

Meeting 35 Summary
California's New English Learner Roadmap:
Leveraging Assets and Addressing Needs for Student Success

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Garden Grove, California

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***Note:** This meeting summary was developed as a resource for members of the California Collaborative on District Reform. We are making this document publicly available in an effort to share the work of the Collaborative more broadly to inform dialogue and decisions of educators throughout the state. This summary does not, however, contain the background and contextual information that might otherwise accompany a product created for the general public. For more information about the meeting and other Collaborative activities, please visit www.cacollaborative.org.*

The 35th meeting of the California Collaborative on District Reform returned to an issue that was central to the group's work at its inception, addressing the strengths and needs of California's English learners (ELs). It also addressed three key themes from the Collaborative's June 2017 direction-setting meeting: (1) the need to shift state and local attention from accountability and new policy formation to capacity building at all levels of the system; (2) the value of a continuous improvement approach and focus; and (3) the need to ground all of our work in a vigilant pursuit of equity.

With their high concentrations of ELs, meeting cohosts Garden Grove Unified School District (GGUSD) and Santa Ana Unified School District (SAUSD) provided a rich context for exploring these issues. Through the two-day convening, the Collaborative incorporated the voices of district leaders, content experts, students, and teachers to explore issues related both to classroom instruction and to social and emotional learning (SEL) considerations that can best position ELs for academic and life success.

Summarizing Overall Themes

Across the multiple sessions of the meeting, several cross-cutting themes emerged, most of which are also reflected in a recent guidance document from the California Department of Education (CDE) on implementing the new EL Roadmap in California. First among these was the importance of taking an assets-based approach to working with ELs. New state-level policy directions, as well as the accounts of educators and students, reflected a view

¹ Thanks to Marina Castro, Linda Choi, Kathleen Jones, and CoCo Massengale for taking careful notes during the meeting and thus making this summary possible.

that all students add value to the learning environment through their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Fostering student success means celebrating the strengths that they bring, not tolerating or seeking to “overcome” them.

A second theme was the need to integrate language and content. Mastering language is not a precondition to accessing academic content. Rather, understanding and using language is central to the learning process. To that end, encouraging and supporting discourse among students and between students and teachers is essential for developing both language and content knowledge.

Third, the meeting underscored a consistent observation across many recent Collaborative meetings that students’ academic and SEL skills are inextricably linked. Social and emotional needs profoundly shape students’ abilities to engage in academic learning environments and thrive in school settings. For all students—and for ELs in particular—educators and the systems in which they work need the capacity and the commitment to support the full range of student needs.

The meeting also highlighted the importance of student voice in school improvement. This theme is, in part, an extension of the emphasis on discourse, but it extends much further. Reflections from multiple perspectives suggested that districts and schools should actively and consistently turn to students to understand their experiences and address the problems they face. Just as important, educators can improve their effectiveness by seeing students as parts of the solutions, leveraging their ideas, talents, and energy to help create better opportunities for ELs and their peers.

Finally, observations throughout the meeting pointed to the advantages of coherence in district approaches to support ELs. Interventions and other forms of assistance too often grow in silos, reflecting the particular focus of a school or department to address a specific identified student need. Districts that can integrate their supports for ELs into their existing strategies and overall program may experience greater success in implementing them with fidelity and quality, thereby increasing opportunities for ELs and reducing outcome gaps.

Setting the English Learner and District Contexts

Presentations from Stanford emeritus professor Kenji Hakuta, GGUSD Superintendent Gabriela Mafi, and SAUSD Superintendent Stefanie Phillips provided state- and district-level contexts for the conditions in which ELs learn.

California’s English Learner Roadmap

The meeting began with an orientation to California’s new *English Learner Roadmap*, a guidance document that Hakuta authored for the CDE with the aim of supporting districts “as they incorporate English learner education into their local program designs.” He began his presentation by recounting the evolution of EL policy in the United States; its civil rights origins include the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and the Bilingual Education Act of 1968, as well as landmark court cases such as *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) and *Castenada v. Pickard* (1981). Language of instruction has historically

been a political lightning rod, perhaps most notably in California with the passage of Proposition 227 in 1998, but Hakuta argued that this is a distraction. The focus of EL policy should be on students learning academic content. Recent policy developments have finally brought together language and content, shifting the emphasis toward how students *use* language rather than the mere acquisition of vocabulary and grammatical forms.

As the next step in the state’s evolving story, the Roadmap sets a direction for EL education in California. In doing so, it concentrates on several federal and state initiatives, including new standards (especially the Common Core State Standards, the Next Generation Science Standards, and the revised California English Language Development [ELD] Standards) that explicitly call out the role of language in content mastery and a new accountability paradigm that focuses attention on resource allocation, capacity building, and a focus on student learning through the lens of continuous improvement. State policy changes, including an integrated English language arts (ELA)/ELD framework and the passage of Proposition 58 in 2016, further cement a state philosophy that honors and supports students’ home languages and the language development process.

To help assist local education agencies (LEAs), the Roadmap articulates four principles to guide EL education:

1. The first principle refers to **assets-oriented and needs-responsive schools**, which asserts both that ELs’ languages and cultures are assets in school, and that there is no one-size-fits-all approach that will be appropriate for all ELs.
2. The second principle emphasizes **intellectual quality of instruction and meaningful access**, arguing that ELs need to “engage in intellectually rich, developmentally appropriate learning experiences that foster high levels of English proficiency.”
3. Third, school systems should feature **conditions that support effectiveness**; leaders at the state, county, district, school, and preschool levels all play important roles in facilitating EL success.
4. Finally, the Roadmap calls for **alignment and articulation across systems**, including connections in and out of school, throughout grade levels, and across educational segments.

Reactions to the Roadmap prompted questions about the factors that guide EL practice today. History suggests that litigation, research, policy, advocacy, and practice all play critical roles, and that different points of leverage open at different points in time. As a result, efforts to better serve ELs should be multifaceted, and education leaders should look for opportunities within their spheres of influence to promote powerful learning opportunities.

Garden Grove Unified School District

The first of the meeting’s hosts to present, GGUSD is California’s 11th largest district, serving 43,000 students in Orange County. The district operates 67 schools through the efforts of 5,000 employees. Most GGUSD students (70%) qualify for free or reduced-price meals, and the district’s student population is predominantly Latino (53%) and Asian

(33%); the majority of Asian students—27% of students overall—are Vietnamese. The district also features substantial language diversity. English-only students represent 29% of the student population, while 35% of students are ELs, 35% have been redesignated as fluent English proficient (RFEP), and the remaining 1% are initial fluent English proficient (IFEP).² GGUSD students speak 49 different languages.

Mafi described GGUSD as a system with a strong emphasis on coherence. All district work ties to three overarching goals. Goal 1 addresses academic skills, including mastery of academic content, academic English, and the scholarly habits that enable students to thrive. Goal 2 relates to personal skills, including motivation, social and emotional well-being, and overall school climate and culture. Goal 3 emphasizes lifelong success for students through a focus on preparation for college and career readiness and success.

Mafi's opening presentation also highlighted progress on key student outcomes for the district. Graduation and Advanced Placement examination passage rates in Garden Grove exceed the rates for the county and the state overall. Completion rates for the A-G requirements needed for admission to the University of California and California State University systems have grown from 29% in school year (SY) 2005–06 to 58% in SY 2016–17, a number that also eclipses the results for the county and state. She also reported that 632 seniors graduated with California's Seal of Biliteracy in 2017. Percentages of students meeting Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) standards have also grown, although the district has experienced a reversal of results from the California Standards Test that preceded SBAC. Previously, students earned much higher scores on mathematics assessments than they did on ELA assessments; but now the reverse is true, a change that GGUSD leaders attribute to the increased language demands associated with the mathematics standards. Despite positive overall outcomes, Latinos score much lower than do their Asian and white counterparts.

Mafi concluded her presentation by describing some of the district's areas of focus. In support of both Goal 1 and Goal 2, GGUSD has embraced the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program and developed a program called Latinos Unidos to build scholarly habits and aggressively battle negative stereotypes in schools and communities. The district has also implemented a framework it calls FAR—Focus, Act, Reflect—to help students develop scholarly habits and enhance motivation.

GGUSD leaders work to achieve district goals by viewing staff, parents, and families as essential pieces of the puzzle. The district dedicates substantial resources to professional learning opportunities for teachers and administrators. It also emphasizes homegrown staff—nearly 500 district employees are former students of the GGUSD system. In addition, the district perceives parents and families as key contributors to its success. Beyond the influence parents exercise over their own children, GGUSD has been able to leverage parent support in response to controversies regarding charter school expansion in the district. To help provide support to parents, a new family resource center—inspired in part by

² The CDE defines IFEP as “students with a primary language other than English who took the CELDT within 30 days of enrollment in a U.S. public school and who met the LEA criterion for English language proficiency.”

practices shared during the Collaborative’s March 2017 meeting in San Bernardino—offers information, advice, and connections to other community supports.

Santa Ana Unified School District

SAUSD is adjacent to GGUSD, also in Orange County, and serves 54,000 students. The district operates 56 schools and features substantial faculty stability; the average teacher in the district has 16 years of experience, 15 of which have been in SAUSD. Among SAUSD students, 90% qualify for free or reduced-price meals, and 96% are Latino. ELs represent 41% of the student population, the highest percentage of ELs of any district represented in the Collaborative.

In her presentation, Phillips highlighted several student outcomes. The district boasts a 93% graduation rate, and 93% of graduates report going on to college after high school. A quarter of SAUSD’s graduates—907 students—earned the California Seal of Biliteracy in SY 2016–2017, an increase from the 332 who achieved the same recognition in SY 2011–12. Phillips also described district successes in language acquisition. Nearly three quarters of kindergartners and first graders in the district classify as ELs. By 12th grade, however, only 14% of students continue to be classified as ELs, while 67% are classified as RFEP.

The opening presentation described many of SAUSD’s activities relative to the four principles of the EL Roadmap. To promote assets-based, needs-responsive schools (Principle 1), the district has established an EL Task Force, with a mission statement that reads, “Our commitment is to value, promote, and develop biliteracy and biculturalism through our Dual Language Immersion, World Language and Heritage Language programs, and Seal of Biliteracy recognition.” SAUSD also features “Paso a Paso: Together We Read,” which focuses on early literacy, and a range of additional opportunities such as student clubs, restorative justice resources, and credit recovery options to further support diverse learners.

Principle 2 speaks to intellectual quality of instruction and meaningful access. Relative to this principle, the SAUSD Framework for Teaching and Learning identifies components of high-quality instruction and includes explicit attention to language and cultural context. In addition, the district’s Early Learning Framework weaves together school and community contributions to TK-3 core instruction in numeracy, TK-3 core instruction in literacy, SEL, early childhood education, and parent engagement.

SAUSD engages in several initiatives to strengthen its commitment to Principle 3—the systemic conditions that support effectiveness. Among these are a set of professional learning opportunities for administrators and teachers. In addition, participation in networks of educators such as the CORE Districts, the Irvine Math Project, and Math in Common focus attention on systemic capacity to serve all students, including ELs.

Finally, SAUSD has worked to advance Principle 4 through partnerships that seek to create alignment and articulation within and across systems. Under an agreement with nearby Santa Ana College (SAC), for example, all SAUSD graduates receive laptop computers and free tuition during their first year. In addition, students from SAC are guaranteed transfer

rights to both California State University at Fullerton and the University of California at Irvine. The district also engages in several strategic partnerships with community partners to better meet student needs.

Even as SAUSD has pursued many positive steps forward and has achieved notable student outcomes, Phillips identified several remaining challenges. The district continues to work on system alignment and articulation so that its activities and services fit into a coherent framework of core supports for all students, supplemental supports for some students, and individualized supports for the small group of students with the greatest needs. In addition, the district strives to increase instructional rigor while also providing choices to students and their families relative to their educational experiences.

Improving Instruction to Address EL Needs Through Academic Discourse

Conversation throughout the meeting highlighted the essential role that student discourse plays in supporting EL academic success. New state standards—not only in ELA, but across subjects—emphasize the use of oral language and its integration with disciplinary content. This transition in student expectations to emphasize speaking and listening more than did California’s previous standards underscores the point raised in Kenji Hakuta’s framing comments about the essential role that language plays—not only in its own right, but in service to the learning process.

A Classroom Strategy for Improving Discourse

Stanford researcher Jeff Zwiers led a session that spotlighted the importance of discourse and explored a strategy for improving it. He began by emphasizing the role of oral language in the learning process, explaining, “The person [who is] doing the speaking is the person [who is] doing the learning.”

Focus on Authentic Communication

Zwiers began by distinguishing between authentic communication and pseudo communication. Too often, classroom experiences feature pseudo communication; that is, “using words and meaning-carriers to share information and do things for reasons *other than* using the information in meaningful ways.” Authentic communication, in contrast, uses “words and other meaning-carriers to share information for doing *meaningful* thinking...that just one person can’t do.” Zwiers identified two key features of authentic communication. First, it needs to involve the purposeful building of ideas from one speaker to another. Second, authentic communication requires an information gap between or among speakers. “If you have the same information I have,” Zwiers explained, “there’s no need to talk or communicate.” Attention to language should therefore focus on its use in service of purposefully building ideas and addressing information gaps.

Activity for Encouraging Authentic Communication

After providing a foundation for understanding language use, Zwiers led the group through an exercise designed to encourage authentic communication in the classroom. A teacher begins by supplying students with a prompt. One student responds aloud to a partner, who

pushes for clarification and support and offers his or her own ideas for improvement. The partner then shares her or his own response to the prompt. Subsequently, students repeat the exercise with two additional partners so that by the end of the activity, they will have provided responses three times and heard three peers offer their responses as well. The teacher encourages students to borrow ideas from their peers and to improve their own performance each time. Indeed, as they progress through the activity, the students should offer stronger and clearer evidence in support of their responses. Zwiers suggested that educators can gauge the effectiveness of the activity by the degree to which student dialogue matches the principles of authentic communication.

Following the introduction to the exercise, meeting participants observed the process in a video of classroom dialogue, then practiced it themselves by responding to a prompt from Zwiers. Participants identified several strengths of the approach. First, the exercise positions students as resources to support one another's learning, not just as passive actors in an environment where teachers act as experts. The activity also provides practice for conversational turn-taking, a skill needed for success in and out of the classroom. In addition, the activity creates an opportunity for formative assessment by enabling teachers to observe, identify, and address misconceptions that emerge in students' responses. Finally, although the group explored the approach through the lens of ELs, participants observed that it can help students with a variety of learning needs, including students with disabilities.

Despite these strengths, reactions from participants also drew attention to challenges with the approach. Merely encouraging discourse is insufficient for improving student learning. An exercise such as this must take place in a learning environment in which the teacher also has the necessary pedagogical content knowledge. Even with a skilled teacher, the activity is difficult to embed into classroom practice. It is time-intensive, and teachers need to exercise discretion about when and how it best fits within a full set of learning opportunities and supports.

A District Approach to Improving Discourse

Following the session with Zwiers, GGUSD leaders described their efforts to improve student discourse at the systemic level. The GGUSD team emphasized that the practices they described represent one aspect of the district's work at a point in time; that is, the practices are neither complete nor perfect. Rather, they are part of a constellation of approaches, and their shortcomings can help to illuminate areas for future attention.

The GGUSD team explained that California's new standards called for a shift in what and how the district was teaching. Under the previous California standards, GGUSD's approach to mathematics, in particular, had been highly procedural. Given the new set of student expectations identified through the state's revised standards, however, district leaders recognized that students needed to do much more talking, questioning, and describing their reasoning. One presenter characterized GGUSD students prior to the transition to new state standards by saying:

They were very compliant youngsters who completed the task and turned in their paper at the end and their teachers scored it. And the hard part is that on the CST [California Standards Test], our kids did very, very well; so asking our teachers to have faith that perhaps that wasn't going to help our kids in the long run took a lot of work.

Efforts to Build Teacher Capacity

To help guide the district through the transition, GGUSD focused its attention on building teacher capacity. A Stanford massive online open course that district leaders attended in 2014–15 helped to define the characteristics of effective peer academic discourse. Building on this understanding, district leaders created a nonevaluative peer-to-peer academic discourse tool designed to monitor and understand what students were saying. Through its Summer Learning Institute, GGUSD created an opportunity for 40 teachers to receive two hours of professional development to plan a lesson, then paired Grades K–6 and 7–12 teachers to conduct and observe the lessons. More than 25 of these teachers have continued to participate in a Discourse Collaborative that meets throughout the year. Through this group, district administrators have observed approximately 50 classrooms over the previous four years. In the meantime, the district has also trained its K–12 administrators and teachers on special assignment in the use of the tool.

A Tool for Monitoring Discourse

GGUSD's tool, designed to help educators monitor classroom discourse, has two components. The first component focuses on conversation. Observers gauge student engagement and the degree to which dialogue focuses on the intended learning. Students should sustain conversation for at least three turns, and ideas should build on one another. Observation segments in which students meet all three of these criteria earn scores of 2; segments with none of the elements present earn scores of 0.

The second component of the tool examines student understanding. Observers rate the extent to which student conversations develop the intended learning clearly and accurately. This component follows the same scoring procedure as does the tool's conversation component; that is, observers assign ratings of 0, 1, or 2. District leaders continue to refine the tool based on their experiences in using it with teachers.

To understand how the tool works in practice, meeting participants observed video clips of classroom discussions. GGUSD representatives then explained how observers would rate the conversation using the discourse tool. Meeting participants then practiced using the tool by reviewing transcriptions of classroom dialogue in small groups and classifying the dialogue samples according to the guidelines of the tool.

Following the practice session, GGUSD leaders shared data they have collected using the tool. In spring 2014, baseline data revealed that almost 30% of observed classrooms provided no opportunities for conversation. In other words, district administrators assigned three out of every 10 classroom segments scores of 0 for conversation. By spring 2017, district leaders no longer found cases of conversations not being observed—that is, of conversations receiving scores of 0. Moreover, observers rated 31% of classes at the

proficient level, meaning that the observed classroom segments merited full scores of 2 for both conversation and understanding components of the tool.

Ongoing Challenges With Fostering EL Engagement

Although GGUSD's work to improve student discourse has yielded positive outcomes in terms of teacher capacity and classroom behavior, district leaders reported that many ELs continue to engage sporadically or not at all in the classroom. Even though more discourse is taking place, not all students are participating. As one individual observed, "Even though our conversations are increasing, our students are still hiding." District leaders further noted that the problem does not appear to be a lack of exposure to the English language. A district leader informed the group that 84% of GGUSD's ELs are born in the United States. "It's not that they don't speak English," she explained. "They're surrounded by the dominant language. So why don't they reclassify?"

To better understand the challenge, the district instituted an EL shadowing practice to better understand what their classroom experience looked like and why discourse was not yet happening for all students at desired levels. GGUSD administrators followed individual students across the elementary, middle, and high school levels for at least 100 minutes at a time. District leaders noted that most academic discourse in the classroom consisted of the teacher speaking to the class (with some growth in the percentage of time students were speaking as students got older). They also observed that academic listening in the classroom typically involved students listening to teachers. Given these findings, GGUSD leaders posed two challenges for meeting participants to consider: How can we continue to shift the conversation of academic discourse from the teacher to the student? And how can we ensure that all students are accountable in the discourse process? Participants broke into small groups to discuss these questions and provide feedback to the district.

Reactions to GGUSD's Problem of Practice

Small-group participants began by making observations about the district's overall approach. First, some individuals expressed appreciation of GGUSD's attention to building teacher capacity as a fundamental component of its solutions to advancing student discourse in the classroom. Small-group members also noted that coherence and centralization enable consistency across the district over time. According to one participant, "You stick to things for a long time. You're not in the cycle of adopt, attack, abandon, which is good." Another individual connected practice in GGUSD to ideal conditions for program implementation, "You don't want to start something new. You want [implementation] to be a natural continuation of what you have put in place . . . [to] be a simple tweaking of things."

The small groups also generated advice for setting clear expectations relative to use of the district's discourse tool. Some participants observed that the tool does a good job of articulating what discourse is and what it should look like. The district might take another step forward by thinking about how expectations and approaches might differ by grade level or by the stages of working through a particular concept or unit. Reacting to this input, one GGUSD leader shared, "Do we have a specific percentage of the lesson that we

would want to see the kids dialoguing? We didn't arrive at one. I don't know if anybody has. Is it 30%? Is it 50%? I don't know. What we do know is that it's probably not a good idea for kids to stay silent in their seats for 15 minutes." Some small-group members further observed that the tool is useful, but that the goal is for teachers to develop an ear for dialogue so that they do not necessarily need the tool to monitor and improve discourse in the classroom.

Meeting participants also suggested ways in which the district might work with data to deepen the usefulness of its discourse work. For example, district leaders might disaggregate findings to focus on gender, RFEP students, or even English-only students who still have language challenges. The needs and supports of different students may vary, and the district will need to respond in kind. Some small-group members also suggested that district leaders examine connections between discourse—as measured through the tool or through EL shadowing—and subsequent reclassification to better understand the connections between the two. Monitoring implementation of classroom strategies might also be instructive. Do classroom behaviors reflect the professional development teachers are receiving?

Previewing an observation that reemerged several times during the student panel that followed, meeting participants also suggested that district leaders involve students in identifying solutions to problems. Some participants asked whether students have seen the discourse tool, which could be a useful resource to help students understand their expectations and roles in the classroom. One attendee suggested using a fishbowl activity to model how students can engage peers who are not participating in discussions. District leaders might also use empathy interviews—which have served as a valuable approach to learning about student experiences—to ask students how *they* would go about engaging all of their peers in the classroom.

Finally, small-group conversation produced recommendations for educators to create situations in which students must talk. According to one meeting participant, "If it's a meaningful task with public accountability—like speaking to an audience—it gives them an opportunity to practice and build their ideas better than isolated discourse activities. Then students can rally each other to perform well." Student-led portfolio conferences can serve a similar purpose. As another idea, teachers can give students five minutes at the end of an exercise to practice what they will say if a teacher calls on them. This provides an opportunity for students to prepare for a structured speaking opportunity and also gives all students a chance to work on speaking even if the teacher does not call on them.

Hearing From Students

At the end of the meeting's first day, the group turned to hear from students themselves. A panel of eight high school students—four from GGUSD and four from SAUSD—joined the group to share their experiences as ELs in the two districts. The students represented a range of English fluency (i.e., some were in the early stages of English acquisition; others had been reclassified early in their academic careers). The students also represented a diversity of immigrant experience; some had been born in the United States, while others came to the country during middle school or even high school. The students reflected not

only on their academic experiences, but on the social, cultural, and legal dynamics that helped to shape their daily lives in and out of school.

An Assets-Based View of Language and Culture

Comments from the student panelists generally were consistent with the assets-based approach to language and culture espoused by the EL Roadmap. Students expressed pride in their bilingualism. According to one, “I take pride in speaking both English and Spanish. I can communicate with other people, and it’s beautiful to be able to help somebody out just like someone helped you out.” Other students described classroom experiences in which teachers used them to help connect with and support ELs who did not yet have a strong command of English. Panelists also discussed the symbolic importance of the state’s Seal of Bilingualism and the way in which it validates their linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Students’ positive self-image extended beyond their language backgrounds to include their cultural heritage as well. Panelists described ways in which various school clubs enable students to both embrace their culture and share it with others. One student further commented on the way in which he and his peers contribute to the diversity of the broader community: “The reason I embrace Orange County is [that] our county and state is not a melting pot anymore, it’s a mosaic. Each piece is put together to complement the other, rather than making it blank.”

Students also talked about their reclassification status. Although several students included the year when they were reclassified in their introductions, they later revealed that they learned this information only in preparation for the panel. Their comments suggested that knowing more about achieving RFE status could have served as a motivating factor. According to one student, “I didn’t know it existed until last week, or that I was an EL. I feel like it would be a goal because it shows you’re improving year by year.” Another student added, “I would have had it as a goal if I knew anything about it.”

Challenges Students Experience

Students also pointed to several of the challenges they face as ELs. Panelists shared ways in which language and cultural identities and barriers create social tensions with peers. One student pointed out that “A challenge for me is my accent...there are people who won’t want to hang out with you because you’re different.” Another student talked about ways in which his appearance creates challenges among peers with similar backgrounds: “I was able to assimilate pretty well, but a challenge is being white-passing and being rejected by other Latino students.”

Panelists also described ways in which linguistic and cultural barriers influence teacher-student relationships. One student recalled, “I’ve had situations where teachers didn’t trust me because they think, ‘He can’t even understand what I’m saying.’” Another student described a similar reticence among teachers to make connections and provide support, saying, “In my school, many teachers don’t want to work with ELs. They think that it’s easier to work with students that know the language. It takes less patience.”

Beyond students' personal interactions, members of the panel also discussed ways in which federal policies constrain their academic options. Some panelists qualified for protection from Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). With changes in the federal approach to DACA, these students no longer have the same guarantee of higher education opportunities. Even when enrollment opportunities exist, the loss of access to financial aid and opportunities to work can make college unattainable. Student panelists described their reactions to the potential curtailment of DACA protections. One shared, "Ever since my sophomore year [in high school], I put myself in a position where I could prosper, and it really took a great hit on me mentally and emotionally." Another student added, "Knowing that you immigrated to this place to reach the American dream, it's like, do I keep going or do I not? If I keep going, will all of this be taken away from me?"

Pathways for Adults to Help

As they outlined some of the issues ELs face, panelists also described ways in which adults can help to address these challenges. Students described cases in which a teacher recognized their struggles and reached out to help. According to one student, "One thing I really appreciate is that our staff and teachers are always there to help us. They notice when you're not feeling well and emotionally down." Student comments indicated that personal relationships were an important piece of this dynamic; teachers could help when they knew students and had established trusting connections with them.

Panelists also suggested that public displays of support are helpful. One school holds an annual diversity week that features an immigrant rights day as part of its celebration. Another student described the positive impact of a teacher who posted a sign in the classroom that read, "We welcome everyone: Muslim, immigrant, LGBT." Two students explained that their schools had brought in an outside expert to provide information about DACA and explained immigrant rights to students and their families. Panelist comments also indicated that stoles presented to members of the Spanish honor society—which graduates wear at commencement—have cache. "Getting a stole that represents something that you work for and everything you accomplished," one student observed, "that would encourage students to do better."

Members of the panel nevertheless cautioned that not all students have access to the supports they described. Indeed, meeting participants raised the apparent tension between student accounts of support—which reflects highly positive teacher-student relationships—and their experiences with teachers who resisted working with ELs—which suggests the opposite. Offering advice to adults who work with ELs, one student urged, "Be more supportive. Be more open to what's going on. That doesn't mean you have to advocate for something you don't believe in. Don't look at it as a political thing. Look at it as a teacher-student interaction, because that's what it's really all about." Students also highlighted the fact that even as schools honor some linguistic and cultural traditions, others remain marginalized. One student argued, for example, that Advanced Placement courses should honor a range of native languages—including Vietnamese, that student's heritage language.

Students advocated for adult leaders in schools, districts, and other student-serving institutions to listen to and believe in students. “Be supportive of your students,” one panelist advised. “You never know the capacity they have to change the world.” Another student added, “Adults of today, instead of going against us, they should empower us, because we are going to be the adults of tomorrow.” A third student argued, “Instead of immediately rejecting our opinions, hear us out because we are the future.”

Opportunities for Student Involvement

The panel discussion concluded with observations about ways in which students can become involved in developing solutions to the problems that ELs face. According to the panelists, student clubs and organizations are vehicles through which students can tap into their passions and assume leadership for issues about which they care. One student with political aspirations offered advice while recounting his experience: “When I first started high school, there was no club talking about what I want to do, which is civic engagement, so we decided to start our own political club. So I created my own activities, and that’s what we should encourage our students to do.”

Addressing the Social and Emotional Needs of ELs

Picking up on observations from the student panel that both academic and personal strengths and challenges shape EL’s school experiences, the meeting’s focus turned to addressing the social and emotional needs of ELs.

Teacher Perspectives

The meeting’s second day began with a panel of four teachers, two each from GGUSD and SAUSD, who collectively represented the elementary, intermediate, and high school levels. Three of the four teachers are directly involved in their respective schools’ AVID programs, so their reflections drew heavily on that experience. The fourth panelist teaches in a dual-immersion school.

An Assets-Based View of Language and Culture

Mirroring experiences from the meeting’s opening presentations and introductions from the student panel, teachers’ descriptions of their students reflected an appreciation of the assets the students bring to school. A teacher from a school in which all students qualify for free or reduced-price meals and 95% of students are Latino told the group, “Our students have a tenacity and a drive and a will and it’s a beautiful thing to see every day.”

Challenges Students Experience

Teachers also described the many challenges that their students face, especially family obligations. Students often contribute in the home by caring for siblings, preparing meals, or cleaning the house. Some work part-time jobs to help support their families financially.

More pressing since the 2016 election, teachers described the profound immigration-related concerns they observe in their students. One panelist recalled, “A student pulled me aside and said, ‘How long do you think I have before my parents are deported?’ What 16-

year-old should be worried about losing her parents when she gets home tonight?" Another teacher echoed this sentiment by explaining that these fears exist even at the elementary level: "One of the assumptions coming to primary is they don't know what's going on in the world, but they do...They fear about their families and deportation. That fear is palpable." That elementary teacher described an exercise for Martin Luther King Jr. Day in which students wrote about their dreams. She recounted what one student wrote: "I want DACA to pass. I want people to be able to live in peace and harmony in this country." The student was seven years old.

Panelists highlighted the ways in which these issues collectively shape the time and energy students can dedicate to their academic obligations. Teachers described an increase in depression and anxiety among their students. "It's really difficult for them to balance all that and focus on their studies," one individual explained. Another teacher estimated that of 70 parent meetings she held for students with Ds or Fs on their first-semester transcripts, half had nothing to do with grades. "It wasn't because the kids couldn't do the work," the teacher observed. "There was something going on with the family that was preventing them from being able to do the work." One panelist noted that the stress students experience acts to compound already existing challenges faced by students who have a limited command of the English language: "Now you're even more worried that someone is going to see you as stupid or dumb. Many of the students have the grit and determination to get through it, but there are some students who say, 'It's cooler not to care than to show that I don't know.'"

Teachers on the panel identified some of the problems within the school system that exacerbate students' challenges. Students often suffer from inconsistency among teachers. While some teachers allow students multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery or to use their native language to demonstrate understanding as they learn English, other teachers do not. Students' academic success thus depends heavily on their assigned teachers. A panelist suggested that the system does not always view a child's home language as an asset and argued that using culturally relevant stories in the classroom can help. Another teacher observed that the process of social promotion enables students to progress to the next grade level without addressing their needs, setting them up for failure when they confront elevated expectations without the knowledge and skills needed to meet them.

Panelists also addressed an apparent disconnect between their descriptions of the relationships they have with students and observations from the student panel about experiences with teachers who do not have the desire or patience to help ELs achieve success in the classroom. The teachers acknowledged that many campuses have teachers without the skills or disposition to provide needed supports to all students. One teacher described her efforts to be a leader for her colleagues. For her, this role includes taking steps to help them build instructional skills, as well as to remind them that because she began her school experience as an EL, some of their misconceptions about ELs reinforce unfairly low expectations about people like her. Another teacher described the reality of poor teacher-student interaction as an opportunity for a teachable moment: "It can be a tough lesson to tell a student that 'You know what, there's going to be people out there that just don't like you' ...so it's teaching them in my AVID class that you need to be your own best advocate."

Promising Approaches to Improve Student Experiences

Teachers on the panel also identified promising approaches that can help address the challenges they described. First and foremost, panelists' comments underscored the importance of developing strong, trusting, personal relationships with their students. One teacher indicated that creating a safe space requires time: "Sometimes you have to give them time to let them know that, 'Hey, I can talk about things.'" Support takes place outside the classroom as well; a panelist talked about accepting invitations to family dinners as an approach to building connections with students and their families. Because of the legal dynamics at play with the families of some ELs, the level of trust families place in the school system can extend far beyond the classroom. One teacher described a parent whose child got into drugs and ran away, but called the school rather than the police. "I don't know what to do. I'm afraid to call the police because I'm undocumented," the teacher recalled the mother saying. The teacher then observed, "But she's comfortable coming to the school."

Panelists also indicated that the responsibility for building relationships extends beyond the classroom teacher. Psychological services and counseling resources play important roles in recognizing and addressing student needs. One teacher described the importance of having a parent liaison at every school to talk to parents who might not feel comfortable talking to a teacher.

The teachers identified AVID as a vehicle that has been important in their efforts to identify and address areas of need. The program creates an opportunity for teachers to provide the individualized support so important for student success. Panelists also suggested that AVID creates personal connections that help students feel comfortable turning to adults and taking chances. Beyond the teacher-student relationship, one teacher described using current college students who are alumni of the school as AVID tutors, noting that "when you see your peers go off to college, you see that it's possible." Another teacher added, "They're such amazing role models because they were here."

One teacher also described an explicit focus on EL strategies as an approach to better meet student needs. Examples might include scaffolding, repetition, sentence frames, rhythm and music, and using cognates to build connections between Spanish and English. When colleagues can model these core strategies throughout the year, the teacher observed, it can contribute to a shift toward teachers feeling more empowered. She also expressed gratitude for what she saw as a shift in the district's messaging to say, "These are best practices not just for our English learners, but for all of our students." In pursuit of increased knowledge and skills, panelists described several of the professional learning opportunities they have experienced, including AVID trainings, a summer institute, afternoon and Saturday trainings, access to professional literature, and observing and demonstrating instruction with colleagues.

In the spirit of building teacher capacity, teacher panelists also described approaches to empowering teachers. According to one teacher, monthly department meetings provide a bridge to voice concerns to district leadership. Another teacher explained that her district administers an annual survey regarding the professional development that teachers want

and need. The district then uses that information to design professional development opportunities during the summer and throughout the year. The survey and learning opportunities always include options for better educating ELs.

Panelists also advocated for understanding student perspectives and empowering them in a school setting. One teacher described a recent student-led initiative that included a scheduled walkout and reading of the names of student victims in the wake of the Parkland, Florida school shooting. Recounting the message that the staff received from the school's administration, the teacher said, "We were told, 'This is not about you. This is about them.'" The elementary school teacher on the panel argued that this kind of mobilization and advocacy should begin at a young age. "As a teacher, how do I facilitate that?" she asked. Answering her own question, the teacher suggested that her role includes "giving them an opportunity to express themselves, and giving them parameters and expectations for voicing those opinions...[and] equipping them with those tools to articulate their thoughts and defend their points to a wider audience." Panelists suggested that opportunities for student advocacy can also provide teachable moments, including lessons about informed and responsible use of social media.

Finally, teachers on the panel discussed the Seal of Biliteracy and the role it plays in affirming the value of home language skills. According to the panelists, the cord that students wear for graduation when they have earned the seal is a significant honor. "They'll really work toward that. They look at it as an accomplishment," one teacher explained. Another echoed this perspective by saying, "It's a big deal...It's a huge honor...It elevates language learning—*any* language learning...and not just the language itself, but the culture, the customs."

A District Approach to Addressing SEL Needs

Following the teacher panel, an overview of SAUSD's work on SEL needs echoed teacher observations about the broader life circumstances from which students enter the school-based learning environment. Affirming the assets-based view of students that teachers had expressed, a district administrator said that "heart" and "resilience" are the words that best describe SAUSD students. She added that students frequently talk about wanting to return after graduation and give back to their communities. District leaders also asserted that attendance rates for Latinos are high, in large part because students see their schools as a safe space. Unfortunately, this often means that students do not view their homes and neighborhoods as safe, either physically or emotionally. One individual shared, "We see our children reacting. Even if they don't know what mom and dad are worried about, they pick up on the anxiety."

Strategies for Supporting SEL Needs

In response to challenges that students face, district leaders have designed a range of supports to address students' social and emotional needs. The district embraces strategies such as positive behavioral intervention and supports, restorative circles, and outreach to parents. The implementation of restorative practices, for example, has expanded from five pilot schools in spring 2015 to 17 sites in SY 2016–17, and the district found that 55% of students participating in small restorative practice circles improved academically. The

district has also turned its attention to mental health awareness through its We Care Campaign. Initiatives such as #GIRLBOSS, #BOSSUP, and other programs seek to empower young women and young men by building self-awareness, developing leadership skills, and exposing them to the district's life skills curriculum's mentoring program and service projects. Some evidence suggests that the collection of activities designed to address needs and build student skills is paying dividends. Suspensions dropped from 7,606 in SY 2011–12 to 2,527 in SY 2016–17; expulsions dropped from 179 to 26 during the same period.

Evidence of Disparities Among Students

Despite progress, district leaders indicated that SAUSD still faces important gaps in terms of meeting the needs of its ELs. Data obtained through SAUSD's participation in the CORE Districts reveals disparities between ELs and non-ELs on several measures. Student surveys show lower scores on growth mindset, self-efficacy, self-management, and social awareness for SAUSD ELs than for English only, IFEP, and RFEP students. These scores are lower still for students who classify as both ELs and students with disabilities. Scores for school culture and climate were similarly lower for ELs in the area of safety than for their non-EL counterparts. SAUSD also shared that ELs were suspended at higher rates than were non-ELs in middle school and high school.

In light of these findings, the SAUSD team posed this challenge to the group: "Given we provide this level of support to our school community, there is a level of inequity that continues to exist in meeting the SEL needs of our ELs." Participants broke into small groups to discuss this problem and to provide feedback to the district about how its leaders might address the issue.

Reactions to District Challenges

Within small groups, some individuals expressed appreciation of the wide range of activities and supports in place at SAUSD. They also asked questions about how those approaches connect with one another, and how efforts at the district level relate to activities and supports at the individual school level. Returning to this feedback later in the meeting, one district leader observed, "We have to help people build more coherence for how these things come together."

In the effort to connect SEL interventions to improved outcomes, meeting participants recommended developing clarity on the causal relationships they expect to see. This might include a process for exploring root causes and establishing hypotheses for why the district believes it is experiencing these gaps between ELs and other students. It may also be that the outcome measures currently available are not the right measures of effectiveness for all categories of support. District leaders may wish to identify the outcomes—both academic and behavioral—they should expect to see in response to various interventions, then find ways to measure those outcomes. For example, student and teacher panelists talked about the levels of anxiety and depression that EL students experience; those factors are not reflected in the existing CORE Districts data.

District leaders might also explore the degree to which students actually access the services available to them. Presenters from SAUSD described a long list of services and supports. Do students know what those services and supports are and how to access them? Are there potentially negative consequences associated with seeking support that might dissuade students from doing so? Similarly, how well do teachers understand the services available to students, and what role do they play in recommending those supports? And is access to services related to AVID participation? If so, what are the implications for students who do not participate in the AVID program? Examining these questions may shed light on implementation challenges and potential solutions for district leaders.

Meeting participants also acknowledged that effective student supports require time and money to implement. The personal connections that were so important to student and teacher panelists require staff time to develop, which can be challenging in a world of constrained resources. Scheduling time creatively might help. Some meeting participants raised the possibility of students themselves serving as sources of support. This approach could help circumvent school-level resource constraints while adding value by creating opportunities for student leadership and by facilitating trusting relationships by leveraging peers. Participants recognized, however, that using students in this way could raise issues of liability and might provoke parental privacy concerns.

The conversation about students helping other students prompted a broader question about risk. Participants identified tension between providing supports that students need and the risk aversion that often characterizes district actions. One individual observed, “So much of our training [in our district] is, ‘Don’t advise kids on mental health issues or immigration because we’re not the experts.’ How many schools or districts would openly say something, because what if something goes wrong?” This person highlighted the way in which the common district approach might actually prevent adults in school systems from providing students with the support they need. “Because the school district is often accused of everything, we get defensive to protect our employees... We’ve got a lot of caring adults who are afraid to talk about things kids need to talk about.” An indemnification clause, perhaps similar to the clause that protects well-intentioned individuals who provide CPR, could help.

Considering Policy Implications

To close the meeting, participants noted several policy implications that arose from discussions about how best to meet EL needs.

A district leader introduced the possibility of creating sponsorship for undocumented teachers. In the same way that technology-based countries sponsor visas for foreign-born employees they deem essential to the organization’s work, school districts might explore doing the same for teachers in their systems who no longer have access to the protections that DACA provided. Although the number of affected teachers in any one district may be too small for that district to act alone, a group of districts working collaboratively could navigate the legal opportunities and obstacles together.

A meeting participant also advocated that district leaders should demand that the Mexican consul speak to students at school sites about their rights and options as immigrants. The

burden of traveling to the consulate office, especially in response to legal circumstances that may be time-sensitive, may present too great a burden for students and their families to overcome. The participant argued that districts should be forceful in calling on the consul to provide support.

Some participants called on the University of California and California State University systems to acknowledge the importance of a student's home language by granting exemptions from the foreign language requirement for university admission. Doing so could free time in students' schedules to meet other A-G requirements that could make them eligible and competitive for college acceptance. Other participants generally supported this idea, but cautioned that any change should take care not to undermine students' motivation to earn the California Seal of Biliteracy, which includes some course-taking requirements.

Next Steps for the Collaborative

The Collaborative will reconvene at the Sanger Unified School District on June 18–19, 2018, to examine Sanger's approach to identifying and addressing the academic, social, and emotional needs of students through multitiered systems of support. In the meantime, the Collaborative's staff will continue to partner with the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence, Pivot Learning, and WestEd to advance the work of the Local Control Funding Formula Test Kitchen and to pursue publications that share key lessons from our core meetings with the broader field of California educators. As always, resources from this and previous meetings, updates regarding Collaborative members, and information concerning upcoming events are available on our website at www.cacollaborative.org.