Designing an Accountability System that Builds Professional Capacity and Sustained Commitment to Equitable Access to Deeper Learning Opportunities for All Students

the CORE districts and deeper learning

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Two important policy shifts characterize the current wave of education reform in the United States and in California specifically: (1) a growing consensus that college, career, and civic readiness should be the educational goal for all high school graduates, and (2) a trend toward local control or flexibility in implementation to achieve that goal. Taken together, these trends present new challenges for school district leaders. The learning demands of college, career, and civic readiness imply that all young people in public schools must have access to deeper learning opportunities that will prepare them to master rigorous academic content, think critically, work collaboratively, and learn to apply classroom learning to real-world contexts. As well, districts are being called on to play a central role in developing the strategies, capacities, and professional accountability systems that are equal to these new learning goals. Against this policy backdrop, the California CORE district leaders have joined in a long-term collaborative to explore common strategies for advancing student achievement in their individual districts.[1] This brief begins by defining deeper learning and explores its importance to educational equity and the goal of college and career and civic readiness for all public school youth. We conclude with an examination of how the CORE district leaders have collaborated with the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities (Gardner Center), Transforming Education,[2] and other partners to design a school accountability system that ensures equitable access to deeper learning opportunities for all youth by focusing on a process of district-led, continuous organizational learning and improvement.

1 California Office to Reform Education (CORE). Six of the nine CORE districts have obtained a waiver from the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) to develop an alternative school quality improvement system. Those "federal waiver districts" include Fresno Unified, Long Beach Unified, Los Angeles Unified, Oakland Unified, San Francisco Unified, and Santa Ana Unified. The other collaborating CORE districts include Garden Grove Unified, Sacramento Unified, and Sanger Unified.

2 Transforming Education is a national non-profit organization in Boston Massachusetts that had spearheaded the CORE district's work to develop measures of the social and emotional constructs incorporated into the CORE School Quality Improvement Index. See: http://www.transformingeducation.org/

Background

Deeper Learning for College, Career, and Civic Readiness

There has been a significant shift in American education over the last five years from a narrow focus on promoting academic proficiency in Mathematics, English and Language Arts to a broader embrace of college, career, and civic readiness for all youth. Since 2010, 45 states (and six major California districts) have received NCLB waivers to voluntarily develop comprehensive plans designed to improve educational outcomes for all students, increase equity, and aim for universal college, career, and community readiness.[3] Although there is no single authoritative definition of college, career, and civic readiness, there is a growing consensus that to achieve their full potential as future adults, parents, and citizens, young people need to develop a range of skills, competencies, and academic knowledge.[4] While academic mastery is important, so too are certain social and emotional dispositions and mindsets associated with learning, such as growth mindset, intellectual openness, self-management, meta-cognition, and empathy. As well, full human development, and the more specific demands of college, career, and civic readiness, require competency in transferring or adapting what one learns in school to a life-long series of new social situations, problems and creative challenges. This last set of learning objectives implicates deeper learning skills to cultivate critical thinking, problem solving, creativity and communication skills that will support the effective application of academic mastery and social and emotional learning over the course of a lifetime.

The National Academy of Sciences has defined deeper learning as "the process through which an individual becomes capable of taking what was learned in one situation and applying it to new situations…. (i.e., knowledge of how, why, and when to apply this knowledge to answer questions and solve problems)."[5] Conceived in this broad way, deeper learning can be understood to contribute to a range of individual and social goals, including shared learning and interactions with others in a community of interest, or personal mastery in a particular domain of knowledge or practice. At its core, deeper learning is about learning to learn. Deeper learning enables each of us to move beyond the memorization of important facts, concepts, or processes, to the adaptive application of that knowledge to solve new problems or to be independently creative.

Why is deeper learning so critical to the full development of academic, social, and emotional skills, both in absolute terms and as an equity concern?

The National Academy of Sciences' own investigation and other meta-analyses amply document the statistically significant, and positive relationships between the cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal deeper learning competencies and desirable adult outcomes, including academic, labor market wages, democratic engagement, social connectedness and health outcomes.[6] The equity

3 In California, state leaders have proceeded with reforms that embrace universal college, career and civic ready learning goals through the accountability reforms embedded in the Local Control Accountability Plans.
4 See e.g., Conley, David T. (2014). Getting Ready for College, Careers, and the Common Core: What Every Educator Needs to Know (Jossey-Bass, San Francisco).
5 National Research Council. (2012). *Education for Life and Work: Developing Transferable Knowledge and Skills in the 21st Century.* Committee on Defining Deeper Learning and 21st Century Skills, J.W. Pellegrino and M. L. Hilton, Eds., Board on Testing and Assessment and Board on Science Education, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. An online PDF of this report is available from the National Academy Press at: http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=13398. p. 5-6
6 National Research Council. (2012), p.37-38; also generally, Thapa, Amrit, Jonathan Cohen, Shawn Guffey, and Ann Higgins-D'Alessandro (2013). *A Review of School Climate Research.* Vol. 83 Review of Educational Research, pp.357-385, September, 2013. Available online at: http://rer.sagepub.com/content/83/3/357.full.pdf+html.

imperative for attending to deeper learning opportunities in public schools is also evident in the relevant literature. The National Academy of Sciences documents a long series of rigorous studies that confirm how technological advances, globalization, and other economic and social changes over the last forty years have made equitable access to deeper learning and the college, career, and civic readiness it supports the central driver of social mobility. "Across much of the 1980s, the inflation-adjusted earnings of high school graduates in the U.S. plunged by 16 percent, while the earnings of college-educated workers rose by nearly 10 percent."[7] This trend continued to diverge in the two decades that followed and even accelerated during the economic crisis of 2008. Other scholars, including Prudence Carter have carefully and more pointedly documented how an "opportunity gap" has evolved in American public schools during the same period, where low-income students, students of color, and English language learners often do not have the same access to deeper learning opportunities requisite for college, career, and civic readiness.[8]

How concern for equitable access to deeper learning is currently situated in public education debates: A tri-level challenge

As nearly every state, including California, establishes plans to make college, career, and civic readiness the guide-star for student learning, the need for corresponding systems change and new capacities becomes evident at every level of our public education system. At the classroom level, educators are preparing to use new technologies and to implement curricula that requires greater capital and human investments in more sophisticated teaching methods and approaches. This, in turn, implies that novice and veteran teachers are being asked to engage in professional learning that not only expands their knowledge and teaching repertoire, but that aims to transform long-standing habits of practice and to challenge deeply held beliefs about their role as teachers.

At the school level, school leaders must implement more robust assessment systems capable of promoting continuous learning and improvement among both students and faculty. They must also address school culture and climate issues that promote academic engagement of all youth directed at the new learning goals. And, the heightened importance of school climate and social and emotional learning also raise the stakes for incorporating afterschool staff, support providers, and Linked Learning partners into a more coherent effort to expand learning opportunities across a restructured day.

At the top of the American school governance structure, there is a growing recognition among state and national leaders that the pursuit of universal college, career, and civic readiness will demand a next generation accountability framework anchored in a more ambitious vision for student learning. The challenge, according to experts, is to devise and implement a new accountability paradigm that promotes professional accountability for equitable access to deeper learning.[9] The balance of this brief examines the potential dimensions of this new paradigm within the context of the school accountability system currently being designed by the constituent school districts of the California Office to Reform Education (CORE) under the auspices of a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education.[10]

7 National Research Council (2012), p.47.
8 Carter, Prudence L., and Kevin Welner (2013). Closing the Opportunity Gap: What America Must do to Give Every Child an Even Chance (Oxford University Press: New York) at pp 1-10. Also see, Darling-Hammond, Linda. (2010). *The Flat World and Education: How America's Commitment to Equity will Determine our Future* (Teachers College Press: New York).
9 Darling-Hammond, Linda, Gene Wilhoit, & Linda Pittenger (2014). *Accountability for college and career readiness: Developing a new paradigm.* Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education. Also, Center for American Progress and the Council of Chief State School Officers (2014). *Next Generation Accountability Systems: An overview of current state policies and practices.* Available from the Center for American Progress at: https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Accountability-report.pdf
10 The CORE waiver districts include Fresno Unified, Long Beach Unified, Los Angeles Unified, Oakland Unified, San Francisco Unified, and Santa Ana Unified.

CORE District leaders work to define California's commitment to College, Career, and Civic Readiness for All.

In 2010, California began a long process of redefining its school accountability system. In August of that year, the State Board of Education (SBE) adopted the Common Core State Standards, and subsequently the Next Generation Science Standards both of which explicitly embody new expectations for all students to engage in developing deeper learning skills.[11] Then, in September of 2012, the legislature directed the SBE to begin work on revising the state's former school Academic Performance Index, to include multiple measures of school performance, limiting academic assessment scores to 60 percent of the school index, and directing that the remaining 40% of the index should include non-test based achievement measures, including graduation rates for high schools. Signed into law by Governor Jerry Brown, the new legislation affirmatively reflected the stated goal that California schools should promote college, career, and civic readiness for all California youth.[12] The legislature directed that the SBE should work to have the new system in place by the 2016-17 school year.

The legislature's actions spurred the California Department of Education (CDE) and other state leaders to begin conversations with US Department of Education (USDOE) about obtaining a waiver from the accountability provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). State leaders agreed that the federal accountability approach was no longer consonant with the new state direction on college, career, and civic readiness, and contained inflexible rules that made it difficult to spend federal funds on more innovative efforts to achieve equitable access to deeper learning opportunities for all students. But by the spring of 2013, it became clear that CDE and USDOE officials could not agree on a path to an NCLB waiver, and so the CORE districts applied as a collaborative to obtain their own NCLB waiver.

The collaborating school superintendents argued that together, the CORE districts enrolled almost one million California students, including almost one quarter of all African-American students and about 1 of every 5 Latino and English Learner students in the state. They were also anxious to move quickly on implementing a more robust accountability system that would be better aligned with local efforts to use student performance data for organizational learning and improvement and that they could begin designing and testing as early as the 2014-15 school year… two years ahead of the state timetable. On August 6, 2013, the Obama Administration granted an NCLB waiver, opening the door for the CORE districts to jump ahead and design a school accountability and improvement system that might set the standard for equitable access to deeper learning opportunities for the rest of the state.

Designing a School Quality Improvement System for Equity and Deeper Learning

Before turning to the specifics of the CORE district's accountability framework, it is helpful to review how leading policy analysts are defining the essential elements of an accountability system equal to the task of college, career, and civic readiness for all. Darling-Hammond and her colleagues, for example, argue that such a system would ideally "nurture the intrinsic motivation needed to develop responsibility on the part of each actor at each level of the [education] system."[13] This new accountability paradigm would rest on three pillars: (1) a broad, high quality curriculum and associated assessments that focus on ***deeper learning opportunities***, (2) a commitment to ***professional capacity building*** to help new and veteran teachers, principals, and school support partners to deliver on the promise of college, career, and civic readiness, and (3) appropriate and ***adequate capital resources***.

John Snyder and Travis Bristol build on this framework to specify a fourth pillar that directs attention to the importance of (4) ***a systematic focus on continuous improvement*** characterized by data-driven inquiry at all levels of the organization and directed at continuous learning.[14] These four accountability pillars sit within a

11 Darling-Hammond, and David N. Plank (2015). *Supporting Continuous Improvement in California's Education System.* (A joint publication of Policy Analysis for California Education and the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education, at p.8-9. Available at: https://edpolicy.stanford.edu.
12 See, California Senate Bill text, SB 1458, and related legislative history documents. SB 1458 was signed by Governor Jerry Brown in September 2012. Available at: http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201120120SB1458
13 Darling-Hammond, et.al, (2014) at p.4.
14 Snyder, John, & Travis J. Bristol (2015). Professional accountability for improving life, college, and career readiness. Education Policy Analysis Archives, Vol. 23 (16). http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v23.2002. Snyder and Bristol forefront an education that aims to improve a student's life before the more specific social goal of college and career readiness.

clear policy frame that puts equity at the center and takes a youth development stance,[15] which focuses on learning for long-term social, emotional, and personal growth, as much as for economic and civic participation.

The CORE Districts are currently two years into the design of a School Quality Improvement System (SQII) that has the express purpose of promoting "deep student learning and effective implementation of new standards that will prepare students for college and a career."[16] The SQII will be publicly launched and introduced to school leaders (including performance baselines for participating schools) in December 2015.[17] While it is too early to assess the effectiveness of this new system, enough of the design is in place to assess whether the SQII comports with the four pillars of the deeper learning accountability framework and might be equal to the task of promoting college, career, and civic readiness for all. Each of these design pillars is discussed below in turn.

A Commitment to Continuous Improvement and Professional Learning

Before turning their attention to the technical aspects of a new accountability system, the CORE district superintendents committed to designing a system that would advance a culture of data-driven continuous improvement that they were each working to build within their respective districts. This singular commitment put the CORE districts on an organizational path that pushed against the prevalent norms of state-led accountability. Long a central approach in enterprises such as manufacturing or healthcare, the concept of systematic continuous improvement is only an emerging approach in public education. In fact, our federal and state accountability systems have, over the last two decades, centered on a more familiar but very different results-based approach that draws attention to system inputs and population-level outcomes while treating implementation processes as something of a 'black box.' By contrast, education organizations that focus on continuous improvement must open the black box, explicitly examine the implementation processes and attempt to improve each critical step between inputs (e.g., teacher training

in the common core state standards) and population outcomes (e.g., student performance in math).[18] To this end, continuous improvement systems in education have been found to be characterized by a set of key features: leadership that brings a continuous learning mindset to the work, broad engagement of all system stakeholders, organizational and process structures supportive of adult learning, and use of data to inform inquiry, action, assessment, and intervention redesign.[19] Each of these elements is examined below.

Leadership. Prior to forming CORE, most of the participating district leaders were already members of a learning community supported by the California Collaborative on District Reform (California Collaborative) organized by the American Institutes for Research (AIR). Through the California Collaborative, the CORE district leaders meet at least three times a year with each other and with policymakers and researchers to explore particular problems of district practice and system improvement. Since 2000, both NCLB and the state Public School Accountability Act, were creating policy pressures for school principals and teachers to improve student performance, but CORE district leaders largely credit their involvement in the California Collaborative for advancing their knowledge of how district-level leadership can create the conditions and organizational structures to help principals and teachers to increase their capacity

15 In the education context, a youth development stance (sometimes referred to as a "whole child approach" draws attention to the full range of learning skills that support the capacity of a young person to understand and act effectively within their social, physical and economic environments. Optimal development in youth enables individuals to lead a healthy, productive life, as youth and later as adults, because they gain the competence to earn a living, engage in civic activities, and from supportive social relationships as individuals, partners and parents.
16 See remarks of Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, US Department of Education press release, August 6, 2013. Available at: http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/obama-administration-approves-nclb-waiver-request-california-core-districts.
17 Reports with school-level results on the 2014-15 CORE Index will be made publicly available in February, 2016.
18 Park, Sandra, Stephanie Hironaka, Penny Carver, and Lee Nordstrum (2013). *Continuous Improvement in Education.* A white paper published by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Palo Alto, California. Available at: www.carnegiefoundation.org
19 See Park, et.al, (2013) at p.23; see also, Snyder and Bristol (2015).

(knowledge and skills) to respond to policy pressures effectively and creatively.[20] In March of 2015, for example, Collaborative members gathered in Fresno (a CORE district) to learn how Fresno uses data-informed cycles of inquiry to improve district and school level practices aimed at advancing college-going rates among Fresno youth. A broader meeting goal was for participants to learn from each other about the specific role that district leaders can play in creating the context for system continuous improvement.[21] Superintendent Mike Hanson's work in Fresno is emblematic of the commitment in the CORE waiver application to continuous improvement through capacity-building and system learning.

The Principle of Broad Engagement. Park and her colleagues find that continuous improvement in the education sector requires a routine "bringing together individuals from across the system," that allows them to "understand the root causes of the problems they face, develop a collective vision for the entire organization," and build a clear sense of shared accountability for responsive action.[22] Likewise, Darling-Hammond and Wilhoit emphasize that broad and iterative engagement of stakeholders across the district is essential to promote collective responsibility for "ensuring that the best available knowledge about curriculum, teaching, assessment, and student support will be acquired and used" and for engaging in continual improvement based on results.[23] To this end, the CORE leaders adopted a collaborative framework developed by Michael Fullan who has written that a key to system-wide success is the engagement of all relevant stakeholders (principals, teachers, counselors) in teamwork that taps into the "intrinsic motivation" of practitioners and builds their capacity to respond effectively to policy pressures.[24]

Here again, CORE leaders credit their prior work in the California Collaborative, particularly a Collaborative-documented partnership between Fresno and Long Beach Unified, to set the standard for their norms of broad engagement.[25] In this CORE prototype, Fresno and Long Beach set out to create cross-district teams of district administrators and instructional leaders to focus on mathematics instruction, improving outcomes for English learners, leadership development, and college, career, and civic readiness. They agreed to hold quarterly meetings to discuss the strands of work. These quarterly meetings between the districts put "data dashboards" at the forefront and allow the key staff to share data practices that accelerate change. Through this approach, participants across different departments within and across the districts modeled the use of performance data use not only for accountability, but also to break down organizational 'silos' and shed light on common challenges in a way that leads to identifying shared solutions.[26] Leveraging this early partnership model, CORE leaders have established a number of organizational structures to promote broad engagement across and within their districts to advance CORE accountability reforms. Two of these organizational structures, the school pairing work and the data-leads collaborative are described in some detail in the following section.

20 See e.g., CORE Waiver Application to the U. S. Department of Education, p25 (March 31, 2015 markup). Available online at: http://coredistricts.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/CORE-ESEA-Flexibility-Request.pdf
21 See e.g., California Collaborative on District Reform (2015). *Accountability and Support in a Coherent System of Continuous Improvement,* Meeting 27 (Fresno, California, March 5-6, 2015). Available at: http://cacollaborative.org/meetings/meeting27
22 Park (2013), *Continuous Improvement in Education,* at p.23.
23 Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit and Pettinger (2014) at p.9.
24 Fullan, Michael (2011). *Choosing the Wrong Drivers for Systemic School Reform,* (Centre for Strategic Education, Melbourne) Seminar Series Paper No. 204, May 2011. Available at: http://edsource.org/wp-content/uploads/Fullan-Wrong-Drivers1.pdf
25 See, http://coredistricts.org/our-work/building-capacity-for-improvement/
26 Duffy, Hellen, Stephanie Hannan, Jennifer O'Day, and Jim Brown (2012). *Building District Capacity for Data-Informed Leadership* (A Publication of the California Collaborative on District Reform, American Institutes for Research). Available online at: http://www.cacollaborative.org/publication/special-series-fresno-long-beach-learning-partnership-series-overview

Organizational and process structures supportive of adult learning. In order for broad engagement in adult learning to be meaningful and sustained, it must be supported by procedures and structures that institutionalize the learning process and make it part of the routine way of doing business in an organization. To advance this goal, CORE leaders have developed a set of what they call "collaborative communities of practice." One of the most prominent of these CORE collaboratives is comprised by pairing educator teams from low-performing Title I schools with higher performing Title I schools that have similar demographic profiles. The explicit goal of this approach is to move beyond the student performance data to examine setting- and system-level factors that affect student academic engagement, and to facilitate discussions that might surface best practices for engaging and challenging students at different performance levels. Participants in the pairing work conduct needs assessments and engage in peer review, share out successes and challenges, learn about related research in the field and other states' implementation efforts and plan for the application of new learning back in their classrooms. Other cross-district learning collaboratives facilitated by CORE are the regular structured meetings with districts charged with data analytics and institutional research to focus as a cross-district team on the design of the accountability index. Another collaborative is organized around teacher learning communities focused on practice issues related to Common Core State Standards implementation.[27]

Using of data to inform inquiry. One key organizational commitment of continuous improvement organizations is to the systematic use of data to inform practice, problem definition, solution identification, and evidence-based intervention design and redesign. As Duffy and her colleagues at AIR have noted, many CORE leaders had a prior history of working to establish data-informed improvement practices within their districts.[28] To build these data use practices across the CORE districts, the participating superintendents first focused on making a case in their federal waiver request for uncoupling data from bureaucratic compliance. Most importantly, the proposed school quality improvement system emphasized that data to be collected would meet federal results-based accountability requirements but would also enable construction of early warning indicators of academic disengagement, as well as indicators of social and emotional learning and of positive school culture and climate that the CORE superintendents believed were fundamentally associated with student's academic success.

Second, CORE leaders wanted to emphasize that data to be collected and examined would advance shared goals, but also would allow for differentiation and flexibility in use at the district level to reflect contextually relevant needs and to connect data to individual district-level intervention strategies. For example, in November of 2013, CORE leaders and the Gardner Center at Stanford convened district principals, teacher leaders, and district staff for a conference to collaboratively decide on the social and emotional learning (SEL) constructs that they wanted to make part of their school quality system. Participants agreed to focus on SEL constructs that were (1) aligned and could be connected to local goals for equitable student college, career, and civic readiness, (2) measurable given current and prospective data collection practices, and (3) actionable at the classroom, school and system (district and cross-district) levels.

The CORE approach to selecting SEL indicators for inclusion in the school quality improvement system also reflects a third important dimension of data use in continuous improvement systems: data use for adult learning within the system. CORE participants understood that information on SEL by students would be context-dependent and would have the most meaning when examined against local norms and when applied to gain a deeper understanding of the connection between their practices and specific school or district learning goals for students. They were also anxious to capitalize on their CORE collaboration to explore the potential of developing CORE-wide SEL benchmarks and to engage such data to facilitate cross district learning on this important experiment. According to the CORE leaders, "[t}he theory is that by allowing local innovation nested in a collaborative approach and an unwavering dedication to high expectations, each district will get better, more contextually relevant results. As a collaborative group of districts focused on continuous improvement, CORE is committed to regularly convening and purposefully ensuring learning from each other's successes and failures, not because of state or federal mandate to meet, but because of a moral imperative to serve children."[29] As Gerstein and Sipes have noted in other contexts, this cross district approach to system improvement — developing the skills and strategies required to work across boundaries

27 See, e.g., Waiver Application at p. 73.
28 See generally, Duffy, et al (2012). *Building District Capacity for Data informed Leadership.*
29 See CORE Waiver Application at pp. 18

— stretches the social, cultural, and political muscle of all of the players in the service of continuous learning and improvement.[30]

Capacity Building

An accountability system equal to the task of universal access to college and career ready learning opportunities must commit to professional capacity building. New and veteran teachers, principals, and school support partners must develop the skills and learning pedagogies appropriate to the delivery of more challenging academic content and to the deeper learning needs of a demographically diverse set of students. At the systems level, district leaders must invest time and energy in training administrators to embed data-driven inquiry processes into the day-to-day work of the district and to create organizational and data collection and use structures that support these approaches. Given their diversity, the task of capacity-building is largely left to each individual CORE district. But CORE leaders have committed to joint capacity building work in two broad areas: the high quality implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the support of low-performing priority schools to more effectively identify and implement targeted improvement supports and interventions at their sites.

To advance local capacity for CCSS implementation, CORE districts established a cross-district Standards, Assessment and Instruction Leadership team comprised of 50 senior instructional leaders representing each of the participating CORE districts. These leaders form a professional learning network. As an early project, the CCSS leadership team worked with experts to facilitate a formative assessment initiative involving the development, pilot testing, and refinement of a set of performance assessment modules in ELA and Math. Designed to inform instructional shifts demanded by the CCSS, the formative assessment initiative was kick-started by teachers and teacher coaches at a hands-on Summer Design Institute in 2012. In fall 2012, the modules were piloted by approximately 400 classroom teachers across the CORE districts, engaging more than 15,000 students, and continue to be refined as part of a cross-district collaborative effort.[31]

The other cross-district learning focus for CORE involves the commitment to support learning among school pairs, a process designed for Title I schools identified as low performing under NCLB. Low performing schools are paired with higher performing "reward" Title I schools for peer learning and are matched with each other based on specific areas of strength and weakness. The collaborating partner schools identify specific focus areas for their shared pairing work connected to their school improvement plans (e.g., problems of practice, key strategies like data use that would benefit from peer support/learning), as well as specific mechanisms for leveraging the partnership (e.g., school visits, collaborative professional development, resource sharing). Both the higher and lower-performing schools receive additional monetary resources and/or training to engage in effective peer review. An animating purpose behind this school improvement strategy is that a focus on shared learning and capacity building will provide a strong venue for promoting professional accountability among teachers and school leaders who are inherently motivated to find better ways to help students succeed.

30 Gerstein, A., Sipes, L. (2015, April).Fostering Collaboration Within a Professional Learning Network: A University-Community Research Partnership in an Out-of-School Time Setting. In John W. Gardner Center (Chair), *Data Use and Inquiry in Research-Practice Partnerships.* Symposium conducted at the meeting of the AERA, Chicago, IL.
31 See, example available publicly at: http://coredistricts.org/our-work/standards-and-data-assessments/

Accountability for Deeper Learning Opportunities

Opening equitable pathways to college, career, and civic readiness requires accountability for universal access to a broad, high quality curriculum and associated assessments that focus on deeper learning opportunities. Darling-Hammond and others have directed attention to systems that establish college- and career-ready standards anchored in core academic knowledge, skills and competencies considered by higher education, employers, and parents as critical to success.[32] Such a system is premised on multiple measures and dimensions of learning, including social and emotional learning skills like self-management, and mindsets associated with persistence. As well, a dual focus on equity and deeper learning also demands attention to the development in all settings and neighborhoods of a school-level culture and climate conducive to learning and that promotes instructional capacity.[33] In the words of the CORE superintendents, "CORE's collaboration starts with a deep, underlying commitment to … a system of accountability that holistically values the many additional factors that contribute to ensuring school and district conditions that produce high levels of learning for all students.[34]

Mastery of Core Academic Content, Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Effective Communication. One important set of deeper learning competencies involves the cognitive skills associated with mastery of core academic content, critical thinking, problem solving, and effective communication. In this respect, the CORE districts have made a firm commitment to implement the Common Core State Standards and, as noted previously, to learning together about best, and emerging practices for effective CCSS implementation. Early evidence from organizations like Achieve and others provides sound reason to believe that the CCSS reflect many important aspects of deeper learning, including a research-based academic core, and recommended teaching strategies that focus on skills such as communications, teamwork, collaboration, problem solving, critical thinking and research skills. Consequently, the CORE district leaders believe that effective CCSS implementation is the cornerstone of a commitment to deeper learning.

Additionally, in the upper grades, Long Beach, LAUSD, Oakland, Fresno and Santa Ana Unified have made major organizational commitments to work-based and Linked Learning strategies and pathways[35] to extend CCSS learning to other important deeper learning skills, including, for example, help-seeking, strategic planning, ethical reasoning, conflict resolution, adaptability, motivation and self-discipline — all skills associated with life-long deeper learning and for transferring that knowledge to problems and challenges beyond the school context.

Collaboration, Self-directed Learning, and acquisition of an Academic Mindset. A second important set of deeper learning competencies are often referred to as "non-cognitive" or social and emotional learning skills and mindsets. The CORE leaders recognize that the skills associated with learning to work well in teams (collaboration), the discipline to be masters of their own learning (self-direction), and the development of intellectual openness and an academic mindset, will often require direct instruction and strategies to develop social and emotional skills and mindsets (SEL) that go far beyond the academic domain of learning. To this end, the CORE districts are working together to improve their efforts at building teacher capacity to deliver on these deeper learning elements and to test the power of placing these SEL skills directly into the school accountability system.

32 Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit and Pettinger (2014) at p.11-16.
33 See generally, Bryk, Anthony S., Penny B. Sebring, Elaine Allensworth, Stuart Luppescu, and John Q. Easton (2010). *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago).
34 CORE Waiver Application at p.17.
35 See, Hoffman, Nancy (2015). *Let's Get Real: Deeper Learning and the Power of the Workplace* (Jobs for the Future, Boston).

Beginning in the 2013-2014 and 2014-15 school years, CORE launched an ambitious pilot program to test student learning and acquisition of four broad deeper learning SEL skills: Growth Mindset, Self-Efficacy, Self-Management (discipline) and Social Awareness. This initial pilot was limited to a set of schools in each of the CORE districts, but yielded promising results indicating the efficacy of measuring these skills and mindsets faithfully and of building them into a professional learning and accountability system. A broader, CORE-wide test of this experiment is scheduled for the 2015-16 school year before becoming a central part of the School Quality Improvement Index in 2016-17.

The Social Context of Deeper Learning Environments. The CORE leaders further recognize, from the experience of their more innovative schools and charters, that the context for deeper learning is socially constructed and maintained. Gaining effective access to deeper learning opportunities requires that teachers and student peers intentionally build a culture that supports and embraces academic and SEL learning. Consequently, a third major component of the CORE academic index will focus on professional learning and accountability for building a positive school culture and climate for learning in every school. During the 2014-15 school year, the CORE districts administered a common school climate survey to develop baseline measures and beginning with the 2015-16 school year, schools will be held accountable for the quality of the (1) climate of support for academic learning, (2) perceived social support for learning, (3) student and teacher sense of belonging, (4) respect for diversity, (5) social-emotional security, (6) perceived fairness of disciplinary rules, and (7) quality of community-school collaboration. Research amply confirms the strong relationship between these climate/culture variables and deeper learning opportunities. Additionally, the CORE districts have committed to tracking and assessing school level attendance, disciplinary suspensions, English Learner redesignation rates, and the assignment of students to Special Education as potential indicators of academic engagement and the climate for teaching and learning at the school level.

Commitment to Equitable Access to Deeper Learning Opportunities. Finally it bears emphasizing the expressed commitment of the CORE leaders and their professional teams to the guiding principal of equitable access. The CORE accountability system will disaggregate results by race, ethnicity, poverty, and English Learner status along

all three accountability dimensions: academic learning, social and emotional learning, and school culture and climate. CORE is working closely with the Gardner Center and other research partners at Harvard and Stanford Universities, among others, to ensure that each component of the accountability system is informed by the best available evidence. The clear commitment is to make deeper learning opportunities accessible to all students and to rely on data and design-based implementation reform to advance the goal of college, career, and civic readiness for all youth.

Resource Accountability

Equitable access to deeper learning opportunities requires an accountability system that is designed to invest available resources (human and capital) in ways that are designed to meet equity standards and to accomplish the goals of universal career and college readiness. As originally conceived, the theory of change embraced by the CORE district leaders holds that district staff and leadership will commit to common standards of practice and engage in cross-district learning, but that issues of implementation (beyond those required by the NCLB Waiver for underperforming schools) will be left to local discretion, including questions about how human and

capital resources are allocated within the districts. State leaders, however, have other ideas. Almost concurrent with the granting of the CORE NCLB waiver in the summer of 2013, the California state legislature adopted the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) which provided additional state funding to districts that enroll large numbers of English learners and economically disadvantaged students. California's new funding allocation formula requires each district to develop a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) and to specify how they will bolster services for high-needs students — low-income pupils, English learners and foster youth with new state dollars. In addition, the State School Board is required to adopt evaluation rubrics to assist districts to identify performance goals and measure progress for student subgroups across multiple performance indicators. In sum, these new state rules allow CORE leaders to stay the course on their agreed performance accountability plans, but require them to join with community stakeholders in a County Office of Education-led cycle of review and inquiry focused on aligning district financial resource allocation decisions with locally articulated goals for universal college and career ready opportunities.

These new resource accountability and public transparency measures are more extensive than anything previously required by the state, but the regulatory features of the new fiscal accountability rules are still being elaborated. Final rules may not be available from the State Board of Education until the fall of 2016. The intent behind the new legislation and supporting rules[36] nevertheless, is that local resource allocation plans should be better aligned to promote equitable access to deeper learning opportunities, and to support cycles of inquiry that provide the public with more transparent information about strategic planning and continuous improvement to that end.

Going Forward

The CORE districts have completed the initial design phase and developed baseline indicators of school performance for the schools and districts participating in the School Quality Improvement System (SQII). In the next two years the CORE districts begin the process of school level implementation of social emotional learning practices and related continuous improvement structures aimed at promoting equitable access to deep student learning for all public school youth. Although they came together around a shared commitment to equity, each district's implementation context is very different in terms of size, student demographics, local politics and reform capacity. These differences will doubtless shape the approaches they will take to drive reform within their districts. This next phase will be critical to observe and document as the California Department of Education completes parallel work on a statewide school accountability system and seeks to draw lessons from the CORE district's efforts as they unfold.

36 See, e.g., Kirst, Michael, President, California State Board of Education, Commentary: *Lessons Learned: Making the Local Control Funding Formula Work*, EdSource, August 4, 2015. Available online at: http://edsource.org/2015/lessons-learned-making-the-local-control-funding-formula-work/83864

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