

February 17, 2023

Dear Collaborative members and guests,

We look forward to seeing you in San José on February 27-28. Our upcoming meeting is an opportunity for us to continue our deliberations from Sacramento last November by exploring coherence in service of instructional improvement. As school systems continue to grapple with pandemic-related educator burnout, integrate new state initiatives, and navigate pressures from community members to embrace particular priorities or adopt new programs, how can they maintain focus to best serve students? Over the course of our two days together, we will examine this question at multiple levels of the K-12 system, from local school boards to schools to the central office to the state. We are grateful to Nancy Albarrán and her team at San José Unified School District (SJUSD) for opening their doors and welcoming us to learn with them.

Meeting Overview

Day 1: The meeting will begin on Monday morning with an orientation to the SJUSD context. District leaders will share background information on the district's history, including developments over time that have enabled it to establish some fundamental conditions for improvement.

Next, we will turn to one of these conditions, an aligned and collaborative approach to local governance, evident in a strong relationship between district leaders and the locally elected school board. A panel of superintendents and trustees from SJUSD and Napa Valley Unified School District will share some of the strategies they employ to develop clarity about roles and goals and to maintain alignment in the work of the board. Following the panel, we will break into small groups to consider some of the challenges that can complicate efforts to maintain coherence at the governance level, using a consultancy protocol to explore relevant problems of practice from three school districts.

On Monday afternoon, we will shift our focus from board vision and policy to instructional practice at the school site. Even when a strong vision unites leaders at senior levels of a school system, a similar sense of shared understanding and commitment among principals and teachers can be elusive. Two panels of site-based educators, one comprising SJUSD teachers and the other composed of SJUSD principals, will reflect on their school-based experiences, including the various messages, pressures, and supports that shape their approaches to teaching and learning. Participants will then break into small groups to process what they have heard and consider the approaches needed to help principals and teachers thrive.

As is our tradition, we will conclude our day with an opportunity for networking, collective relaxation, and additional conversation at a group dinner at Scott's Seafood in downtown San José.

Day 2: We will reconvene on Tuesday morning and begin by inviting SJUSD central office leaders to reflect on what they heard from principals and teachers in the Monday afternoon session. Through a fishbowl conversation, SJUSD administrators will share their insights about how they can best design

their work to support site-based educators. Fishbowl participants will also offer their insights about the challenges that can complicate attempts to maintain focus and coherence at the district level. Among those challenges is the recent proliferation of policies and programs emanating from the state, which may be reasonable and helpful when considered individually but which taken together can fragment or distract efforts at the local level.

The meeting will conclude with an exploration of ways in which state policy can support—and complicate—improved opportunities and outcomes for all students while enabling focus and alignment in local districts. We are thrilled to welcome student members of the acclaimed Leland High School debate team, who will pose arguments about the most appropriate state role in promoting strategies that address inequities and improve opportunities and supports for students, especially those who have been historically underserved. This debate will set the stage for a set of discussions about a more productive path forward for the state.

Participants will next break into a sequence of two small group breakouts. First, a set of role-alike groups will offer space to consider how different stakeholder groups in California’s K-12 education ecosystem contribute to the fragmentation of improvement efforts, as well as ways in which they can create more supportive conditions and maintain focus in those efforts. Participants will then regroup in a “jigsaw” that brings together people across multiple roles. These groups will be charged with developing recommendations for how state and local leaders can both create and respond to a state policy environment that fosters coherence.

After lunch, we will invite each group to share their recommendations, then conclude our deliberations with a discussion about next steps.

Preparation and Dropbox

You should find all the information you need for the meeting at a DropBox link you will receive via email, including a set of readings that will provide important background and context for our collective learning in San José. The reading materials are also available on the Collaborative website at <https://www.cacollaborative.org/meetings/meeting49>. **On February 17, you will receive an email with the subset of priority pre-meeting readings attached. We strongly encourage you to read this subset of materials prior to the meeting.**

If you have any questions regarding the meeting logistics, please do not hesitate to contact Mary Louise at 916-286-8804 or mlbaez@air.org. If you have any other questions, please email me (jknudson@air.org) or reach out by phone or text at 650-924-0373. I look forward to seeing you all next month!

Sincerely,



Joel Knudson
Chair, California Collaborative on District Reform
Principal Researcher, American Institutes for Research