Meeting 19 Summary
Leadership for Change
Finding & Developing 21st Century School Leaders

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Fresno, California

Prepared by Joel Knudson, American Institutes for Research

> *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. However, it does not contain the background and contextual information that might otherwise accompany a product created for the purpose of public consumption.*

The November 2011 and March 2012 Collaborative meetings extended the group's focus beyond K–12 education systems to examine the challenges of positioning students for success in the 21st century economy— through both college and workforce preparation. Picking up on themes raised in those meetings, the Collaborative turned in Meeting 19 to the challenge of finding and developing leaders who can drive schools to meet a more demanding set of expectations. The meeting was situated in Fresno Unified School District (USD), but rather than our typical focus on a problem of practice facing an individual district, the meeting sought to engage district leaders and other participants in dialogue about how best to ensure high quality leadership at all levels in local school districts. Conversations throughout the meeting addressed not only the skills and dispositions that today's leaders require, but the implications of those needs for district efforts to recruit, develop, and plan for the succession of leaders in K–12 systems.

What Are the Current Demands for Leadership?

The meeting began with a fishbowl conversation among district leaders and subsequent group discussion that helped to identify some of the skills and values districts need in their leaders. The overall reflections from this first session would reemerge in conversations throughout the rest of the meeting.

Transitioning to an Outcomes Orientation Informed by Professional Judgment

Participants reflected that traditional managers who follow and implement directions are no longer sufficient to lead schools to fully prepare students for college and today's careers. Rather, current demands require a transition from a compliance orientation to an

outcomes orientation, where leaders have the capacity, authority, and courage to make sound decisions in the best interest of students. Identifying this transition as a struggle, a meeting participant shared a realization that leaders in one particular district had come to regarding leadership capacity:

> We had not built the capacity of our leaders to take a variety of data sources and apply them in the very specific circumstances they may face in their local schools. They were not robotic, but were almost formulaic…there wasn't a stretching of use of information to make decisions to improve what goes on for kids.

As another participant remarked, this transition for leaders mirrors the movement educators are seeking for students—particularly through the Common Core—from direction-following to critical thinking. One component of this demand for critical thinking is a need for strategic thinking and planning, a conception of leadership that emphasizes recognizing and taking advantage of levers to create change. However, participants noted that this more intense set of demands requires improved capacity, and systems of higher education as well as school districts often lack extensive experience in building this capacity.

Attending to School Culture and the Belief that All Students Can Succeed

Attention to instructional expertise, data use, and management skills appropriately receives substantial attention in discussions of leadership. Nevertheless, as one individual described, leaders must balance the "smart side" (or technical skills) and the "healthy side" (involving morale and culture) of leadership. High expectations for students and the role of teachers and leaders, built on a foundation of strong relationships, play critical roles in driving the work of learning in a school. In particular, participants stressed the need for leaders to believe that *all* students can succeed. Subsequent discussion raised questions about which values and beliefs are inherent in individuals and which can be developed. For some participants, a potential leader's demonstrated values represent essential considerations in hiring and placement decisions. As one district leader explained, "For me, the values piece is one of the most important pieces in hires. The values shape the culture, and the culture shapes the outcomes." However, other participants emphasized the importance of creating experiences that can shape the values and beliefs of current and potential leaders, suggesting that they can also be developed. Another district leader voiced this perspective by saying, "Sometimes practice has to precede belief. If you can get people to practice it and be successful, then they start believing it, and frankly, believing in their own ability." Providing an existence proof that all groups of students can learn can be a powerful means of shaping the perspectives of those who must lead. However, participants emphasized that changing culture in this way is difficult work and takes time, especially when it confronts deeply rooted traditions and practices within a school or district.

Transcending Traditional Conceptions of where Leadership Resides

Participants also articulated the critical importance of preparing teachers to lead. Pragmatically, distributing leadership responsibilities lessens the burden on designated site leaders who face more demands in their role than ever before. Simply put, leveraging teacher leaders enables more work to get done. Equally important, however, providing

opportunities for leadership enables teachers with potential to grow personally and professionally and to demonstrate success—which can keep them engaged while allowing them to provide evidence of their readiness to move up to broader levels of responsibility and impact. With this in mind, district leaders emphasized the importance of a strong leader *surrounded by a strong team* in achieving success. Participants also recognized that broadening the pool of leaders requires a careful balance of top-down direction that ensures high standards and levels of support and bottom-up action that empowers individuals to act and grow.

Identifying Potential Leaders

This early conversation also brought to the surface an issue that would emerge throughout the meeting—the challenge of identifying prospective leaders, and the ways in which that challenge takes different forms in different district contexts. District leaders highlighted the importance of potential leaders demonstrating success before stepping into a leadership role. As one explained, "You have to *be* the principal before you can *become* the principal." Yet districts in early stages of their improvement trajectories may not have the luxury of promoting only the individuals who demonstrate readiness. When needs arise, these districts often find that they promote individuals before they are ready. In subsequent conversations throughout the meeting, participants noted the tension between recruiting from outside the district—which can introduce new talent that may not otherwise be present in the existing system—versus developing new talent from within—which can build on an existing culture and deep knowledge of context without introducing the skepticism or resentment that often accompanies the introduction of "outsiders" into the community.

For district leaders considering the challenge of identifying leaders, participants also emphasized the need to reconsider traditional pipelines. If assistant principals are to be prepared to assume greater responsibilities, districts need to prepare them to lead, not siphon them into specialized management roles. Likewise, when promising teachers do not evolve into successful principals, districts need to have the courage to move them back to the classroom if necessary, rather than "promote" them to the central office. For all of these considerations, district leaders have an obligation to coach leaders to enable their success.

Overall, participants emphasized that leadership to meet the demands of the 21st century requires a catalog of values, experiences, and skill sets—including and extending beyond the considerations addressed above. Instructional leadership is necessary, but only one of the strengths a leader must bring to the table. Courage to act, calm demeanor under fire, and the ability to influence others by enlisting their support were among the other characteristics that participants described. Moreover, effective leadership incorporates not only leadership skills, but the values and beliefs that will drive improvement—values and beliefs that are often inherent, but might also be cultivated. Finally, effective leadership is defined by outcomes, whether accomplished by an individual designated leader or (perhaps more often) through a team that collectively gets the work done.

How Do Challenges for Leadership Play Out in Specific District Problems of Practice?

Meeting participants then moved from this more general description of leadership needs to examining those needs through four specific district problems of practice.

Engaging Teachers to Lead Grading Reforms in Garden Grove

In efforts to prepare students for, and ensure their access to, college and skilled careers, Garden Grove district leaders identified a disconnect between what students knew—as evidenced by their California Standards Test performance—and the grades they received from teachers. While the district could identify the problem, the solutions were not clear, and would require a change in grading philosophy and practice that can be deeply personal for many teachers. From a leadership perspective, Garden Grove faced a dilemma with no clear answers and the challenge of resolving it in a way that would enable faithful implementation in classrooms.

The district elected to engage with principals and teachers to address the problem, working with teachers who were influential within their schools. The district purposefully selected not only teachers with open-minded and positive dispositions, but also those whose views reflected more cynicism about change efforts. District leaders established general parameters for what a new grading policy should entail, but left the work of defining any new policy to these principals and teacher leaders. At the same time, the district tried to ensure transparency in its efforts. It explicitly included union representatives in the process, and encouraged open communication by requiring participants to hold structured sharing sessions back at their school sites, including the collection and publishing of all comments about the activities. District leaders reported that empowering teachers to develop solutions not only enabled them to leverage the substantial expertise in schools, but also to build buy-in to the process. In addition, they reported that the inclusion of potential opponents markedly improved the process—not only by identifying challenges with proposed solutions immediately, but by smoothing the implementation process when these individuals returned to their schools as proponents of the new ideas they helped to develop.

Expanding Leadership for Change through Accountable Communities in Fresno

District leaders in Fresno sought to address the wide variability they had identified in instructional quality. At the same time, they encountered a challenge of scale in implementing new ideas primarily through the principal as the designated site leader. As one district leader explained, "Part of our problem was that we were forcing everything to go through the principal's door." From a leadership perspective, Fresno sought to expand the district's capacity for change, a problem it is addressing through a focus on teacher leadership.

District leaders began by working with the teachers' union to develop a clearer vision for what instruction should look like—a process that has produced a set of expectations for lesson plans the district calls Foundations. They have also implemented "Accountable

Communities"—teacher teams that meet regularly to address student learning needs as defined by assessment performance. The district sees the Accountable Communities as the primary vehicle for improving instruction for students, not only to share expertise and build capacity within teacher teams, but also to build a set of resources across the district by requiring teams to publish lessons and assessments they develop.

Like Garden Grove, this effort fundamentally relies on teacher leaders to motivate and carry out improvement efforts. Rather than a strategy to design a new district-wide initiative, however, Fresno's story is one of expanding a set of leaders beyond school principals to increase capacity for improvement. Ultimately, by building the capacity of teacher leaders, the district seeks to minimize burden on principals while empowering a broader set of leaders to take ownership over instructional growth.

Leading Culture Change for Restorative Justice in Oakland

District leaders in Oakland have expanded their focus beyond academic growth for students to begin addressing the challenges of social-emotional learning that they see as critical to promoting a healthier community. As part of this effort, the district has initiated efforts around "restorative justice," which seeks alternatives to zero-tolerance discipline policies that keep children out of classrooms and perpetuate traditions of disproportionate student exclusion—especially for the district's African American males. From a leadership perspective, the district faces the challenge of initiating and motivating a substantial cultural shift among adults in the K–12 system. Oakland is engaged in training efforts with a set of pilot schools in the district, with a focus on building capacity throughout the school—including a particular emphasis on the role of the principal in leading change. Efforts to date have included not only protocols to respond to disciplinary issues in ways that seek to repair relationships, but also to build school communities that can reduce the incidence of problems in the first place through more positive interactions between adults and students and among students themselves. Restorative justice fundamentally calls into question traditional approaches to discipline, and the shifts it requires ask many school leaders to reconsider strongly held values and beliefs. The district's emerging efforts therefore entail careful work to shift the prevailing culture; in doing so, they raise again the question of whether changing practice can change beliefs. The district's pilot tries to engage deeply with schools that are prepared to make the shift. In the process, it seeks to change beliefs by changing practice and demonstrating success—which can build support for an expansion to system-wide change.

Building Teacher and Leader Capacity for Common Core Implementation in Sacramento

Common Core implementation represents a shared challenge for *all* districts, one that meeting participants explored through the approach Sacramento has taken to build awareness and capacity in principals and teacher leaders alike. Sacramento district leaders saw implementation of the Common Core as an opportunity to address variance in instruction across classrooms and schools while building a culture of continuous improvement. From a leadership perspective, the district's approach seeks to address the

challenge of building capacity and deep levels of understanding about the new standards in a limited timeframe—a challenge that has led it to focus both on teachers and traditional site leaders. Monthly principals' meetings and an upcoming principals' institute in August have provided opportunities for district leaders to familiarize site leaders to both the content and instructional shifts introduced by the Common Core. At the same time, the district has engaged teams of teachers in meeting monthly to discuss assignments and student work and support each other and their teams in carrying work back to other teachers at their schools. Finally, the district is looking to support self-selected networks of schools focused on particular problems of practice associated with the Common Core. Taken together, these efforts seek to build deep levels of understanding and coherence across the system while empowering leaders (regardless of their designated title) to move instruction forward in schools.

Themes across District Problems of Practice

Across these four examples, several themes emerged, many of which reflected the priorities for leadership identified at the beginning of the meeting. First, district improvement efforts often specifically involve the principal as a leader of change at the school level. In Oakland, district leaders see the principal as a critical player in motivating cultural shifts and building new relationships with the surrounding community. In Sacramento, principals' understanding of the Common Core represents a key ingredient to leading changes in instructional practice at the school level. In Garden Grove, principals were among the central contributors to the district's new grading policy, while also playing the important role of identifying teacher leaders within school sites who would guide the process. (Notably, the Fresno example explicitly focuses on involving leaders *in addition to* the site principal.)

In addition to the roles of traditional site leaders, the examples also highlight the value of empowering teachers and creating opportunities for them to demonstrate leadership. The examples suggest that district leaders do not need all the answers, and that teachers can often drive improvement efforts in powerful ways. This was particularly true in Garden Grove, where teachers operated within some general parameters to guide grading practice in a way that addressed existing inequities while exercising strong professional judgment in creating effective policies. The lesson holds true in Fresno and Sacramento as well, however, as teachers have taken ownership over the process of learning and improvement, sometimes pushing the work forward before the principal has been ready. This movement towards teacher leadership often requires districts to relinquish some control over what happens in schools. District leaders repeatedly pointed to the payoff they have experienced by giving trust and respect before it has been earned, reaping the benefits of guiding and empowering teachers to work in the best interests of students despite the increased level of uncertainty this approach introduces into the process. As one district leader commented, "It's really reinforced my belief in the power of teacher leadership." Notably, the Garden Grove and Fresno district efforts have explicitly incorporated their respective teachers' unions into the strategy for change.

These examples also point to the difficulty in changing practice, especially when it calls into question deeply held values and beliefs. Oakland's restorative justice efforts may provide the most prominent example, as the district is asking leaders to fundamentally reconsider an unambiguous traditional approach to student discipline. Garden Grove provides a similar example, as grading practices often represent a very personal aspect of an individual teacher's instructional practice. Even the general movement in Fresno and Sacramento to increase critical thinking and professional judgment in a culture of continuous improvement reflects a change from traditionally isolated and/or compliance-driven approaches to instruction. In all cases, the process requires strategic efforts to build understanding—efforts that may be most effective when supported with patience and consistency over time. The benefits of demonstrating the success of new approaches as a means of changing beliefs may be an effective strategy in achieving these cultural shifts.

How Do Districts Approach the Challenge of Leadership Development?

Recognizing the demands for leadership and the ongoing gaps between existing capacity and need, discussion turned to the challenge of leadership development. In a similar fashion to the exploration of leadership within specific problems of practice, the session on leadership development provided opportunities for the group to explore this challenge through the lens of three district approaches.

Supporting Teacher Leaders and Aspiring Administrators through the Scaffolded Apprenticeship Model (SAM) in New York City Schools

The Scaffolded Apprenticeship Model (SAM), a program originally designed for aspiring administrators, is employed as an administrator certification program in multiple locations. Joan Talbert shared her research on SAM in New York City, where it has evolved to incorporate a much greater focus on teacher leadership, without the certification component and often without the administrator aspirations.

The basic SAM model asks teachers to work in teams and to use data to identify a target group of students outside the "sphere of success." The teams then use data to diagnose the skill needs of the target group, design an intervention, assess the outcome, and apply their learning more broadly. The goal of SAM is to engage aspiring administrators and teacher leaders in activities that will yield the shifts in perspective and practice necessary for a culture of continuous improvement. These shifts include moving from a focus on teachers and teaching to a focus on student learning, and from a view of assessment as summative and outside of instruction to seeing (and using) assessment for formative and instructional purposes. In addition, SAM seeks to engender a sense of shared accountability for student success among teachers and leaders, an emphasis on evidence-based practice, and more distributed models of leadership within schools. To achieve these shifts, SAM rests on the assumption that if you can focus on small tasks and produce results, you can change beliefs. As one meeting participant commented, "When you change [teachers'] behavior, their experience changes, which changes their beliefs." SAM also includes components on analyzing the system of the whole school with respect to the identified learning problem and on learning to lead inquiry with colleagues.

The shifts sought by SAM have several implications for leadership. First, research suggests the critical role of the facilitator in achieving success with the inquiry process. SAM follows a particular set of steps to identify needs and solutions, and the facilitator is important to ensuring faithful implementation of these steps. Second, although principals need to authorize the work in schools, they do not need to be superstars who do or lead all the work themselves. Skilled and thoughtful teachers can make the inquiry process in SAM a powerful tool for improving student performance. Third, in addition to coming from the work of the inquiry teams itself, the cultural shifts that district leaders seek can also come from teachers leading change. District leaders may feel the temptation to spur change through top-down communication of urgency or priorities, but as one meeting participant noted, "beating someone over the head with a moral imperative doesn't work." Rather, "[a] focus on what kids need to learn is where you get the appetite for professional growth." SAM thus provided another example of teacher leadership opportunities driving improvement. Recognizing this point, and the contrast with a traditional reliance on principals to drive school-level change, one meeting participant observed, "If we're going to reach every child, we need to recognize that leadership transcends title."

The dialogue around SAM at the meeting also raised the importance of learning from research and of implementing strategies well. Research suggests that SAM can be effective, an important finding in and of itself, but that it requires careful trade-offs and supports. District leaders who implement the model without acknowledging or attending to these can undermine its effectiveness. A central challenge for district and school leaders becomes not only the identification of appropriate strategies, but also the ability to implement them with fidelity. As one meeting participant noted, "The problem isn't lack of innovation. It's a lack of getting it done." The conversation also highlighted an ongoing challenge for the Collaborative in general: how to better integrate research into the group's ongoing work. This will remain an area of focus for Collaborative staff as we move forward.

Training New Principals through the Leadership Cohort in Fresno

The Fresno Leadership Cohort is a partnership between Fresno USD and California State University, Fresno (CSUF) designed to produce a better pipeline of school leaders in the district. The impetus for the program was the district leaders' realization that they had no "bench" of well prepared aspiring leaders to meet their school leadership needs. Although the district had to overcome initial resistance from cautious CSUF leaders wanting to protect the university's reputation and from site principals not wanting to lose good teachers, the program has evolved to incorporate several features that are unique from other higher education partnerships. Over time, Fresno USD leaders have increasingly had the opportunity to mold the program to meet the district's specific needs. Most courses are now taught by Fresno district leaders, and coursework aligns closely to the changing demands of the K–12 system—including alignment to the Foundations document introduced above. Fresno USD also funds half of the tuition for its participants, a reflection not only of its support for leadership development, but also a commitment to participants that increases their investment in the program and the district.

District leaders described one of the great successes of the Leadership Cohort as surfacing other areas of improvement for the district. For example, the mismatch between the skill sets of existing leaders and people who went through the Leadership Cohort revealed the need for Fresno to better develop its existing leaders (and not just focus on training new ones). The program also highlighted the need to help principals see leadership development and succession planning as part of their role, turning from a system in which site leaders tended to be territorial about their star teachers to one where leaders are attentive to meeting student needs across the district. In addition, district leaders found that early participants were primarily white, female, and coming from elementary schools, raising concerns about a pipeline of new leaders that poorly reflects the Fresno student population. The district has made progress in attracting potential secondary leaders, but continues to struggle to achieve gender and racial diversity. Finally, the district faces the ongoing challenge that the supply coming through the Leadership Cohort is not sufficient to meet its demand; despite initial success in meeting credentialing demands, the broader challenge of placing high quality leaders in every leadership position remains.

Conversation around Fresno's Leadership Cohort also raised issues regarding the role of higher education systems in developing leaders. Fresno USD has experienced some success in working with CSUF, but this is in large part because the district has had the opportunity to exercise a great deal of ownership of the program—an element that may not be present in similar partnerships elsewhere. Other practitioners in the meeting mentioned obstacles they face in working with "ivory tower people with no connection to the ground level" who determine the leadership skills schools need—skills that district leaders often find are ill-suited to actual job demands. In a different conversation during the meeting, another participant suggested that districts having to take this degree of ownership in their partnerships with higher education speaks to a flaw in the system. If higher education institutions are not meeting their obligations to prepare leaders for K–12 systems, alternative models and funding structures may be worth considering.

Ongoing Development for Current Leaders though Principal Summits in Sanger

In the early stages of improvement in Sanger, self-reflection among district leaders led to the realization that the existing group of principals featured some effective managers but few effective instructional leaders. The district therefore initiated a process of ongoing development work with principals connected to school improvement through a vehicle the district called principal summits. The summits—45-minute presentations to the superintendent's cabinet, followed by questions, and open to the public—began as a way to gauge what principals knew and how they were doing. District leaders explicitly elected not to provide a template for the presentations, reasoning that if principals merely had to plug in numbers into a predetermined form, they might fail to engage in the self-reflection that would lead to improvement. Nevertheless, the summits rested on the assumptions that every principal needs to know what is expected of them, and that feedback loops need to include both areas of strength and weakness. The first iteration of the summits primarily revealed how much principals did *not* know, but over time, they have driven principals to prepare extensively and, in the process, develop incredibly deep knowledge about their schools. District leaders assert that the summits have helped principals to focus on their

own planning, and in fact, many principals have extended the summits to require similar planning and presentations within their own schools and departments. Moreover, common challenges that have emerged during the summits have highlighted important areas of focus for district leaders and fostered increased networking among principals as they look to address shared problems and opportunities.

Themes across Approaches to Leadership Development

These three examples of leadership development make clear the importance of not only developing a pipeline for new leaders, but also of addressing the capacity of existing leaders. Sanger's principal summits are explicitly designed as a strategy to do this, but Fresno's efforts to build a pipeline of new leaders also revealed the need to work with existing principals to build their capacity. This lesson may be particularly salient for districts in early stages of improvement, where recruiting opportunities from the outside may be limited and the capacity of existing leaders may not be sufficient to lead schools where they need to go.

Once again, the importance of teacher leadership also emerged. SAM revolves around the roles of teacher teams in identifying student needs and addressing gaps in student learning. However, the Fresno and Sanger stories also have implications for teacher leadership. The Leadership Cohort has led the district to more actively identify its most promising teachers as candidates for the credentialing program, and the background characteristics of early participants have pushed the district to address disparities among emerging teacher leaders. The principal summits, while originally designed as a tool for engagement with and development of principals, have evolved as a model being replicated within school sites, where teachers must take on responsibility for identifying, understanding, and addressing student needs as revealed in student data—skills that teachers will need not only to improve their classroom practice, but to prepare for future leadership roles as well.

Participants also noted the degree to which leadership development strategies not only serve to build individuals' leadership capacity, but to identify common challenges facing the district as a whole. With SAM, initial efforts focused on small groups of students provide a foundation for examining the system of an entire school. With Fresno's Leadership Cohort and Sanger's principal summits, the district-wide initiatives have revealed common challenges that exist across individuals and schools. While these capacity building efforts have responded to the initial weaknesses that district or school leaders have identified, they have also revealed ongoing system-wide challenges that the district may be in the best position to address.

How Can Districts Approach the Challenge of Succession Planning?

From the conversation about leadership development, dialogue at the meeting expanded to include district leadership as well as school leadership, and to address the challenge of succession planning and preparing new leaders to meet future vacancies. In this vein, participants emphasized that leaders at all levels need to see capacity building as part of their role. The ultimate goal is for districts to have a deep bench of candidates prepared to

assume leadership positions. If this is to happen, succession planning starts with growing teacher leaders in the classroom.

Opportunities for succession planning may be reflective of a district's place in its improvement trajectory. Districts characterized by stability and cultures of continuous improvement have greater flexibility to identify and plan for upcoming needs. Indeed, these districts may face a different challenge—one of keeping potential leaders engaged and giving them opportunities for growth when new leadership opportunities are *not* available due to the high performance and stability of existing leaders. Nevertheless, upcoming needs and strategies to meet them must require persistent attention among school and district leaders—including the anticipation of needs that arise from promotions, retirements, and (as leaders improve), transfers to new leadership opportunities outside the district.

Meeting dialogue also focused on the particular case of superintendent transitions and the importance of managing board relationships through the process. Even in districts with ongoing trends of success, the temptation often exists for school boards to undertake a national search for a new superintendent, hoping to demonstrate to themselves and others that they have identified the best possible candidate available. Current leaders looking to ensure stability and coherence, therefore, have a responsibility not only to develop leaders to step into new roles (including teaching them about board dynamics), but also to work with the board to understand the trade-offs of looking outside the system for new candidates. Just as participants noted in conversations about recruiting school and district leaders, bringing individuals from the outside can help introduce talent and fresh perspectives to a system that lacks internal capacity to meet its goals. At the same time, though, these moves can impact relationships and levels of trust in the system and jeopardize the sustainability of existing programs. Regardless of how a board chooses to act, however, participants emphasized that shared beliefs and well-established professional practice help ensure consistency and coherence throughout any major transition.

How Might Districts Work Together to Improve Leadership Capacity?

The work of the Collaborative and the relationships it has supported have already spurred multiple forms of cross-district collaboration. Among these are examples of district sharing related specifically to leadership practice. For instance, Long Beach has loaned assistant principals who were ready to assume principal positions to Garden Grove, giving those individuals an opportunity to continue to grow when open principalships did not exist in Long Beach, while meeting a capacity need for Garden Grove at the time. Similarly, Long Beach's willingness to share one of its leaders with Fresno on a part-time basis during the last school year provided a growth opportunity for that individual while lending Fresno improved capacity to lead middle school improvement. Mentoring relationships between districts, including evolving work between Garden Grove and Oakland around human capital development, represent another form in which districts have worked with one another to improve leadership capacity. Participants at the meeting convened in small

groups to consider whether additional opportunities exist for districts to work together to develop strong site or district leaders.

One group suggested that the current educational environment increasingly promotes sharing and provides a backdrop that can enable more collaboration. Growth in recent years towards sharing through groups like the Collaborative, Urban Education Dialogue, and others is a departure from the isolation that superintendents have traditionally experienced. Moreover, the nature of those conversations has changed from commiserating about political, financial, and other obstacles to authentically addressing shared problems of practice. As one participant explained, "People are more open to sharing practices because there's a commonality and a connectedness."

Participants also highlighted the advantages of sharing ideas and systems. The examples of sharing staff provide evidence of potential leaders from one district continuing to develop where they might otherwise have lacked opportunities to move forward in their careers, while the receiving district can benefit from their leadership, expertise, and the ideas they bring from their home district. Cross-district visitations can allow leaders and teachers to expand their horizons and see the potential for their own system—in some cases providing an opportunity for effective practice to drive new values and beliefs. Describing her district's reasons for engaging in this cross-visitation, one participant explained, "It's not that [our leaders] know they have low expectations; they just don't know any other way." Sharing can also take the form of mentoring or coaching relationships, the latter representing an opportunity not only to share general advice, but also to assist leaders in unpacking specific situations to identify sources of leverage and make improvements. Participants emphasized that these examples of sharing can provide benefits to all districts involved. As one explained, "I look for opportunities to give to somebody else because I get that what you give away generally will come back to you, but improved."

Meeting participants also identified some of the conditions for success that can enable these collaborative opportunities to be successful. The *quality of the people* involved, and the respect shared among them, plays an important role in making opportunities worthwhile. Furthermore, the opportunities require *safe places* to take risks. The willingness to expose challenges and vulnerabilities is essential to successfully addressing those challenges, but also requires a great deal of trust. Participants also cautioned against becoming wedded to one model of sharing or collaboration. Many opportunities for shared learning exist, and *remaining open to new ideas* that most effectively address any particular situation can allow the greatest prospects for success.

Despite the promise of sharing and collaboration, challenges exist to making them work effectively. As one participant noted, "We get so focused on our own district operations" that seeking opportunities to share can become an afterthought. Looking for opportunities to share—like Sacramento's invitation to other members to participate in its principal summit this summer—needs to become a part of the way leaders see their work. The Collaborative could potentially play a role in identifying these opportunities and posting them on a shared calendar for members. Educators also face the challenge of time, especially before new relationships have yielded a substantial return. As one participant

noted, "One of the most valuable assets we have is time…The notion that I'm going to go spend time in another district is hard to accept. It becomes valuable when you build trust, and that takes time. You have to ask people to commit time before that time is valuable." Other participants described the level of comfort and trust that is often required before they are willing to seek help from others. As one individual described, "I worry that I'm imposing if I seek out coaching or mentoring informally. When it's structural, I know it's okay." This comment speaks not only to the importance of strong relationships in facilitating collaboration, but also to the value of formal opportunities to share. In recognition of these challenges, the Collaborative will work with districts to try to identify and support opportunities for sharing and collaboration.

Concluding Thoughts about Leadership

The meeting concluded with reflections from participants about the importance of leadership in the larger picture of school improvement. Specifically, leadership is the never-ending pursuit of continuous improvement. Moreover, it is an important piece of a larger conversation around human capital, which is itself a conversation about improving instruction. As one participant asserted, "I agree that it's all about instruction, but the thing that leverages instruction best is high quality leadership." The elements of leadership discussed throughout the meeting—from the skills it requires to the identification, recruitment, and development of leaders—matter to districts because they represent an essential component of school improvement.

Next Steps for the Collaborative

Before concluding the meeting, members briefly discussed next steps for engagement in the development of a weighted pupil formula (WPF) for school funding. While the policy failed in the most recent legislative cycle, participants expressed interest in continued involvement that can help a WPF policy be successful and determine what that policy will look like. Collaborative staff will remain engaged in the issue and look for opportunities to involve members in the process moving forward.

In the meantime, Collaborative staff are preparing to release a brief this summer that identifies lessons from the California Learning Assessment System of the early 1990s to inform districts as they move forward with implementation of and assessment around the Common Core. Brief meeting dialogue raised areas in which the Collaborative might engage in preparing districts and the public for a range of Common Core implementation efforts—including a focus on the ways in which the Common Core promotes an equity agenda that builds skills and knowledge for students that need it most. The Collaborative will continue to pursue these issues as it completes and disseminates the brief.

The date, location, and topic of the next Collaborative meeting have yet to be determined, but we anticipate that Meeting 20 will be held sometime in the late fall. In the meantime, for ongoing information about the Collaborative, resources from this and previous meetings, updates about Collaborative members, and information on upcoming events, please visit our website at www.cacollaborative.org.