

February 7, 2025

Dear Collaborative members and guests,

Rapid policy changes from the new federal administration have created substantial uncertainty about the conditions in which K-12 education systems will operate in the months and years ahead. It is in this context that we are especially grateful for the opportunity to learn together with you in Garden Grove on February 19-20 for our first convening of 2025.

Our recurring attention to whole child well-being in previous Collaborative meetings has highlighted the importance of creating a safe and welcoming school environment that enables students to enter classrooms ready to learn. Research and practical experience tell us that family and student engagement are critical for cultivating the kinds of strong and supportive relationships that enable students to thrive. This meeting will therefore explore district strategies and structures designed to strengthen family-school partnerships in service of student well-being and academic success. In Garden Grove Unified School District (USD), one such strategy has been the implementation of a community schools approach, which has introduced both resources and tools to support effective engagement. With its large immigrant population, Garden Grove also provides an opportunity to examine the challenges and strategies specific to immigrant students and their families, particularly in this period of threatened mass deportations. We thank Gabriela Mafi and her team in Garden Grove for hosting this timely and important set of discussions.

Meeting Overview

Day 1: We will begin our time together with an introduction to the Garden Grove context, including the kinds of outcomes that districts aim to promote with respect to students' personal skills and mindsets. Hayin Kimner of the Community Schools Learning Exchange will join us to highlight ways in which a community schools approach can contribute to progress toward those outcomes.

Next, we will turn to the first of two opportunities to learn more about the families and students that Garden Grove USD serves. A panel of parents will join us to share their impressions about the strengths they see in their community, the nature of their relationships with schools in the district, and ways in which the district can support them in navigating some of their most pressing challenges.

After breaking for lunch, we will return to address ways in which federal policy enforcement may shape student and family experiences in and interactions with educators and schools. Margie McHugh of the Migration Policy Institute will begin with a brief overview of the current context. Next, district leaders will participate in a fishbowl conversation to share approaches to working with undocumented students and families, including the rationale behind approaches and the trade-offs associated with different courses of action. Small group discussion about important considerations for district action will follow.

Our afternoon will conclude with our second window into the experiences of the Garden Grove community, this time through a panel discussion featuring six high school students. These students, who

attend schools receiving community schools grants and who participate in the Latinos Unidos program, will share insights about the strengths of their high school experiences and ways in which teachers and administrators can improve their relationships with students. Our day will conclude with small group discussions in which we can process what we have learned from parents and students, including the implications for how districts can best foster effective engagement with both.

As is our tradition, we will conclude our day with an opportunity for networking, collective relaxation, and additional conversation at a group dinner at an old favorite from previous Garden Grove meetings, Brodard Chateau.

Day 2: On Thursday, we will turn our attention to the kinds of individual and system capacities needed to foster the climate, culture, and relationships that can help families feel connected to schools. First, a panel discussion among principals and community schools coaches will highlight some of the strategies underway in Garden Grove to strengthen these connections, as well as the challenges that complicate those efforts. We will then break into small groups to process what we have learned and explore the implications for how central office staff can best support site-level educators.

Our conversation will turn next to the district structures and supports designed to foster effective engagement at the site level. Our meeting will conclude with a discussion of sustainability and how districts can embed promising practices into the fabric of their work so that it can serve families in meaningful and lasting ways.

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 Garden Grove. The reading materials are also available on the Collaborative website at <https://www.cacollaborative.org/meetings/meeting54>. **On February 7, 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 Emily Agopian at 909-342-3895 or eagopian@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