

The California Collaborative on District Reform

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November 17, 2010

Dear Collaborative Members and Guests,

We are all looking forward to the fourteenth convening of the California Collaborative on District Reform, which will be held in Sanger Unified School District on November 29 and 30. The topic is *Professional Learning Communities: Using Data Collaboratively to Improve Instruction for ELs*.

As many of you may know, by implementing a district-wide approach to improvement that is guided by high expectations and channeled through the work of professional learning communities (PLCs), Sanger has turned chronic underperformance at the school level into sustained growth and high achievement. This meeting will allow participants to see first-hand how the district engages PLCs around the use of formative and benchmark assessments in order to improve student outcomes, especially for English learners (ELs).

Overview of Meeting Agenda

The meeting agenda is located behind the first tab in this binder. On the first day, we will focus on understanding school-level practice and perspectives in Sanger by spending the day at Washington Academic Middle School (WAMS)—the district's only middle school. The day will start with WAMS principal Jon Yost providing a brief overview of the school and the day. Participants will then break off into small groups to observe classroom instruction and discuss what you have seen. In the afternoon, we will meet first with the school's leadership team to discuss how they engage and support their PLCs. We will then be joined by a group of teachers to hear about how they work together as a PLC. Throughout the day, we will focus both on how teachers interpret and use information on student performance (especially for English learners) and how PLCs support them in this work.

On the second day we will turn our attention to the use of PLCs as a district-level strategy to turn around low-performing schools. The morning will include discussions with the Sanger leadership, followed by presentations from Joan Talbert, Jane David, and Kenji Hakuta, who have been documenting various aspects of Sanger's improvement efforts. In the afternoon, we will consider how these district-wide efforts in Sanger can inform current approaches to school turnaround, including in the reauthorization of ESEA. We hope also to consider future work of the Collaborative in conjunction with the recent formation of the California Office to Reform Education (CORE) to continue moving the agenda set forth in California's Race to the Top application.

As usual, there will also be opportunities for networking and collective relaxation at the group dinner Tuesday evening.

Overview of Binder

In this briefing binder, we provide background materials relevant to the meeting topic. As always, we have included a variety of additional materials both in hard copy and on the enclosed CD for your reading pleasure. (The CD contains electronic versions of both the hard copies included here and additional related materials for further exploration and sharing.) For the first time we have also been able to upload these materials to the Collaborative's new website (www.cacollaborative.org/Meetings/Meeting14PLCs.aspx) so you can also access them online.

The California Collaborative on District Reform (www.cacollaborative.org) joins researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and funders in ongoing, evidence-based dialogue and collaborative activity to improve instruction and student learning for all students in California's urban school systems.

These materials include background information and recent studies on Sanger Unified; specific information on the middle school we are going to visit; research on PLCs, especially as they pertain to a district-wide strategy; literature on interim assessments (including both formative and benchmark assessments); and finally pieces on assessing language development.

As with previous binders, we have selected a limited number of resources as priority readings, marked with a double asterisk (**) on the lists behind each tab. **Most importantly, we ask that you watch the enclosed video of WAMS principal summit to learn more about this school prior to our visit on November 29th.** Sanger's principal summits are mandatory presentation and feedback sessions in which each principal presents his or her school's achievement data and plans for the coming year, responds to questions, and receives feedback and suggestions from the central office. After watching the video (approximately one hour), please consider questions you may have for Jon Yost, the school leadership team, or the teachers at WAMS. The video is located on the DVD in the binder, and is on our website: http://www.cacollaborative.org/Portals/0/members/WAMS_principal_summit.m4v.

Additionally, we would like to point you to the draft of our policy brief on a systemic approach to school turnaround, located behind the fourth tab. We will be discussing the considerations for ESEA reauthorization included in this brief on the second day, including what the role of the federal government is in addressing districts with different levels of capacity and commitment to do this work. To this end, **we ask that you review the enclosed version of the turnaround brief and note any comments or revisions you would like to see.**

Finally, I want to let you all know that, unfortunately, I will probably not be able to join you in Sanger for this meeting. As some of you may have heard, I have been in New York for several weeks now due to a family medical emergency. It is unlikely that I will be able to make it back to California before December or even later. However, we are arranging for others to step in in my place, and Larisa Shambaugh, the Deputy Director for this project, will be on hand to answer any questions or respond to any suggestions you may have. I really regret that I will miss this gathering, as I have looked forward to it for some time, but I will be with you in spirit and am certain the dialogue will be both interesting and useful.

If you have any questions specifically regarding the meeting logistics, please don't hesitate to contact Suzanne Claussen at 650.843.8192 or sclaussen@air.org. For any other questions, you may contact Larisa Shambaugh either by phone at 650.843.8269 or email at lshambaugh@air.org.

I would like to thank Marc Johnson and his staff in Sanger Unified in advance for hosting such an interesting meeting. I look forward to hearing about the lively conversation!

Sincerely,



Jennifer O'Day, Collaborative Chair
American Institutes for Research