

February 16, 2024

Dear Collaborative members and guests,

We are excited to see you on February 27-28 when we convene in Oakland for our first meeting of 2024. We will have an opportunity to continue a year-long dive into matters of teaching and learning, this time with an emphasis on language acquisition and literacy development in the early grades. As we prepare for our time together, we build on lessons from our last meeting about how shared understanding of quality and mutually reinforcing supports throughout a district can foster coherence in instructional quality. We also draw on developments in research, practice, and the national dialogue—often framed as “the science of reading”—that have shaped district approaches to cultivating early literacy. The meeting will enable us to explore ways in which classroom learning experiences can simultaneously address language and literacy needs, especially for multilingual learners. It will also feature discussions about the capacity-building efforts needed to bring those learning experiences to life, with attention to a system of professional learning that can promote the knowledge, skills, and mindsets that can foster instructional quality. We are grateful to Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) team for offering their journey as a way to ground our discussions and push our thinking.

Meeting Overview

Day 1: The meeting will begin on Tuesday morning with an orientation to the intersecting language and literacy learning demands for students in the early grades. An exercise that walks participants through the history of the language rights movement in the United States, followed by an introduction to the OUSD context, will lay the foundation for our collective learning. These issues are especially pertinent in Oakland, where a history of civil rights advocacy has raised attention to the rights of underserved populations and where the diverse language backgrounds of OUSD students require attention in establishing district priorities and designing approaches to instruction and student learning.

We will turn next to an exploration of how classroom learning experiences can best address the full range of student learning needs and incorporate what research has revealed about how students learn to read. Using a set of vignettes of literacy instruction, participants will consider aspects of high-quality instructional practice and the kinds of curricular resources that can facilitate language and literacy growth. We will tie our discussion about these instructional practices to the OUSD language and literacy framework, the priorities it identifies, and its role in fostering teaching and learning.

After lunch, we will direct our attention toward issues of educator capacity. Given the kinds of teacher knowledge and skills required to promote language acquisition and literacy and development, the group will consider the training and supports that can enable teachers to be effective. This discussion will be especially important in the OUSD context, where high levels of turnover have implications for how the district supports both novice and experienced teachers. After an introduction from district leaders, a panel of OUSD teachers will share their experiences with professional learning. We will then break into small groups and use a consultancy protocol to address some key problems of practice that emerge in efforts to create powerful professional learning experiences for teachers.

Consistent with our typical practice, we will conclude our day with informal discussion, networking, and collective relaxation at a group dinner. Our venue is Bocanova, just a short walk from the meeting location in downtown Oakland.

Day 2: On Wednesday, we will broaden our focus on capacity to consider the *system* of professional learning that supports early language and literacy development. After an introduction from district leaders, a panel of educators in a variety of roles will describe their responsibilities in advancing student learning and the supports they receive to prepare them for success. Subsequent small group discussion will enable participants to explore ways in which the combination of roles, resources, and supports can best align with and reinforce one another.

The final session of the meeting will address issues of change management. The movement toward greater consistency in language and literacy instruction in OUSD is a departure from what has historically been a decentralized approach to school improvement. Participants will once again break into small group consultancies to consider strategies for facilitating the cultural shift that accompanies a shift in classroom instructional practice.

We will conclude the meeting with a discussion of the most appropriate role for state policy in promoting high-quality teaching and learning in the early grades. As part of this conversation, we will consider the implications of recently introduced Assembly Bill 2222—which would establish a definition for evidence-based literacy instruction and expectations for teacher preparation, professional development, and instructional materials—for local practice.

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 Oakland. The reading materials are also available on the Collaborative website at <https://www.cacollaborative.org/meetings/meeting52>. **On February 16, 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