

February 19, 2015

Dear Collaborative Members and Guests,

We look forward to seeing all of you at our upcoming meeting of the California Collaborative on District Reform on March 5-6 in Fresno Unified School District (FUSD). Many thanks to Mike Hanson and his team for offering to host the meeting and for their willingness to share their work as we explore strategies for balancing accountability and support to foster student success and continuous systemic improvement.

After spending our most recent time together focused on classroom instruction in mathematics, we take a step back in this meeting to examine the broader district context in which instruction and system learning take place. Our purpose in this meeting, entitled *Accountability and Support in a Coherent System of Continuous Improvement*, is to connect the dots between goals, measures of progress, and supports that enable districts to address their most pressing challenges. As usual, we will ground much of the discussion in the specific context and problems of practice selected by our host district—with a particular focus on some of the tools that Fresno has developed to create system-wide coherence and monitor progress—but the underlying issues are those that confront all California districts.

Meeting Overview

Day 1: The meeting will begin Thursday morning with a discussion of coherence and the ways in which district goals drive decisions about program design and resource allocation. It will also address the ways in which existing accountability mechanisms—including the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), the California Office to Reform Education (CORE) waiver, and the Single Plan for Student Achievement—incorporate these district goals. The Fresno team will begin with an orientation to its guiding principle: providing all students with the opportunity to graduate with the greatest number of postsecondary choices from the widest array of options. FUSD leaders will then share ways in which they have tackled issues of alignment, followed by small group discussion and full group report-out on how these issues play out in different contexts.

Having identified where districts want to go, as reflected in their goals, we will then pick up on a theme from our last meeting: How do we know if and in what areas we are making progress towards those goals and how do we use that information to improve? Jorge Aguilar, Fresno's associate superintendent of equity and access, will provide a brief orientation to the district's data system and some of the high-level indicators that FUSD collects and uses to monitor progress and identify areas needing attention. Participants will explore additional metrics in small groups and suggest ways to slice the data to reveal root causes and actionable patterns. Jorge will respond to these ideas by demonstrating the full capacity of Fresno's data system and the ways in which it can help address some of the ideas generated in the small group discussion.

In the afternoon, we will turn to the third piece of the puzzle: If we have clearly identified district goals, and if the right metrics exist to provide information about progress towards those goals, how do district leaders design supports and structures to deal with any challenges that the data expose? Day 1 of the meeting will explore this question through a district leader panel on the approaches to this question underway in other district contexts.

As usual, we will end the day with an opportunity for networking and collective relaxation over dinner, this time at The Painted Table in Fresno.

Day 2: On Friday morning, we will continue our focus on structures and supports by returning to the Fresno context. Fresno district leaders will share the challenges they have encountered in translating data into appropriate action by sharing a problem of practice with the full group. Meeting participants will then break into smaller groups to reflect on the issues posed by their Fresno colleagues and offer their insights on how the district might move forward. The full group will then reconvene to share some of the key takeaways and to give Fresno district leaders an opportunity to react to the feedback they receive.

Just before lunch, we will transition our discussion briefly to the state level. As local districts are developing their own approaches to accountability and improvement under LCFF, California is refining the LCAP requirements and evaluation rubric, transitioning to a new state assessment system, and defining the role of the new California Collaborative on Educational Excellence. We will use our exploration of how districts are connecting goals, resources, data, and improvement actions to address the role the state can play in facilitating this kind of continuous improvement cycle.

Finally, we will conclude the meeting by returning to our ongoing examination of Common Core implementation. At the request of our district leaders, we will give meeting participants an opportunity to reflect on the current status of their transition to the new standards, as well as some of the successes and challenges that require district attention and may be a focus of future Collaborative meetings and activities.

Readings

As usual, all readings and reference materials for the sessions are available in multiple formats. If you requested a hard copy of the binder, all of the readings are included inside; the cover sheet within each tab identifies a subset of the readings as priority readings. **On Friday, February 20, you will also receive an email with a subset of preparatory readings attached. We strongly encourage you to read these materials prior to the meeting,** as they have been incorporated into our group activities and provide important background information on the topics we will discuss.

For your convenience, all of the meeting materials are also available on the Collaborative website at <http://www.cacollaborative.org/meetings/meeting27> and via DropBox at a link you will receive via email.

If you have any questions regarding the meeting logistics, please don't hesitate to contact Dawn Smith at 650.843.8239 or dsmith@air.org. If have any other questions, please email me (joday@air.org) or give me a call at 202.262.4987. I look forward to seeing you all next month!

Sincerely,



Jennifer O'Day
Chair, California Collaborative on District Reform, and
Institute Fellow, American Institutes for Research