

April 19, 2024

Dear Collaborative members and guests,

We look forward to seeing you at our upcoming meeting in Sanger on May 1-2. The Collaborative's year-long focus on teaching and learning continues by unpacking a key aspect of the learning environment at the secondary level: the practices through which teachers document student progress and the implications for student engagement, content mastery, and academic progress. The rapid transition to distance learning in the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic forced districts to address the immediate implications of traditional grading practices that could have resulted in high failure rates and closed postsecondary pathways for many students. Well into pandemic recovery, many districts have confronted the reality that grading practices present barriers to opportunity even in normal times. Too often, grades prioritize point accumulation over learning, making it difficult for students to overcome early struggles or missed assignments. Moreover, subjective judgments about effort and expectations for out-of-school behaviors can reflect biases that create a steeper road to success for historically underserved students. We are excited to learn from districts who have made progress in rethinking approaches to grading and to unpack persistent challenges that complicate improvement efforts. We thank Dennis Wiechmann and his team at Sanger Unified School District for welcoming us and offering their work as a foundation for exploring this important set of issues.

### Meeting Overview

Day 1: Sanger has invited teams of teachers to play a critical role in highlighting some of the problems with traditional grading practice and testing alternative approaches that more closely align with the district's vision for teaching and learning. We are thrilled to begin our convening with an early start at Sanger USD's annual grading exhibition. **(Note that our start time is 7:45 rather than our typical 9:00.)** Held at Sanger High School, the event will enable us to interact directly with teacher teams to learn about efforts underway in their classrooms and emerging lessons learned.

Following the exhibition, we will travel to our primary meeting location at Sanger West High School. After a short debriefing conversation, our Sanger hosts will offer an orientation to the district and some additional framing about its commitment to revamping grading. To build a stronger shared understanding of the problem in which Sanger and other districts are engaged, we will then dive into evidence of inequitable practices associated with traditional approaches to documenting students' performance in class. In small groups, participants will review data from multiple district contexts to consider issues that require attention and the implications for how educators should respond.

After lunch, we will direct our attention to the educators who play instrumental roles in shaping grading approaches. A panel discussion featuring Sanger principals, curriculum support providers, and teachers will help to illustrate the roles each is playing in designing new approaches to grading. Subsequent small group discussion will explore the supports that individuals in each role need to be successful and the ways in which those roles can work together to facilitate progress. We will conclude the day with a set

of consultancies, each designed to tackle a specific problem of practice from a different district context associated with the transition toward new grading practices.

Keeping with tradition, we will conclude our day with informal discussion, networking, and collective relaxation at a group dinner in nearby Fresno at The Lime Light.

Day 2: On Thursday, we will broaden our focus to consider how exploratory and voluntary efforts in teacher teams translate to a set of consistent district-wide expectations for grading. We will again employ a consultancy protocol to explore this challenge of spread and change management through the lens of the work underway in Sanger.

Efforts to redesign grading practices are fundamentally about changing the learning experience and academic progression of youth in our school systems. Student voice is essential for both crafting district priorities and understanding how classroom experiences evolve in response to change. We are fortunate to be joined by students from Sanger's middle school and two high schools, who will model empathy interviews that district leaders have employed to gather student input. These student perspectives will help to highlight the issues that matter most to students and ways in which shifting practice shapes their academic journey.

We will conclude the meeting after lunch with a discussion of next steps. Conversations about grading practice often focus on A-G completion and therefore typically begin at the secondary level. When deeply understood and thoughtfully addressed, however, approaches to grading have the power to shift the classroom experience to reorient student and teacher attention to prioritize learning and growth. A full group discussion will explore the implications of the work underway for expansion to Grades K-8 and how districts can foster systemwide expectations that foster and honor student learning.

### 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 Sanger. The reading materials are also available on the Collaborative website at <https://www.cacollaborative.org/meetings/meeting53>. **On April 19, 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](mailto:mlbaez@air.org). If you have any other questions, please email me ([jknudson@air.org](mailto: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  
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