

October 20, 2023

Dear Collaborative members and guests,

We look forward to seeing you in Elk Grove on October 31-November 1 for our first meeting of the academic year. Our upcoming deliberations represent an important progression from recent emphases on the immediate challenges facing school districts as they navigate various stages of pandemic recovery, including attention to elevating whole-child well-being, advancing racial justice, and fostering coherence in the face of multiple competing priorities for educators' time and attention.

Through the pandemic and its aftermath, however, the slowed progress of student learning remains an urgent priority that has received insufficient attention in too many schools and school systems. Our convening this month is an opportunity to deepen our attention to coherence by sharpening our focus on teaching and learning. We know that a clear articulation of what high-quality instruction entails can help foster shared language across a school system and provide an anchor for professional learning and supports for principals and teachers alike. We will therefore use the lens of an instructional framework in Elk Grove to explore approaches to cultivating educator commitment and improving teaching practice. We are grateful to Chris Hoffman and his team in Elk Grove Unified School District (EGUSD) for their willingness to share their journey and provide the foundation for two days of dialogue and collective discovery.

Meeting Overview

Day 1: The meeting will begin on Tuesday morning with an orientation to the Elk Grove context and an overview of the district's efforts to establish a shared vision for excellent teaching through the development and implementation of an instructional framework. Participants will have an opportunity to explore the framework and the principles it articulates in small groups, using an equity lens to consider the kinds of supports needed to foster learning experiences that meet all students' needs.

We will next turn to a recurring area of focus in recent Collaborative meetings, the role of principals as instructional leaders. In EGUSD, early implementation efforts have sought to introduce principals to the district's instructional framework and build a common language and set of expectations for teaching and learning. A panel of principals will share their experiences with this process, with particular attention to the kinds of evidence administrators look for to gauge the quality of instruction in their schools. Subsequent small group discussion will provide a forum for considering key challenges that arise in building site leader capacity to lead implementation of the framework.

After multiple years of laying the foundation for the implementation of its instructional framework, EGUSD has begun to engage teachers across the district in introducing it into classrooms. We will hear from teachers and teacher leaders in the district about the successes and challenges associated with these efforts. Subsequent conversation will enable participants to wrestle with key questions surrounding the district's work with its teaching staff.

As is our tradition, we will conclude our day with an opportunity for networking, collective relaxation, and additional conversation at a group dinner at Sheldon Inn Restaurant & Bar. If you feel so inclined, we invite you to come in costume and celebrate Halloween in style.

Day 2: On Wednesday, we will turn to a key question that emerges in instructional improvement efforts: To what extent are the teaching practices that districts promote taking place in classrooms, and how do we know? EGUSD leaders will introduce participants to multiple sources of information that provide insight into instructional practice, then engage participants in an interactive experience designed to explore the district's Framework Observation and Note-Taking Tool, or FONT.

Transitioning from a focus on classroom observation, we will take a step back to consider broader approaches to monitoring the implementation of district improvement efforts. EGUSD leaders will guide us through their Program Implementation Continuum. We will have an opportunity to explore an online tool that provides access to teacher, student, and principal insights about instruction and enables comparisons across multiple data sources, then engage in dialogue about how to refine and maximize the effectiveness of such a tool.

We will conclude the meeting with a discussion of the road ahead, including next steps and cautions for navigating an ongoing journey for maximizing instructional effectiveness.

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 Elk Grove. The reading materials are also available on the Collaborative website at <https://www.cacollaborative.org/meetings/meeting51>. **On October 20, 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 soon!

Sincerely,



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