December 5, 2019

Dear Collaborative Members and Guests,

We look forward to seeing you in San Bernardino on December 18-19 for our upcoming meeting of the California Collaborative on District Reform. The meeting will focus on the design and implementation of career pathways to create powerful student learning experiences inside and outside of the classroom. Throughout the two days of discussion, we will explore the ways that school districts attend to matters of both quality and equity as they embrace a pathways approach. We thank Dale Marsden and his team in San Bernardino City Unified School District (SBCUSD) for hosting this important set of conversations.

Meeting Overview

Day 1:
The meeting will begin Wednesday morning by examining the motivations behind career-related pathways. Why has SBCUSD taken this approach and how is it related to their efforts to provide more equitable opportunities for their students? Why do students, teachers, and employers participate? Dale Marsden and his team will lead off with an overview of the San Bernardino context, the purposes and goals of the district's pathways approach, and the evolution of this work over time. We will then talk with pathways participants and partners about why they are involved and what benefits they hope to reap now and in the future.

The remainder of the morning and most of the afternoon will center on a central component of career-related pathways: opportunities for learning about and in the workplace. Two central questions will guide this exploration: What constitutes high-quality workplace learning opportunities and how can the district expand employer participation in creating those opportunities? A shared reading in small groups will help to ground our inquiry in what we know about adolescent development, followed by a student panel to help us understand the elements of effective workplace learning from the student perspective. Of course, without employer participation, there can be no workplace learning. We will conclude this portion of the meeting with a problem-of-practice consultancy to help SBCUSD leaders explore potential avenues expanding and deepening employer engagement in the pathways work.

At the end of the day, we will take a short break from our focus on pathways to engage in a conversation about the Collaborative itself. As suggested by our name, the Collaborative was founded on the principle of bringing multiple and varied perspectives to the table to collectively explore district strategies for improving instruction and reducing opportunity and outcome gaps among students. However, while a recently completed review of our work identified many strengths and accomplishments over our 13-plus years, it also suggested that we have a ways to go in creating a welcoming, diverse, and fully inclusive environment for all members and participants. I firmly believe that we cannot foster diversity, equity, and inclusion externally if we do not practice them with each other. In our final session for the day, we will use evidence from the review and a framework from research to begin a conversation about steps we can take toward a more inclusive culture. We hope to incorporate perspectives of both guests and members to explore this important challenge.

As is our tradition, we will follow Wednesday's conversation with an opportunity for networking, collective relaxation, and continued conversation over dinner at Mario's Place in Riverside.

Day 2: On Thursday morning, we will turn our attention to another aspect of student learning that is critical to high-quality pathways: creating applied opportunities to build knowledge and skills in the classroom. To demonstrate the kinds of rigorous, meaningful, and applied learning experiences called for in California's academic content standards, two SBCUSD pathways teachers will lead participants in an exercise to illustrate the difference between a traditional instructional approach and an applied learning approach. Subsequent discussion will enable meeting participants to debrief about the activity, consider implications for rigor and relevance in pathways environments, and address issues of equity and access. The session will continue with a problem-of-practice consultancy that explores the supports needed for teachers to create powerful learning opportunities in a pathways environment.

The meeting will conclude by extending the conversation from our June 2019 meeting about data access and data use. As districts evolve from traditional high school experiences to those that embrace both workplace and classroom learning experiences, how do schools, employers, and students know whether they are making progress? Participants will consider indicators of success that can inform improvement efforts, with particular attention to evidence related to equity and access for all students.

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 materials are included there; the cover sheet behind each tab identifies a subset of priority readings that we suggest you read before the meeting. **For your convenience, on December 6, you will also 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**, as they provide important background information on the topics we will discuss. Also for your convenience, all of the meeting materials are available on the Collaborative website at http://www.cacollaborative.org/meetings/meeting40 and at a DropBox link you will receive via email.

If you have any questions regarding the meeting logistics, please do not hesitate to contact Dawn Smith at 650-376-6439 or dcsmith@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 later this month!

Sincerely,

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