

THE CALIFORNIA COLLABORATIVE ON DISTRICT REFORM

December 3, 2009

Dear Collaborative Members and Guests,

We look forward to seeing you at our eleventh convening of the California Collaborative on District Reform, which will be held at the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation in Menlo Park on December 17th and 18th, 2009. The topic is *Turning Around Low-Performing Schools: District and State Strategies*.

Background

Our conversations at this meeting will provide an opportunity to extend Collaborative discussions that began in August in Sacramento between invited district practitioners and state policymakers. At that meeting, we focused on turning around California's persistently lowest-performing schools as one of the four state assurance areas for federal stimulus funding, especially as related to the upcoming Race to the Top grants. On December 17 and 18, we will be expanding this conversation to the full Collaborative and embedding it in a deeper exploration of districts' past and current experiences, lessons, and challenges in their efforts to markedly improve practice and outcomes in these schools.

In addition to its substantive linkages with the August district-state dialogue, this meeting will also reflect some changes in format stemming from a recently completed assessment of the Collaborative's work over the past four years. The full report of the assessment, conducted by Michaela Hayes and Associates, is included in this binder. The assessment found universal support for the overall goals, approach, and outcomes of the Collaborative's work to date but also made suggestions (based on member feedback) for how we might refine and expand this work going forward. Some of these findings have been incorporated into the format for this meeting, including:

- Starting later on the first day to allow for travel that morning,
- Greater use of loosely structured small group discussion to allow for deeper dialogue,
- A tighter connection to policy outcomes and efforts to extend the Collaborative's influence beyond our membership,
- Expansion and changes in our membership, and
- Inclusion of binder (and additional) resources in electronic version (a CD located in the front binder pocket) to facilitate portability and sharing among your colleagues.

We will be interested in hearing from you how these features are working as well as how we are planning to address other findings from the report.

Overview of Meeting Agenda

Please see the enclosed agenda for an overview of the plans for each day. As you will see, Thursday's dialogue will address strategies and lessons from local efforts to improve their persistently troubled schools, paying particular attention to several cross-cutting issues: challenges and strategies for recruiting and developing *high quality teachers* in these schools, efforts to ensure they have strong and appropriate *leadership*, and ways in which *altered governance* and structural arrangements can be used to enhance opportunities for improved



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performance. On Friday, we will turn our attention to the state role in catalyzing and supporting school turnaround, beginning with lessons from past efforts in California and other states and then moving to the specifics of Race to the Top and School Improvement Grant plans. Our goal will be to use what we have learned from research and practice at the local level to provide feedback and suggestions for state efforts moving forward. As usual, there will be opportunities for networking and collective relaxation at the group dinner Thursday evening.

Overview of Binder

Consistent with prior meetings, we have provided background materials relevant to the discussions in this binder. These materials include both relevant federal guidance on federal stimulus funding that focuses on turning around low-achieving schools as well as selected materials on: 1) research on school turnaround; 2) district strategies for turning around low-performing schools; 3) ensuring high quality teachers in struggling schools and skills needed in turning around low-performing schools 4) ensuring effective leadership and the school leader's role in turning around schools; and 5) the state role in turning around low-performing schools.

Also consistent with previous binders, we have selected a smaller number of articles (generally one in each section) as a priority reading (marked with a double asterisk **) and have placed these directly behind the relevant tab. A new addition for this meeting's binder is the enclosed CD with the electronic versions of the included and additional related materials for further exploration and sharing.

Additional materials for review

Please note that we have also included for your review a revised draft of the policy and practice brief about 8th grade algebra. We encourage you to share your comments on this brief so they can be incorporated into the final revised and reformatted version for distribution. In the next few weeks, you will also be receiving two additional Collaborative products for review, and we would appreciate any feedback you have on those as well.

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
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