

THE CALIFORNIA COLLABORATIVE ON DISTRICT REFORM

August 13, 2009

Dear Participants,

We look forward to seeing you at a special one-day meeting of the California Collaborative on District Reform on August 21, 2009 at the California Department of Education in Sacramento. The topic of this meeting is *Gathering Input for California's Race to the Top: Seizing the ARRA Opportunity*. A particular focus of the day's deliberations will be on developing effective district and state strategies to turn around the state's persistently low-performing schools in the context of new federal priorities, ARRA funding, and lessons from district practice.

Race to the Top as a Backdrop and Goal

As part of the larger American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), the U.S. Department of Education recently released draft guidance for a competitive grant program—the Race to the Top (RTT) Fund—that will provide \$4.35 billion to selected states in order to create conditions for education reform, improve student outcomes and graduation rates, close the achievement gap, and ensure student preparation for college and career. California hopes to be one of these RTT states. In preparation for California's application for the RTT funds, leaders from the Governor's office, the State Board of Education, and the California Department of Education will be holding conversations with educators and stakeholder groups to garner their input and participation in an emerging state strategy. The August 21 convening is the first of many such conversations.

In this meeting, district, county, and state education leaders will have an opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions about how California might approach its application for a RTT grant. In the morning, Kathryn Radtkey-Gaither, Undersecretary of Education, and Rick Miller, Deputy Superintendent for P-16 Policy Development and Information at CDE, will outline the opportunity presented by RTT and present a draft of California's approach to the grant competition. After the presentation, the remainder of the morning session will be devoted to an open dialogue regarding the state's proposed approach.

School Turnaround as a Particular Focus

In addition to meeting basic eligibility requirements regarding state stabilization funds and data systems, states applying for RTT grants will be expected to address four core reform priorities in the state plans: 1) adopting internationally-benchmarked standards and assessments; 2) recruiting, developing, retaining, and rewarding effective teachers and principals; 3) building data systems that measure student success and inform teachers about how they can improve their practices, and 4) turning around the lowest-performing schools. These four priorities mirror the assurances required for the ARRA's state stabilization funds and are expected by many to be reflected in future federal legislation, including the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Our afternoon's discussion will focus on the fourth priority—turning around struggling schools—drawing on federal guidelines, current California policy, and evidence of effectiveness from the field. At the core of the discussion will be the input from district leaders about the work that needs to occur at the district and school levels to turn around the lowest-performing schools and about the ways in which the state can support districts and schools to be successful in this endeavor.

Overview of the Binder

In this binder, we have included information on meeting logistics, participants, and agenda. In addition, we have provided you with background readings relevant to ARRA funding and the specific topics of the



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meeting. The readings are organized in three main sections: 1) information on the federal guidance currently available on the RTT funds, 2) literature related to what we know so far about what has (or has not) worked in terms of turning around the lowest-performing schools under the current federal provisions, and finally 3) guides on promising approaches to turning around the lowest-performing schools. Recognizing that your time to read the materials before the meeting may be limited, we have selected one reading in each section as a priority reading (marked with a double asterisk **) and have placed these directly behind the relevant tab. One theme that runs throughout the readings is the limited evidence on the effectiveness of any particular intervention approach.

If you have any additional questions regarding the meeting logistics, please don't hesitate to contact Suzanne Claussen and the California Collaborative staff at 650.843.8192. For any other questions, you may contact me either by phone (202.262.4987) or email (joday@air.org).

Again, thanks for joining us!

Sincerely,



Jennifer O'Day, Collaborative Chair
American Institutes for Research



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