue to weather the challenges and lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In some respects, this meeting marks progress toward a semblance of normalcy, as districts across the state have offered full-time in-person instruction since school resumed in August. Within the Collaborative, we are resuming our traditional practice of nesting our deliberations in the context of a host district. We are grateful to Gabriela Mafi and her team in Garden Grove for hosting the group and we are thrilled about the opportunity to learn from their work.

Nevertheless, the vestiges of the pandemic continue to shape student learning opportunities. Collaborative meetings have repeatedly emphasized the threats to students' physical, mental, social, and emotional health during this time period. Especially concerning are the additional layers of struggle for students living in poverty, for students in immigrant families, and for students of color that exacerbate disparities between the most vulnerable members of our communities and their more advantaged peers. This meeting will therefore directly address matters of overall student well-being, with particular attention to issues of equity.

Meeting Overview

In what has become our typical practice for virtual meetings, we will meet in four sessions.

Session I: Understanding the Learning Conditions of Vulnerable Students (Monday, 8:30-10:30)

The meeting will begin with an exploration of the contexts from which students—particularly students from underserved communities—are entering the learning environments in their schools. We are fortunate to be joined by a group of current and recent Garden Grove students who will help us understand how the challenges that they and their communities have experienced during the pandemic can stand in the way of whole child well-being.

Session II: Exploring a Tiered Approach to Building SEL Competencies (Monday, 2:00-4:00)

In the afternoon, we will turn our attention to the strategies that districts might employ to address the student needs identified early in the meeting, including the ways in which a multi-tiered system of support framework in Garden Grove can help design and implement appropriate levels of support and intervention. To inform this conversation, we are pleased to welcome Rob Jagers of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), who will share perspectives about how educators can leverage an evolving view of intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies to promote social justice.

Informal Social Gathering (Monday, 5:00)

Following the first two meeting sessions, we invite you to join us for a virtual happy hour to relax, connect with longstanding friends and colleagues, and build new connections with Collaborative members.

Session III: Addressing Challenges that Complicate Supports for Student Well-Being (Tuesday, 8:30-10:30)

In their quest to meet the full range of student needs, districts confront a range of constraints created by their systems and the contexts in which they operate. In the third session, we will use a consultancy protocol to explore these challenges and some possible strategies for addressing them in a variety of districts.

Session IV: Employing a Community Schools Approach to Meet Student Needs (Friday, 2:00-4:00)

Conversations about community schools have increasingly penetrated the dialogue about school improvement in California. We are excited to welcome Hayin Kimner of the California Community Schools Learning Exchange for a set of discussions about ways in which a community schools approach can help to foster more effective school systems for addressing student well-being.

Format

We recognize that the “Zoom fatigue” that has been mounting over many months is perhaps even more daunting with the passage of time. In recognition of the continued demands on your time and mental and emotional energy, we have planned the agenda and readings to minimize burden and maximize engagement. No session will last more than 2 hours, there will be a break of 3 ½ hours between, and all sessions feature time to work in smaller breakout groups to ensure opportunities for 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 multiple sub-folders. ***Please read the articles in the “Priority Pre-Meeting Readings” folder before the meeting.*** We have identified five short pieces as priorities, each connected to one of the four meeting sessions. The remaining subfolders contain additional materials that we encourage you to review as your time permits.

Please let us know if you have questions or concerns. You can reach Joel by email (jkudson@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 relaxing and hopeful weekend and holiday break.

Warmly,



Joel Knudson
Principal Researcher
American Institutes for Research



Jennifer O'Day
Chair, California Collaborative on District Reform
Institute Fellow, American Institutes for Research