

Meeting 23 Summary
Leveraging Opportunities for Instructional Excellence:
Implementing the Common Core

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Sacramento, 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 in order to inform dialogue and decisions of educators throughout the state. It does not, however, contain the background and contextual information that might otherwise accompany a product created for public consumption. For more information about the meeting and other Collaborative activities, please visit www.cacollaborative.org.*

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have been a consistent thread running through meetings of the California Collaborative on District Reform for more than three years. A meeting in June 2010 first enabled Collaborative members to explore the content of the standards, a meeting in June 2011 addressed assessment related to the CCSS, and subsequent meetings have continued to weave the new standards into conversations about equity, access, and overall school quality. The Collaborative’s 23rd meeting sought to meet member districts where they are today with regard to CCSS implementation and address some of the most pressing challenges and opportunities associated with that effort. Concrete examples of implementation efforts in Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD) provided a foundation to address critical issues of curriculum development, cultural and behavioral shifts for all members of our K–12 education systems, and resource allocation strategies that can best support the CCSS. In addition, Fresno, Oakland, and Sanger Unified School Districts shared specific problems of practice in CCSS implementation that they are facing and received consultation from members about their efforts to address those problems.

Setting the Sacramento Context

New senior leadership arrived in SCUSD in 2009 with the goal of developing a stronger learning organization that could better support student success. District leaders described trends of flat student performance in English-language arts (ELA), great variation across the district in instructional quality, and limited collaboration among teachers. In response, district leaders aimed to produce a more collaborative and reflective culture that could engage in continuous improvement in the service of students.

California’s adoption of the CCSS in summer 2010 represented perfect timing for SCUSD. Its strategic plan—informed by stakeholder input from around the district and released in January 2010—features three pillars, one of which is college and career readiness. The new standards provided a means for the district to meet this critical goal for students because the standards were already aligned to what leaders wanted to accomplish in district classrooms. As one district representative explained, “It gave us momentum to start the work.” The district therefore embarked on an immediate effort to begin implementing the standards and aligning curriculum, assessment, teaching, and learning to the demands of the CCSS. District leaders clarified, however, that the standards have not driven SCUSD’s work. Rather, it has served as a vehicle for the work. As multiple district leaders explained during the meeting, “We believe that the work is the learning and the learning is the work.”

Using Units of Study for Common Core Leverage

Effective CCSS implementation requires a broad range of interconnected efforts. Among these, districts embracing the CCSS often face the challenge of incorporating new standards and adapting instruction while continuing to use existing textbooks—which teachers often have used to guide lesson pacing and content for the year. Therefore, one of the questions the CCSS raises for districts is how to approach the development and incorporation of curriculum and instructional materials so as to be consistent with the standards—particularly in the absence of the traditional state textbook adoption process. As one component of its implementation efforts, SCUSD has embraced a units-of-study approach both as a tool for guiding curriculum and for framing professional learning.

SCUSD Process of Developing Units of Study

2010–11: Task Development and Lesson Design in ELA

After convening a stakeholder group to determine how best to introduce the CCSS in SCUSD, the district began its implementation work in January 2011. From the beginning, district leaders focused on the instructional core (the interaction among students, teachers, and content), with particular attention to learning tasks that are directly relevant to the standards and that call for students to demonstrate deep levels of understanding through those tasks. For their earliest efforts, district leaders invited principals to send a teacher to meet with peers in the central office to learn the standards. This group of teachers moved from standard to standard in ELA, asking what each standard required of teachers and students and designing tasks that would enable students to demonstrate mastery of that standard. By June 2011, the group had examined three standards.

Through the process, SCUSD educators realized that addressing standards in isolation from one another was a suboptimal approach because the standards are designed as an interconnected set of knowledge and skills. Building both on their own experience and the

advice of Phil Daro,¹ district leaders determined that a unit was a more appropriate grain size for approaching the work of implementing the standards. At the same time, district leaders realized that working with only one teacher per school was not sufficient to take the approach to scale.

2011–12: Developing Units of Study With the End in Mind

In 2011–12, district leaders revised their approach. The original team of teachers continued to work on CCSS implementation but shifted their focus to issues of assessment. At the same time, district leaders selected 19 early implementation sites to develop units of study in teams of teachers as a means of understanding the standards and incorporating them into classroom instruction. The approach to unit design follows a model of backward design in which educators begin by identifying the goals for student performance by the end of each unit and designing assessments that will produce evidence of whether students have achieved those goals. The group then specifies what needs to happen during an instructional unit—including elements like essential questions, instructional materials, and formative assessment tools and practices—to enable students to reach those goals. The result of these efforts is a set of draft units that can be used districtwide, as well as a model for teacher teams to continue developing units for their own sites.

2012–13: Supporting English Learners and Expanding to Mathematics

In 2012–13, the district’s work expanded and deepened. In particular, the focus sharpened on English learners (ELs) and access to complex texts, an effort for which the district drew on the support of Lily Wong Fillmore.² In addition, SCUSD moved beyond ELA to begin developing units of study in mathematics for Grades 3–8.

2013–14: Expanding Efforts to Every School and Beginning the Process of Integration

In 2013–14, SCUSD has expanded its efforts again to work with teams of teachers in every school and in every grade K–12 to develop at least one unit. Whether teachers have been engaged in the unit development process or not, every teacher in the district will use a replacement unit developed within the district for ELA and mathematics during the school year. At the same time, district leaders are working to connect CCSS implementation efforts to other district initiatives. These efforts include integration with the arts, attention to universal design for learning for students with disabilities, and a districtwide emphasis on social-emotional learning. The process of integration also enables the district to build upon its strengths. For example, the Linked Learning pathways already developed in many of the district’s high schools provide lessons about developing and using integrated units of study; a process of integrating the CCSS into these existing units is currently emerging.

¹ Phil Daro is a lead author of the CCSS standards in mathematics and has consulted with SCUSD district leaders on implementation of the standards.

² Lily Wong Fillmore is a professor of education at the University of California at Berkeley whose work focuses on issues of language access for second language learners in school settings. Fillmore’s article on what text complexity means for English learners, developed for the Understanding Language project, was one of the background readings provided to participants as a resource for Meeting 23.

SCUSD Use of Units of Study to Facilitate Professional Learning

Leaders in SCUSD have designed the unit development process to both follow an evidence- and inquiry-based cycle of continuous improvement and build teacher capacity to understand and facilitate student mastery of the standards.

In SCUSD, teachers begin with the end in mind by examining the standards themselves and determining what the standards expect students to know and be able to do. Next, teachers identify assessments that will provide evidence of whether a student has achieved mastery of that standard (or set of standards). Having established the final goal for a unit and the evidence of whether students meet that goal, teachers turn to research to deepen their content understanding and repertoire of instructional strategies. They also ground their thinking with a text-based discussion—where “text” takes on an expanded definition that could include video, student work, or online or print-based text—that asks whether the evidence they seek is available in the text at hand. From that point, teachers engage with the work as students and try on what they will ask students to do, refining as appropriate. Once teachers have developed a solid plan for instructional materials and delivery, they return to their own classrooms to work on the new lessons and tasks with their students, collecting student work as evidence of effectiveness. From this evidence, teachers reconvene and modify the units to better guide classroom instruction that will lead to desired student learning goals.

District leaders believe this approach to professional learning offers several benefits for teachers. First, it enables them to wrestle deeply with the standards and develop a deeper understanding of what the standards require of students. Second, incorporating evidence of student learning drives the refinement process; all lesson planning and instructional decisions derive directly from what the evidence indicates that students know and are able to do. Third, the view of implementation as a developmental process (evidenced by the labeling of all units as being in draft form and the explicit incorporation of unit revision into the process) supports an orientation toward continuous improvement that district leaders hope will frame teachers’ view of their professional role overall.

Challenges With a Units-of-Study Approach

District leaders in SCUSD described the units-of-study approach as one that has helped introduce the CCSS into classrooms while building the capacity of teachers in the system. Nevertheless, the meeting conversation revealed several challenges that have emerged from the SCUSD experience and from meeting participants’ review of a sample unit.

Time and Support

Some individuals identified challenges that relate to the district’s ability to effectively support the unit development. Finding time for teachers to learn and engage in the learning and development process is an ongoing struggle and has limited the speed with which the district can expand its efforts districtwide. Likewise, district leaders indicated that providing on-site support to teachers strengthens the quality of efforts at the school level,

but available resources limit the extent to which the district can provide this support. In addition, districts have traditionally relied on the state’s textbook adoption process to provide some criteria for instructional materials. With a shifting role for the state in this regard and a state timeline that lags behind the SCUSD implementation schedule, the burden of identifying resources has shifted primarily to classroom teachers.

Level of Specificity

Meeting participants also raised questions about the level of detail that a unit can or should incorporate. Providing access points for ELs and students with disabilities, incorporating prior knowledge, and other aspects of classroom instruction can help provide guidance to teachers on how best to facilitate student learning within a unit, especially when taking into account concerns about equity and access. These elements may be particularly important for teachers who were not involved in developing a particular unit. At the same time, excessive articulation of expected teacher behavior can create an overwhelming document of 30–40 pages while also stifling the creativity of teachers who may feel constrained by the overspecification of the unit details. Participants emphasized that districts must pair units like those being developed in SCUSD with strong professional development so that teachers are equipped to deliver effective instruction within the parameters that a unit provides.

Quality

SCUSD district leaders also raised the challenge of ensuring quality in unit development. The district’s units of study can help teachers understand the standards in deeper and more meaningful ways than traditional approaches, but it also calls on teachers to act as curriculum developers, a role that is new for many. High standards of quality need to accompany unit development, and district leaders need to find a balance between empowering and trusting teachers to exercise their professional judgment with ensuring quality control.

Assessment

The SCUSD units of study revolve around collecting evidence of student learning throughout a unit. Meeting participants identified some of the challenges of using assessment appropriately. Pretests can provide valuable diagnostic information for teachers to identify learning needs at the outset of a unit. Designing such tests effectively so that they can capture actionable information even on students who struggle just to access the text presents a challenge. In addition, teachers are better equipped to assess some skills than they are to assess others. Engagement with text and incorporation of evidence are artifacts of language that are reasonably easy to gauge. Discourse with peers—a skill frequently called for in the CCSS—is harder, especially if teachers wish to capture evidence of speakers building on one another’s ideas (and not simply speaking to each other). Nevertheless, participants emphasized that student work is a powerful indicator of progress; its use is a strength of SCUSD’s approach to date.

Equity and Access

Among issues of equity and access, some meeting participants raised the challenge of integrating the goals and objectives of a unit with the goals and objectives of an individualized education program (IEP). Traditionally, IEPs have been divorced from the desired outcomes of a particular classroom learning objective, a reality reinforced when special education teachers lack training or background in the content of instruction. As districts aim for more inclusive and integrated practices under the CCSS, changes in traditional practice and adult behavior will be necessary.

Opportunities to Improve the SCUSD Units of Study Approach

Meeting participants also identified some opportunities to improve the units of study in SCUSD. The first is the use of rich media resources. Technology can enable students to learn about unfamiliar content and interact with others in authentic ways. For example, the sample unit studied during the meeting explored the world of farming, a topic with which students may have various levels of familiarity. Videos that expose different aspects of farm life, interactions with real farmers via Skype, or other technology-enhanced activities can help learners gain content knowledge, improve student engagement, and facilitate the real-world application of knowledge and skills. These strategies also can improve access to content for ELs by exposing them to important material despite written language barriers. Rich media sources can be equally powerful for teachers. Recording and sharing lessons can help teachers learn from examples of high-quality instruction and receive feedback on their own practice.

The conversation also raised opportunities for greater coherence across subjects and grade levels. The topic of farming (the focus of several suggested texts in the sample unit reviewed during the meeting) offers some natural connections with both social studies and science. Integration of subject areas can help reinforce concepts and deepen students' engagement with and understanding of academic materials (and the standards they promote). Similarly, aligning efforts across grade levels can help students build on and connect models for demonstrating their learning (for example, the creation of a book) as they progress through their schooling. Finally, meeting participants advocated engaging arts and music teachers and librarians in identifying instructional materials and connecting student learning across subjects.

Meeting participants also advocated the expanded use of student work. Some expressed appreciation for the incorporation of student books into classroom libraries but also pushed educators to celebrate student work beyond classroom walls and make stronger real-world connections with the products that students develop. And again, meeting participants emphasized the power of student work in grounding instructional conversations in the end goals of a lesson and examining evidence of effectiveness throughout the learning process.

Supporting Shifts at All Levels of the System

The transition to the CCSS requires shifts at all levels in the system. A panel of SCUSD principals and teachers helped illustrate what these shifts look like at the school level. The panel and subsequent full-group conversation identified some key considerations for working on these shifts with teachers, leaders, parents, and students.

Shifts for Teachers

For the CCSS, a movement that fundamentally seeks to improve instruction and student learning in classrooms, the role of teachers is essential. As one meeting participant articulated, “Our teachers are front and center. As they go, that’s how the Common Core will go.” Meeting participants noted, however, that the transition requires a shift in both culture and practice. The Common Core calls for teachers to act as facilitators of learning, which demands a different skill set than the imparting of information that has often characterized instruction in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) era.

The shifts introduced through the CCSS present exciting opportunities, but the shifts also can create fear in teachers. Approaches to curriculum and instruction under the CCSS that break away from following the pages of a textbook remove some of the structure that teachers have grown accustomed to (and often rely on). Although some teachers may embrace the shift, others find it daunting—or may reject the notion that selecting or creating instructional materials is part of their job responsibility in the first place. As district leaders call on teachers to exercise greater degrees of autonomy and professional judgment, meeting participants emphasized the need to create trusting environments where teachers feel comfortable taking risks.

Because of the critical role that classroom teachers play, meeting participants also emphasized the need to leverage teachers’ experiences and expertise to inform implementation efforts. As one individual advocated, “If you really want to understand the work and how you can support it and make it get better, ask the people doing it.... Seeing teachers as the solution, not as the problem, is really, really important.” SCUSD efforts to develop units of study and other, similar approaches can enable district leaders to collect the advice and feedback of teachers and use them to enhance implementation effectiveness. As district leaders explore uncharted territory in supporting instruction and student learning, teacher feedback is essential for the continuous improvement process.

Panelists suggested that capacity-building efforts in SCUSD—many of them centered on the district’s units of study—have offered several benefits for helping teachers make these professional shifts and improve their instructional practice. The standards themselves and the district’s guidelines for unit development have given teachers and leaders common language for talking about instruction. Seeing the promise of the CCSS and the impact on student learning also has helped increase teacher excitement about the transition. The calls for teachers to select and incorporate a broader range of instructional materials have fueled this excitement in many cases. Instead of trapping teachers within the confines of a

textbook, units of study have allowed teachers to select content their students are actually interested in and that the teachers look forward to teaching.

Shifts for School Leaders

As districts seek to improve the quality of classroom instruction, site leaders also play a critical role in CCSS implementation. Many of the benefits for teachers—including the development of common language and the excitement of working with new sets of materials—apply to principals as well. However, the shift can be as uncomfortable for leaders as it is for teachers. One principal described the change of doing classroom walkthroughs and no longer feeling confident in determining what was happening at a given point in a lesson. In classrooms that feature more student discourse and incorporation of a wider range of instructional materials and departure from a traditional script can introduce as much change for those individuals charged with monitoring and supporting instruction as it does for those delivering it.

Because culture shifts create fear in many teachers, site leaders play an important role in addressing and mitigating that fear. Panelists and other meeting participants emphasized the need for leaders to support risk-taking and provide a safe environment for teachers to try new things. Describing her principal's approach to doing this, one SCUSD teacher explained, "That was a great gift for us, because we knew we could try things out and he wasn't going to come in with his check marks and say, 'Okay, you're fired.' ...It helps us be comfortable with the chances you're taking." Meeting participants also noted that leaders need to move beyond *allowing* risk-taking to *model* risk-taking. Demonstrating comfort with change and a willingness to make mistakes, evaluate, and refine one's practice as a leader can send a powerful message to teachers that the same kind of reflective practice is encouraged for them.

Shifts for Students

The Common Core also introduces shifts for students. Demands to explain and provide evidence for thinking and to engage in academic conversation with peers raise expectations on many students. These shifts also can produce frustration. The standards call for more collaboration and interactive discourse among students, but the additional burden can lead to anger or resentment when individual members of a group do not pull their own weight. Teacher experiences in SCUSD also suggest that the CCSS may be particularly challenging for students in gifted and talented education (GATE) programs, learners who have grown accustomed to getting the "right answer." The standards call for these students to process and explicitly support their thinking—often for the first time—and teachers face a challenge in leading them through the process without having the students shut down. Teachers implementing the CCSS therefore need to not only adapt their own instructional practice, but help guide students through a new set of expectations for what it means to be a learner.

SCUSD panelist comments also suggest that the CCSS can help create conditions for more positive student-to-student and student-to-adult interaction. One teacher explained that encouraging and valuing student input helps students feel valued: "My students know that

what they have to say is important.” The teacher added, “The foundation [of our work] is a respect for the student. It is at the basis of everything we do.” Other panelists added that the Common Core goes hand in hand with SCUSD’s efforts to support social-emotional learning. By pushing students to engage directly with one another in an academic setting, educators have found that the nature of all their interactions has changed. One panelist explained, “Our kids are becoming better people. They’re becoming nicer people.... It has transformed the school.”

Shifts for Parents

CCSS implementation also introduces shifts for parents. SCUSD panelists described pushback that sometimes comes from parents who no longer feel comfortable with how best to support their children under new academic expectations. At the same time, the CCSS can help parents become excited about new levels of engagement and higher levels of performance from their students. As one panelist said, “Now, parents can get inspired by their kids’ work.” Panelists and other meeting participants alike noted that communication is critical for keeping parents informed about and comfortable with classroom changes.

Identifying and Allocating Resources to Support the Work

Even when district leaders have identified promising practices for implementing the CCSS, they face challenges in identifying and effectively allocating resources to support the work. The meeting conversation raised some of these challenges and opportunities in the overlapping categories of people, time, and money.

People

Echoing themes that emerged in conversations about teachers and leaders, meeting participants emphasized the importance of people in effectively implementing the CCSS. Identifying, training, and supporting teachers in transforming their classroom practice therefore represent key CCSS priorities. Individuals have only so much time to participate in professional learning, however. Moreover, because most preservice training programs have not yet adapted so as to prepare teachers for the demands of the CCSS, the responsibility for supporting teacher learning falls largely to districts.

Meeting participants suggested several approaches to leverage a district’s strongest teachers. New teacher leadership positions can provide pathways for individual growth while also creating vehicles for providing on-site support. Early adopters of the standards—those who have already tried new strategies and navigated some of the inevitable obstacles that emerge—can act as resources for their peers. In some districts, strategies like pilot classrooms and fellowship programs for innovators can provide formal recognition and support structures for teachers well positioned to lead the work. In addition, some of the resisters to more scripted approaches to instruction might be strong allies and leaders of CCSS efforts. As one individual proposed, “Teachers who have not been enthusiastic about the constraints that they’ve been working on might be reenergized by having more professional opportunity and having their professional judgment more honored.”

Finally, meeting participants recognized that resources related to people can and should extend beyond classroom teachers. Roles in other parts of the district may need to shift in order to support the work of the CCSS. In addition, the districts can leverage the support of outside partners and foundations and work from other states. When insufficient resources exist within the district to support people to the extent that district leaders feel is necessary, outside sources of materials and expertise can help districts move forward.

Time

A second and closely related aspect of resources is that of time. Constraints that result from budget cuts and collective bargaining contracts can limit the hours available for professional learning and collaboration. Even as districts begin to experience a recovery from the recent financial crisis, many bargaining units place a higher premium on pay raises than professional development time. Traditional conceptions of scheduling also can confine district approaches. Reliance on seat time and Carnegie units, the use of average daily attendance (ADA) to drive school funding, and the parameters of a school's master schedule often limit flexibility and impede innovation.

Nevertheless, meeting participants identified ways to think outside the box to promote more efficient use of time. Purposeful integration of during-school and afterschool activities can help extended learning opportunities deepen and extend classroom learning, rather than operate as disconnected add-ons. In addition, emerging models of school reform that include early college high schools, hybrid learning, and expanded learning time can provide compelling examples of how to use time more flexibly and effectively while stepping outside the boundaries of seat-time requirements and ADA calculations. Accelerated courses and an orientation toward homework that builds in authentic and integrated learning experiences rather than isolated practice also might be tools for getting around the constraints of the master schedule.

Money

The third category of resources overlaps heavily with the first two. Meeting participants identified professional learning and collaboration as high priorities for allocating money within districts, as well as supporting technology and the development and use of assessments. As in the case of people, foundations and partnerships can add monetary resources to school systems, but district leaders need to exercise sound judgment in engaging in these relationships to ensure that the priorities of their partners align with the district's direction. Districts also can leverage existing and newly available funding streams to support CCSS implementation efforts. The one-time state allocation of \$1.25 billion and the additional funding and flexibility afforded by the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) present districts with new monetary resources. In addition, federal dollars available through Title I and Title II can help districts pursue initiatives at the local level.

In the area of technology, meeting participants noted that devices are increasingly cost effective, which could help districts achieve cost savings in helping schools access and leverage the power of technology. Nevertheless, bandwidth and infrastructure demands

remain and will continue to require substantial funding in order to support the work of instruction and assessment in classrooms.

Exploring the State Role in Common Core Implementation

As meeting participants wrestled with the many issues surrounding CCSS implementation at the local level, they also explored roles the state might play in supporting these efforts. California is embracing a movement toward greater local control, a transition that might enable high-capacity districts to act in the way that best meets their students' needs. The movement toward more local autonomy, however, also creates a challenge for districts that have low capacity and few avenues for support. In a time of transition, the opportunity exists to revisit the role that the state can play in interacting with districts across California.

Ideas emerged from the group conversation about how the California Department of Education (CDE) can best support local implementation efforts. Meeting participants suggested that CDE can highlight best practices and serve as a broker of expertise by accumulating and vetting resources—a role for which most districts lack capacity. CDE also might help leverage the power of networks by facilitating peer-to-peer networking. Another idea that emerged was for CDE to take district leaders on loan for a year, essentially borrowing local expertise to more effectively incorporate an on-the-ground perspective into state-level decision making. Such ideas suggest a transition for CDE from an organization that has traditionally focused on compliance to one that embraces a role of support. At the same time, meeting participants recognized that CDE receives the majority of its funding from the federal government and works within the constraints of those funding streams. New stakeholder groups—including the largely undefined California Collaborative on Educational Excellence—could represent an opportunity to help CDE move into a stronger support role.

Conversation about the state role also raised the question of whose responsibility it is to develop capacity in the first place. Discussions about “the state” sometimes suggest a monolithic bureaucratic entity, when in fact the legislature, CDE, and the State Board of Education all play important (and sometimes politically complicated) roles in leading the state's work. Even beyond “the state,” leaders at the local level and in a wide variety of stakeholder groups play critical roles in advancing the work of student learning. The current policy environment might encourage the education community to think more broadly about the way that California supports the CCSS. CDE is a critical player in these efforts, but one of many that can contribute capacity and expertise. The Consortium for Common Core Implementation, which has guided a statewide survey of districts about CCSS implementation efforts and produced a leadership planning guide for district leaders, provides one example of how a more dispersed model of support can operate.

Connecting Themes About Common Core Implementation

Across the more targeted discussions about curriculum development, capacity building, shifts for educators, resource allocation, and the state role, several broad themes regarding CCSS implementation emerged.

Understand and Appropriately Contextualize CCSS Implementation

Throughout the meeting, individual comments underscored the point that the standards are a means, not an end, to improving student learning. The standards create the conditions for districts to pursue best practice, but they will not in and of themselves create best practice. Likewise, the drive toward effective implementation can create the false perception of implementation as an endeavor involving checklists or a finish line, a point in time at which school systems can consider themselves “done.” Meeting participants emphasized that implementation is a process that will evolve and continue over time. Educators must remember to maintain a focus on *student learning*, and not implementation, as the end goal.

Equally important for understanding the bigger picture is communicating about the CCSS. District leaders need to reach out systematically both to the adults within the K–12 system and to students, parents, and the broader community. Clarity and transparency in these efforts are essential. So too is the message that the transition to the CCSS is about *instruction*; the standards represent a tool to help districts achieve high-quality instruction. At the same time, district leaders need to communicate honestly about benefits and challenges, taking care not to oversell the benefits of the CCSS.

Experiment, Then Maximize the Effectiveness and Efficiency of the Work

Meeting participants described the work of CCSS implementation as inherently messy. Initial efforts will never be perfect. Comments throughout the meeting, however, reinforced the perspective that improvement and refinement are never possible until educators start *somewhere*. From the SCUSD context, for example, early efforts to develop tasks around specific standards revealed some important obstacles and informed the eventual transition to developing entire units of study. Describing the importance of experimentation and reflection at the school level, one SCUSD panelist advised, “You’ve got to just do it. When you get involved, you have things to learn from. From the abstract, it’s overwhelming. [When things get concrete,] you can revise and improve and hone.”

Coupled with the notion of trying new things is the imperative of developing trust. The SCUSD panel revealed some important elements of fostering healthy relationships at the school level. Meeting participants emphasized nevertheless the need to build trust from the district level as well. As an example, one district has elected to suspend all benchmark assessments and educator evaluations for individuals in good standing in an attempt to relieve pressure on teachers and leaders and give them the freedom to try new things. The challenge becomes creating and maintaining trust while continuing to monitor practice and push teachers and leaders to improve.

Conversation throughout the meeting also emphasized the power of engaging people in the construction of CCSS tools and ideas. In the SCUSD context, this has meant the direct involvement of teachers in the development of units of study. District representatives described the benefits of this effort not only in guiding instructional efforts, but in building understanding among teachers about what the standards require and fostering

commitment to the CCSS effort. Describing the efforts at one school site, an SCUSD panelist shared that “Teachers struggle together. They are invested and they care how it turns out. There is buy-in.... They have a bond now that is way deeper than passing someone in the hall.”

Meeting participants also repeatedly extolled the benefits of networks as a means of accelerating work at all levels of the system. Leveraging the collective expertise of peer groups and building on lessons from other contexts helps implementation efforts move faster. Just as professional learning communities of teachers can help push the work of quality instruction in classrooms, similar learning networks among principals, district leaders, and even states can enable entire systems to move forward more quickly.

Make the CCSS a Tool for Improving Outcomes for All Students

Meeting participants consistently raised the importance of using the CCSS to facilitate access for all students, including ELs, students with disabilities, and other subgroups that have struggled to achieve success in our public education system. Conversation about ELs in particular identified some of the opportunities present within the CCSS. Because of the language demands of the Common Core, language has become *everyone’s* issue. Therefore, motivation to build in the language supports that ELs need may be increasing because those supports are needed for *all* students. Language development need not be relegated as a responsibility for “other” teachers to address. As one meeting participant advised, “We need to move away from the separation between Common Core and [English language development].” California’s ELD standards may represent one tool to help with this effort to integrate supports for students; these standards are evolving to include alignment between the ELD standards and the CCSS beyond the area of ELA in recognition of the fact that language demands exist for students across content areas.

Acknowledge and Address the Tensions Inherent in CCSS Implementation

Dialogue throughout the meeting identified some fundamental tensions with CCSS implementation efforts.

Balancing Urgency With the Pace of Adult Learning and System Change

First, educators must strike a balance between urgency and doing things right. Comments suggested that there is a “top speed” for implementation. Systems must build an infrastructure of support, and adults must have the opportunity to build deep understanding of the changes they need to make in their practice. An allowance for this process of development, however, must always maintain the urgency to meet student needs as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Balancing Respect for Professional Judgment With Guidance and Support

District leaders also must find ways to provide sufficient guidance while enabling and pushing teachers to exercise their professional judgment. Using existing tools—whether units of study or instructional materials or assessments—can help educators act more efficiently and leverage the work of early adopters. Teachers who have not been involved

in the development process, however, will not have experienced the same level of thinking and planning that led to the end product, and they will need substantial support to understand and embrace new tools. Without understanding, educators face the danger that these tools (for example, applying the SCUSD units of study in other district contexts) might simply lead to the same kinds of scripted curricula that emerged under NCLB.

Balancing Movement to Scale With Appropriate Attention to Organizational and Adult Learning and Development

Similarly, meeting participants cautioned that efforts to move good work to scale should avoid compliance-oriented and bureaucratic approaches that have frequently characterized education management under NCLB. Networking and collaboration represent powerful tools for improvement, but the danger exists of creating ritual versions of a professional learning community that do not produce the deep conversations needed in order to push instruction forward. Likewise, district leaders need to avoid the temptation to create checklists and encourage a compliance mentality as they introduce changes at scale. An orientation toward reflection, continuous improvement, and learning should drive implementation at all levels.

Next Steps for the Collaborative

Collaborative staff members are preparing to release a brief that identifies lessons that some Collaborative districts have learned from Tier 3 categorical flexibility and from employing a weighted pupil formula at the local level that might inform the work of other districts as they embrace the flexibility afforded through LCFF. The date of the next Collaborative meeting has yet to be determined, but we anticipate that Meeting 24 will take place in Los Angeles Unified School District and will present members with the opportunity to wrestle with implementation issues that occur with LCFF. In the meantime, for ongoing information about the Collaborative, resources from this and previous meetings, updates about Collaborative members, and information about upcoming events, please visit our website at www.cacollaborative.org.