Meeting 31 Summary
Integrating Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning to Advance Equity and Achievement

December 6–7, 2016
Oakland, California

Prepared by Joel Knudson, American Institutes for Research[1]

> *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. It does not, however, contain the background and contextual information that might otherwise accompany a product created for the general public. For more information about the meeting and other Collaborative activities, please visit www.cacollaborative.org.*

While the California Collaborative on District Reform's longstanding attention to implementation of the Common Core State Standards has primarily emphasized the development of academic knowledge and skills, members have also acknowledged the importance of interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies both for academic success and for career and civic success later in life. Past meetings of the Collaborative have suggested that these competencies may in fact be preconditions for meaningful academic engagement—especially in environments where trauma profoundly impacts students' lives inside and outside of school. Meeting 31, set in the context of the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), explored these connections through a focus on social and emotional learning (SEL) and its intersection with academics. OUSD provided an ideal venue for this exploration, as it has worked for several years to integrate SEL into its districtwide improvement efforts. That work has also been integrally linked to Oakland's effort to address racial disparities and provide equity and access for all students.

Setting the Oakland Context

The Collaborative's focus on academics and SEL through the lens of the Oakland experience was appropriate not only because of work underway throughout the district, but because of the broader community in which the school system operates. The meeting began with participants offering one-word descriptions that captured their view of Oakland. Words

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[1] Thanks to Jarah Blum, Marina Castro, Suzette Chavez, Zeena Karim, Elena Rein, and Dawn Smith for taking careful notes during the meeting, which made this summary possible.

such as "community," "vibrant," "diverse," and "resilient" highlighted many positive attributes of the broader OUSD context.

For all of its positive attributes, the Oakland community is often beset by trauma and instability. Other one-word descriptions—"struggles," "grieving," "tough," "challenged"—spoke to this dynamic as well. At the time of the meeting, Superintendent Antwan Wilson had just announced his decision to accept a new position as the chancellor of the District of Columbia Public Schools. Oakland was also reeling from the Ghost Ship warehouse fire that had claimed 36 lives only days before. Both of these developments took place against a backdrop of fear and uncertainty that had grown in the wake of the 2016 presidential election. Even beyond these headline-grabbing struggles, district leaders shared that four African American students had lost their lives to gun violence in the past month.

As OUSD looks for ways to achieve success for its students, it builds on the many strengths of its surrounding community. It also confronts the profound and persistent struggles that students and adults alike must navigate on a daily basis.

Efforts to Define the District's Path Forward

OUSD's vision—All students will find joy in their academic experience while graduating with the skills to ensure they are caring, competent, fully-informed, critical thinkers who are prepared for college, career, and community success—articulates an image of success that incorporates both academic and life skills. Recent district-led efforts have sought to ground that vision in a set of shared commitments. A day-long meeting in summer 2016 brought together teachers, board members, students, and central office staff to identify a set of core values that drive the district's work. The convening produced six core values: (1) students first, (2) equity, (3) excellence, (4) integrity, (5) cultural responsiveness, and (6) joy. Both OUSD's vision statement and its core values reflect a district commitment to achieve academic goals, but to do so as responsive and contributing members of a broader community.

The district's core values would reemerge in conversations throughout the meeting. In sharing them with the group, however, one OUSD representative emphasized diversity and equity in particular as essential to the district's educational philosophy, explaining, "In Oakland, we call out diversity unapologetically."

SEL as an Anchor for the District's Work

SEL has long been a part of OUSD's improvement efforts under the umbrella of developing caring school communities. The district formally introduced SEL approximately six years ago, adding a framework and vocabulary around work that some teachers had been doing for years. At its outset, district and school leaders predominantly related SEL to behavior management. As the work has continued to evolve, however, Oakland leaders have worked to strengthen the links between SEL and academic learning.

District leaders now view SEL as fundamental to students' academic engagement and success. As one district leader described, "We've come as a district to see social-emotional learning as the through-line. We believe that SEL is foundational to all of our work in this

city." As a reflection of this integrated approach, OUSD decided to rename its academic division the department of academic, social, and emotional learning (A/SEL).

District leaders in Oakland described their equity-based A/SEL approach through the metaphor of a three-legged stool. The first leg is culture and climate, and refers to ways in which educators develop positive environments and interactions in schools and classrooms for all members of the learning community. The second leg of the stool is explicit instruction, or the ways in which educators intentionally teach SEL competencies to adults and students. The model's third leg is integration. OUSD leaders seek to weave SEL into all instructional and improvement efforts in the district, including through the full range of academic content areas.

Today, the district has developed multiple systems and structures to help advance A/SEL. These include administrative actions ranging from the designation of a symbolically and organizationally important A/SEL department to the establishment of a team of three central office leaders who focus specifically on SEL implementation. They also include practices such as restorative justice and positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS). In addition, the district has adopted academic curricula that incorporate SEL competencies, as well as curricula that teach those competencies explicitly. OUSD has also engaged with external partners to support the work. These include both funders—who have supplied financial backing—and organizations that have provided more substantive support and collaboration. In the latter group are the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL); the CORE Districts; and the Mills College Teacher Scholars program, among others.

The remainder of this meeting summary explores some of the entry points to promoting SEL and strengthening its connections with academics in greater detail.

Other District Perspectives

Although the meeting took place in the specific context of OUSD, it drew on the perspectives of other participating district leaders at well. The themes that follow in this summary reflect not only the practices underway in Oakland and observations of Collaborative members, but the experiences of two other districts that participate in the CASEL Collaborating Districts Initiative: Sacramento City Unified School District and Cleveland Metropolitan School District (MSD).

Motivating a Focus on SEL

As part of an introduction to Oakland and the dialogue that followed, meeting participants wrestled with how to define SEL and why it merits attention in a public school system.

Definitions of SEL

Throughout the meeting, participants observed that if districts are to integrate SEL into the full range of their interventions and supports, it is important for stakeholders throughout the system to understand the concept of *social and emotional learning*. OUSD leaders shared their definition of the term:

Social and emotional learning is a process through which children and adults develop the fundamental skills for life effectiveness. These are the skills we all need to handle ourselves, our relationships, and our work effectively and ethically. In OUSD, we believe that strengthening our social skills and competencies enhances our ability to connect across race, class, culture, language, gender identity, sexual orientations, learning needs, and age.

Participants also reviewed the five competencies that CASEL has identified to define SEL:

- **Self-awareness** is a recognition of one's assets and challenges.

- **Self-management** refers to the ability to regulate one's emotions and behaviors and to motivate oneself to set and achieve goals.

- **Social awareness** speaks to the importance of embracing diversity, demonstrating empathy, and interacting productively across diverse communities.

- **Relationship skills** enable one to communicate with and build connections with people similar to and different from oneself.

- **Responsible decision making** means problem solving effectively while responding to context and considering the well-being of self and others.

Specific terminology and conceptions of SEL may vary by context. For example, the CORE Districts consider growth mindset[2] to be an important component of SEL. Generally speaking, however, participants consistently referred to SEL as the process of developing the nonacademic skills all individuals—children and adults—need for life effectiveness.

Connections Between SEL Competencies and Academic Outcomes

Research demonstrating connections between SEL and academic performance further underscore the importance of SEL competencies for success in school. Publications included in the meeting's briefing binder highlight connections between skills such as self-control, problem-solving, cooperation, focus and creativity and positive life outcomes;[3] between participation in SEL programs and both academic and noncognitive outcomes;[4] and between exposure to deeper learning opportunities and deeper learning competencies, high school graduation, and college matriculation.[5] In addition, the CORE Districts have used student survey data to develop four measures of SEL competencies:[6] (1) self-

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[2] Growth mindset describes a point of view in which people see their basic qualities—such as intelligence or talent—not as fixed traits, but as malleable abilities that they can develop through practice and dedication. See Dweck, C. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success.* New York, NY: Random House.

[3] See Garcia, E., & Weiss, E. (2016). *Making whole-child education the norm: How research and policy initiatives can make social and emotional skills a focal point of children's education.* Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute. Retrieved from http://www.epi.org/files/pdf/107051.pdf

[4] See http://www.casel.org/impact

[5] See American Institutes for Research. (2016). *Does deeper learning improve student outcomes? Results from the study of deeper learning: Opportunities and outcomes.* Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from http://www.air.org/sites/default/files/Deeper-Learning-Summary-Updated-August-2016.pdf

[6] For publicly available information about the CORE Districts' efforts to measure SEL, see http://coredistricts.org/our-work/social-emotional-learning/

management, (2) growth mindset, (3) self-efficacy, and (4) self-awareness. Early correlational analyses are not conclusive, but they find promising connections with academic outcomes. All four competencies correlate positively with cumulative grade point average, mathematics test scores, and English language arts test scores; and all negatively correlate with suspensions and absences. In elementary and middle schools, self-management has the strongest association of the four competencies with academic performance. In high school, the strongest association is with growth mindset. Much work remains to explore these connections in greater detail, but they combine with existing research to provide some justification for a focus on SEL in advancing academic success.

SEL as an Essential Component of Academic Success

Participants also connected SEL competencies to key elements of the Common Core State Standards. Indeed, notable evolutions from previous academic standards include attention to collaborative work (which requires social awareness and relationship skills) and critical thinking (which students may be better positioned to demonstrate with a range of SEL competencies, including self-awareness and responsible decision making). SEL becomes a critical entry point to the full range of skills students now need to succeed. As one participant attested, "You're not going to be able to engage students at the level of rigor needed for the Common Core if they're not aware of their feelings and how to manage them and if [students are] not aware of [their] relationships with peers."

SEL as a Response to Trauma

SEL may be particularly important in districts such as Oakland that suffer from a high incidence of trauma. The effects of gun violence, incarceration, and other ongoing challenges profoundly influence the Oakland community. Similar examples from Cleveland—ranging from gun violence to poverty to lead poisoning to strained relationships between residents and the police force—illustrate how SEL can be a powerful tool for addressing community needs. Adults and children confronting physical and emotional pressures in their lives in and out of school need a set of tools to address those pressures as part of living a healthy life. Moreover, students consumed by other distractions will often struggle to prioritize and process their academic responsibilities. The skillset developed through SEL might be a precondition for full academic engagement in school.

Connecting Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Through Instructional Practice

Meeting participants explored the connections between SEL and academic learning through an examination of instructional practice.

Mills College Teacher Scholars Exercise

The Mills College Teacher Scholars program is a grassroots network that works with 350 teachers across six California districts to enhance teacher learning through teacher-led collaborative inquiry. The group's initial efforts took place in a small number of elementary schools. Over time, the network has expanded to explore how its model functions in

different contexts. The approach followed by the Teacher Scholar program rests on two assumptions: (1) Teaching is inherently uncertain work, so teachers need time and support to examine what takes place in their classrooms; and (2) designs for teacher learning need to link to hopes for student outcomes. In other words, the work explicitly sets out to engage teachers in the same kinds of productive struggles that students need in their classroom learning environments. In their work with OUSD, leaders of the Teacher Scholars program have come to see their process as closely aligned with the district's goals in terms both of addressing SEL competencies in academic instruction for students and of building teachers' SEL competencies through collaborative inquiry.

To see concretely how this might be the case, meeting participants observed a collaborative inquiry session among three Teacher Scholars program participants—an elementary teacher with a particular problem of practice, an OUSD teacher leader, and a leader from the Mills program. The fishbowl activity began with the teacher sharing a learning goal she has been pursuing in her classroom—to encourage strong partner talk among students. To illustrate her progress and problem, the teacher shared a video recording of a recent classroom activity in which two students—a Latina female and an African American male—worked through a mathematics exercise together. The video begins with the girl reading the problem aloud, then identifying what she believes to be the answer, which she writes on the paper. Next, the boy identifies what he believes to be the answer by giving a different response than the girl's. As he speaks, the girl wordlessly erases her answer and writes the answer the boy gave. Despite prompting from an off-screen teacher for the students to talk about their difference of opinion, the girl remains silent through the end of the clip.

Reactions to Video Evidence of Classroom Instruction

Following the video, the other two members of the trio shared their reflections on what they saw. First and foremost, they noted that there was no partner pushback. Rather, the girl simply conceded to the boy's point of view. Although she initially demonstrated confidence in voicing her perspective, she backed down in the face of a dissenting opinion. One of the trio participants wondered about the degree to which race/ethnicity or gender played into this dynamic. (Conversations about measuring SEL competencies, discussed later in this summary, also addressed the role that gender might play in building skills such as self-efficacy.)

In response to this feedback, the teacher offered her own observations. She noted that the class had practiced disagreement, but that the girl clearly did not demonstrate what they had practiced. She also shared that the exercise had made her rethink how to help students respectfully disagree with one another. Many of her classroom efforts had aimed at helping students get along and avoid fighting; the video evidence and her colleagues' reactions to it showed that she needed to move one step further.

Comments from the larger group of meeting participants offered further insights about the instructional clip and possible solutions. Having students do the work separately before coming together could help them develop their own lines of reasoning before engaging in conversation. One participant observed that while the teacher trio was seated in chairs facing one another, the students in the clip were seated side-by-side, making the act of

turning to engage a partner in conversation somewhat unnatural. Classroom design might be one means of facilitating interpersonal skills and SEL growth. Finally, echoing the teacher's self-reflection, participants advocated for the teacher to practice disagreement with her students in ways that do not come across as conflict.

Reactions to the Process

Following the discussion among the teacher trio, meeting participants offered their reflections about the process. Commenters noted that the process was powerful and the practice of making one's professional performance public helps to advance the professionalization of teaching. Doing so requires bravery, and the Teacher Scholars program has worked closely with teachers to make them comfortable with the process. One participant responded appreciatively to the teacher's disposition by saying, "I wish more teachers responded to comments like [the teacher in the trio did by saying], 'That's great, that's something I'd love to work on.' The tendency is to be more defensive." The program has helped to foster a shift in focus from the strengths and weaknesses of an *individual* to the strengths and weaknesses of the individual's *practice* and the conditions in which he or she works. Districts can play an important role in creating these conditions for public learning; the Teacher Scholars model provides one example for doing so.

Participants also argued that teaching SEL cannot be independent of conceptual understanding or the standards themselves. By addressing an academic problem through an SEL lens—for example, attending to the interpersonal skills that shaped the two students' abilities to interact effectively—teachers have an opportunity to improve the overall learning environment. Doing so requires careful thought, however. Practices such as the collaborative inquiry process in Oakland can help incorporate those considerations. One participant suggested that the connections between SEL and the Common Core can be even stronger. Because mastering the standards in mathematics requires students to develop and explain an argument, more closely integrating the two might help deepen the work.

Connecting Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Through Curriculum at the High School Level

The meeting focus shifted from instructional practice to curriculum that helps develop SEL competencies, especially at the high school level.

The Evolution of SEL Efforts in Oakland High Schools

OUSD leaders recalled that as recently as 2013, there was no SEL presence in the district's high schools. Beginning in the 2013–14 school year, the SEL team partnered with Linked Learning[7] to incorporate SEL into the district's pathways. One concrete outcome of the district's foray into high school was the incorporation of elements of social and emotional growth into its graduate profile. OUSD continued its work with Linked Learning in 2014–15

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[7] Linked Learning is a high school improvement approach that operates through pathways that provide a uniting theme to students' high school experience and connect students to real-world learning opportunities related to that theme. For more information, please refer to resources from the Collaborative's November 2011 meeting in Long Beach at http://cacollaborative.org/meetings/meeting17

and came to an understanding that for Linked Learning to be effective, the district needed to incorporate SEL. The district tested its thinking through a 2015–16 pilot in one of its large, comprehensive high schools, and teachers placed sufficient value in the experience to advocate for its schoolwide expansion. Moving into 2016–17, the district received a donation to offer four days of summer SEL training to representatives from additional high schools. By the 2018–19 school year, OUSD hopes to have evidence-based SEL curriculum available in all schools and, ultimately, to have all students enrolled in a Linked Learning pathway.

To help anchor its high school work, OUSD deliberately selected a curriculum that incorporates SEL competencies into academic lessons. In addition, it has adopted materials from Engaging Schools that articulate 10 core instructional practices to integrate SEL into content instruction. Among these was the importance of having a caring adult in the room.

Taking SEL to Scale at the Secondary Level Across a District

Although the district has made progress in introducing SEL at the secondary level, central office leaders are grappling with how best to scale the effort. Meeting participants met in small groups to discuss the respective advantages and disadvantages of various strategies for expanding SEL practices across OUSD's high schools. Reflections on this problem were consistent with other observations during the meeting about leading SEL from a district level and appear later in this summary in a broader discussion of coherence in SEL implementation.

Transforming Adult Behavior and Culture

Comments throughout the meeting emphasized the importance of building SEL competencies among adults as a foundation for doing so among students. As one participant stated, "We cannot possibly teach what we cannot model."

Working With Adults in Oakland

Oakland's foray into SEL several years ago thus began with a recognition of the need to strengthen adults' social and emotional skills. Indeed, the district's theory of action reflects this importance:

> Shifts in our organizational practices and culture will change as adults across the system strengthen their SEL skills and competencies. If we increase our ability to effectively build relationships and social awareness, thereby creating a more inclusive, caring environment, decreasing disproportionality, and preparing our students with 21st century skills, then our students will graduate and be successful in college, career, and community.

One way in which the district seeks to embrace SEL competencies with adults is through the use of three signature practices to structure all meetings. The first of these is a **welcoming ritual**, an inclusion activity designed to set the tone for engaged, respectful interaction during the meeting. A second component calls for **engaging practices** that create space for adults to make meaning from their experiences and provide "brain breaks" that enable continued engagement. Finally, meetings conclude with an **optimistic closure**

that reinforces the topic of the meeting and creates momentum for taking next steps. OUSD leaders used these practices throughout the Collaborative meeting—for example, the welcoming ritual in which participants used a one-word description to characterize Oakland—to illustrate how they operate in a real-world context.

In addition, OUSD has worked with leaders throughout the system to facilitate introspection and skill building with respect to SEL competencies. To understand this process better, meeting participants engaged in an exercise that combined quiet reflection, partner talk, and full-group sharing to respond to several prompts issued by an OUSD leader. For example, one prompt asked individuals to provide examples of social awareness and/or cultural responsiveness that led them to place students first in their work. The exercise sought to make an explicit connection between the SEL competencies (in this case, social awareness) and the district's core values (in this case, cultural responsiveness and students first). The district has engaged central office leaders in a workshop that uses similar exercises to help demonstrate how the two work together to advance the district's goals and to illustrate the social and emotional skills adults need to exercise to do the work effectively.

Reaching All Adults

Participants affirmed that teachers create important personal connections with students; but they also emphasized the need to work with all adults, not just with teachers. According to observations from various parts of the meeting, districts play a critical role in making sure that students come into contact with caring adults. To that end, districts can work to help all departments to see their work as serving the needs of students and to look for opportunities to build caring and supportive relationships with them.

In particular, examples from Oakland and Cleveland pointed to the role that classified staff can play in building their own SEL skills and supporting students overall. In OUSD, for example, district leaders discovered that the average tenure of their classified staff was 27 years. Although the district had rightly invested resources in building capacity among teachers, turnover is an ongoing problem in the district, and those teachers may not be in place long enough to use their newly developed skills. In contrast, staff such as school secretaries often know their schools, their communities, and the students and their families as well as anyone in the building. A district leader recalled one such employee saying, "We are the front line… I often know more about these students than anyone else at the school site." By investing in the capacity of classified staff, districts can help create the conditions for students to experience a welcoming environment and positive adult relationships.

Understanding and Addressing the Connections Among Equity, Race, and SEL

Understanding and responding to the ways in which race and class shape students' opportunities, interactions, and identities is critical to realizing more equitable education systems. Meeting conversation explicitly addressed equity considerations for moving forward with SEL.

Understanding How Race and Equity Interact With SEL

Race profoundly impacts students' day-to-day experiences inside and outside of school. Sometimes this happens in obvious ways, as in the 2014 shooting death of 12-year-old Cleveland student Tamir Rice that highlighted issues of race and community relationships with the police force. Just as meaningful, though, are the human interactions that take place each day. Urban school districts often feature a predominantly white faculty teaching students who are primarily African American and Latino. Implicit biases frequently contribute to micro-aggressions that can make students feel inferior to their peers. A listening campaign in Oakland that involved interviews with 600 African-American children yielded observations such as this one: "When I go to school, adults don't talk to me. When they do engage me, they talk to me as if I've done something wrong, that I'm bad or mad."

School systems can also contribute to low expectations among adults and children alike. Sometimes these expectations even come from a place of caring. One meeting participant described a common teacher perspective in this way: "They say, 'Look at the trauma. I don't want to stress them out,' and then give them coursework below their grade level. This is a deficit model, and though it is coming from a good place, it ends up patronizing students." Other participants commented on the dominant narrative that surrounds people of color in American society. One individual observed, "There are so many messages you are getting about the black experience. How many are nested in beauty and brilliance? Very few."

Observations during the meeting highlighted the damage that results from these racial dynamics. One participant cited a Californians for Justice report that found one third of students in Oakland, San Jose, Fresno, and Long Beach did not feel they had someone to rely on at school. Early data from the CORE Districts (discussed later in this summary) finds differences in SEL competencies among racial subgroups. An Oakland high school student who joined the meeting for the second day powerfully described the impact of his early school experiences on his own self-efficacy, but also highlighted the transformative potential of a program such as OUSD's African American Male Achievement (AAMA) initiative: "Before high school, I wasn't comfortable with who I was. I was ashamed of who I was as a black kid…the one thing that still sticks with me is that there's nothing wrong with who I am. There's even *greatness* in my identity, and I'm really grateful for that."

When deficiencies in self-efficacy, relationship skills, and other SEL-related competencies result from marginalization and micro-aggressions, participants suggested that disparities in SEL skills and academic performance among racial/ethnic subgroups are outcomes that should surprise no one.

Identifying and Supporting Adults to Navigate Racial Issues

To address and counteract the negative ways in which racial identity and bias impacts student experiences, participants argued throughout the meeting that strong relationships are critical. In particular, districts need to look for ways to build connections between students and caring adults. The Oakland student connected issues of self-identity directly to teacher-student relationships by saying:

Many students feel like they are alone and don't have a voice. Regardless of how you feel about the results, we all have to recognize that students feel targeted because of their race or gender. We have to give them the safe space to let them know their voice matters and they can speak out. The heart of SEL is teachers having relationships with students to tell them they have a voice.

Ensuring that adults throughout the system have the capacity to understand and navigate racial dynamics, build relationships, and provide student a voice is key.

Efforts to ensure that sufficient capacity exists within the system begin before teachers enter the classroom door. Existing teacher preparation programs may pay insufficient attention to building SEL competencies—among both teachers and students—and using those competencies to have difficult conversations around race and equity. One individual argued, "We are too afraid to be uncomfortable, to offend, and to say things that make others uncomfortable. As we bring new people into the system, teacher prep[aration] has an obligation to do work around implicit bias." Districts also make important decisions in the hiring process that shape the system's capacity to meet student needs. One district leader observed, "I think the biggest internal challenge is always the belief systems that a lot of the adults in the system possess and how they engage with the students on a daily basis. Who we hire is half the battle." The capacity issue is not limited to teachers, of course. Participants posited that effectively addressing equity also requires attention to finding the right school leaders who share a value system in recognition and service of student needs.

The racial identity of the teaching force itself also creates opportunities and challenges. Teachers in many urban school districts do not match the racial or economic backgrounds of the student body; finding staff who can identify with students and provide a model for them can help foster trust and strong relationships. At the same time, several participants emphasized that teachers of different backgrounds are not incapable of caring or forging connections. However, they may need support to learn how to do so.

Developing Approaches That Explicitly Address Race

Presentations and dialogue during the meeting highlighted some of the specific approaches districts have taken to identifying and addressing issues of race. Meeting participants watched segments of a documentary series called *Kingmakers of Oakland* that describes OUSD's AAMA.[8] The program targets African American males, a group of students that the district has not traditionally served well, and celebrates the beauty and brilliance of African American culture while building knowledge and pride among students about their own identities. As a district leader explained, "We use video, social media, and many other [media] to rewrite a new story to counter implicit bias." Multiple districts in the Collaborative have also sought to elevate equity-related work by creating equity departments within their central offices.

Within programs such as AAMA, some meeting participants advocated for starting early in a child's school career. Despite the promise that high school initiatives have demonstrated,

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[8] The documentary is available online at www.kingmakersofoakland.org.

its leaders are often doing extensive work to deconstruct the biases and negative self-efficacy students have built up through years of schooling. By starting earlier, districts have the opportunity to build positive skills from the beginning rather than counteract a deficit mentality.

Initiatives such as AAMA, central office equity departments or afterschool equity programs can help to focus attention on equity-related issues, but participants observed that they can also create silos that are difficult to bridge. One meeting participant described the way in which well-intentioned adult agendas can produce conflict that slows progress: "It's an interesting piece when you have nonprofits and you have money and you have people at their core trying to do the right kinds of things, but it gets caught up in the politics and adult agendas that conflict and collide." Districts need to find ways to strike a balance between providing the targeted and locally tailored support that individuals and groups need while connecting it to the broader constellation of programs, offices, and activities that comprise a district's overall improvement effort.

Meeting participants also talked about the importance of addressing local context. The challenges and opportunities associated with a largely African American student body, for example, may take a different form than they do in a district serving a predominantly Latino population. In some districts, the homogeneity of the student population and lack of exposure to other races poses challenges. Cultural views also make a difference. Some communities embrace a view that the school system is responsible for academic learning, but families are responsible for personal growth. This can make it difficult to engage parents in the process of academic teaching and learning, but it can also pose challenges for schools to pursue the all-encompassing personal development that SEL entails.

Given differences in context and cultures, some participants suggested that districts can develop strategies to build understanding, empathy, and trust between schools and families. One district leader described a program in his district in which college students receive salaries to work as advocates. Because they understand the school system from which they have just exited, and because they know the communities in which they have grown up, these advocates are well positioned to help foster communication and build relationships with families. Creating this role while students are in college also has the potential of building a pipeline for new employees in the district after graduation.

Regardless of the specific approach, participants emphasized that districts need to be intentional about work related to race and equity.

Knowing Students and Honoring Their Voices

Observations throughout the meeting referred to the critical importance of SEL in promoting student growth and voice, especially in confronting issues of race and equity.

Leaders from multiple districts described initiatives to identify students who struggle and provide them with the supports they need. In the Sacramento City Unified School District, one form of this support was a men's leadership academy in the district's high schools. AAMA

in OUSD has provided a structure to strengthen the skills and identities of the African American males; the district is pursuing similar structures for other subgroups of students.

In addition to programs offering support, mechanisms for capturing student voice can help elevate and honor that voice. In Cleveland, a student advisory group gives young people in the district a direct line to share their experiences, concerns, and ideas with the superintendent. Similarly, mechanisms such as a parent-student advisory council or a student leadership council provide channels for adults to understand and address student needs.

Participants also argued that independent of formal groups, adults need to make choices that help them better understand students' experiences. As one meeting participant stated, "The higher you go, the harder you must serve." This responsibility may be especially important for district leaders who have become progressively detached from the daily student experience as they have advanced in their careers. One suggested approach was to meet with a student at her house in the morning and stay with her the entire day to better understand her experience. As one individual advised, "If we listen to our children, they'll tell us exactly what we need to do and where we need to be."

Beyond creating opportunities to meet student needs and understand student experiences, participants suggested that a key factor in developing SEL competencies among adults and students is seeking and honoring student voice. Referring to the first of OUSD's values, "students first," one participant observed that everyone values putting students first on the surface, but doing so may become more difficult when moving into the detailed context of navigating adult agendas, budgets, and other priorities. Participants also emphasized that it is important not merely to seek input from students, but to circle back and demonstrate where that input influenced district action. Student voice becomes meaningful when students themselves see that their voices inform and drive actual decisions that reflect their interests.

Meeting participants also made the case that if districts say they value student voice, they need to be prepared to walk the talk. One district leader described a situation in which high school students had walked out of school in protest of actions the principal had made. The immediate response from adults was that the students were acting inappropriately, but the superintendent pushed back by advocating that the adults in the building talk with the students to understand their perspectives. Districts can do more good by helping students find appropriate channels to voice their opinions than shutting down student attempts to communicate. As this leader explained, "We do more damage by saying, 'You have a voice, you have a voice, you have a voice, but not when it counts.'"

Measuring Progress and Making the Work Visible

Although states, districts, and schools have developed a set of commonly understood measures for monitoring academic progress, the same kinds of metrics for tracking SEL growth have not been well established in schools. The meeting therefore addressed questions of how to measure SEL competencies for both students and adults, as well as how to effectively and appropriately share information about progress.

Developing Valid and Reliable Measures

One of the higher profile efforts to measure SEL in California has come through the CORE Districts. The work began with a recognition of the limited utility of academic measures that focused exclusively on mathematics and English-language arts achievement, and an intention to measure differently what matters for kids. In 2013–14, the CORE Districts convened a group of researchers and measurement specialists to develop a set of SEL constructs and survey measures of those constructs. Using this advice, the CORE Districts conducted a pilot test of their SEL measures with 30,000 students and had an external expert examine their validity and reliability. A field test followed in 2014–15, in which the CORE Districts surveyed all students in Grades 5–12 but did not include the results in their accountability system.[9] The 2015–16 school year saw the surveys implemented for all students again, this time incorporating the results into the School Quality Improvement Index (SQII).

The CORE Districts' work is promising, but it is not the only effort to measure and analyze SEL competencies. Cleveland MSD has been engaged with SEL for a longer period of time and has formative and summative measures that include student surveys, student behavior, academic performance, and parent engagement. The district now has nine years of data for many of its measures and can therefore examine trends over time to deepen its understanding of areas of growth and persistent need.

Interpreting Results

The meeting enabled participants to explore emerging patterns from the CORE Districts data. These initial findings suggest important connections with SEL measures, but they also shine the light on important cautions and questions for further research.

Exploring Issues of Race

Early data indicate notable disparities among racial/ethnic subgroups on SEL competencies such as social awareness and self-management, differences that supersede differences in class. These findings highlight important areas for district exploration into issues of equity and the different messages students receive based on their appearance and their background. Low self-reported measures of SEL competencies for African-American males, for example, could be a reflection of the micro-aggressions they encounter throughout their formal schooling.

Participants also cautioned the CORE Districts and others to exercise extreme caution in using, interpreting, and sharing these data. Issues of bias—always a fundamental concern in any measurement endeavor—may merit particular attention relative to race and the measurement of SEL, as competencies such as self-awareness and social awareness are

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[9] A subset of the CORE Districts received a waiver from the accountability provisions of No Child Left Behind to create their own accountability system that relied on a more expansive set of measures than those mandated under federal law. With the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2015 as the Every Student Succeeds Act, waivers no longer applied and the CORE Districts' accountability system was no longer operational. Nevertheless, the School Quality Improvement Index that was designed to inform the accountability system remains.

profoundly shaped by race. Participants therefore recommended the involvement of multiple perspectives in interpreting SEL findings, especially those who might bring insights into the root causes for differences among student subgroups. As one individual advised, "Do not drown out the voice of diversity in understanding what these data are telling you." Similarly, comments suggested that districts need to be very careful about messaging, especially when data that reveals racial differences could reinforce negative and misleading stereotypes.

Exploring Issues of Gender

The video clip from the Mills College Teacher Scholars exercise demonstrated a case in which gender dynamics might shape the ways in which students interact and engage with academic content. Data from the CORE Districts suggests a strong connection between gender and SEL competencies. Of the four competencies that the CORE Districts measure (self-management, growth mindset, self-efficacy, and self-awareness), gender gaps exist for all except growth mindset. In particular, self-efficacy—on which females score higher than males in elementary schools—drops for girls in middle school and never recovers. These gender issues will be a topic for further exploration as the CORE Districts continue to collect and analyze data.

Exploring Additional Issues

Meeting participants also identified other issues that merit further attention. One of these is reference bias. If different groups of students have different standards or points of comparison that they use to guide their responses to a survey question, the resulting outcomes could be a reflection of these reference points, not the SEL competencies themselves. Causal mechanisms are another topic for exploration. Although preliminary analyses have shown strong correlations among various SEL and academic outcomes, much remains to be learned about which measures might drive change in others. Finally, given the attention from participants throughout the meeting to the importance of working with adults, some wondered whether there might be connections between student academic performance and *adult* SEL competencies. The CORE Districts are administering surveys to adults in only two districts, but these data could provide a means of exploring that question. The CORE Districts will continue to pursue these and other questions moving forward.

Using Results to Guide Action and Make the Work Visible

After exploring some mechanisms for measuring SEL, preliminary findings from one of those approaches, and considerations for interpretation, meeting conversation turned to considerations for districts to act appropriately on SEL data. New evidence can generate excitement and motivation to act on emerging patterns, but participants emphasized the need to strike a balance between responsiveness and rushing to judgment. As interesting as they may be, early findings typically raise more questions than answers. Some participant comments suggested that research has not yet produced definitive answers related to SEL—especially those with enough certainty to guide state policy action—but that educators cannot afford to wait for such answers. Those engaged in the work need to acknowledge the knowledge gaps and adopt a learning stance by trying new approaches,

recognizing the mistakes they make along the way, and using the experience to learn, adapt, and improve.

One approach to data use that might generate particular controversy is for accountability purposes. The CORE Districts' decision to incorporate SEL measures into its SQII was one high-profile approach to doing this, and the index retains the SEL measures even though its accountability purposes have changed. Critics of this approach worry that attaching high stakes to SEL measures might promote surface-level understanding of the underlying concepts, poison relationships among teachers who compete rather than collaborate with one another, or even encourage educators to game the system, thus undermining the initial goal of elevating and addressing SEL competencies as an important educational outcome. Representatives from the CORE Districts acknowledged that they do not know what will happen, but have deliberately chosen to move forward to learn more about what works and what does not. By sharing this learning publicly, they hope to inform and advance the broader field.

Some comments also distinguished between internal and external accountability. External approaches to measurement, reward, sanction, and support can often lead to unintended negative consequences. Internal accountability, in contrast, can help teachers and school leaders understand where they stand relative to their peers and, in turn, build their understanding and agency in finding pathways for growth.

Using SEL measures in accountability systems is one way to call attention to the importance of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills; but there are others. Districts can also ask teachers to evaluate SEL as one measure of progress in student report cards. Doing so creates a mechanism for parents and students to receive feedback on student progress. It also enables school and district leaders to track progress on individual, school, and district levels. Ratings of SEL competencies can also help educators identify students who are at risk and need additional support or students who might serve as role models and resources for peers. Finally, tracking SEL progress lays a foundation for teachers to have conversations about students' positive behaviors with the students themselves and with their parents.

Creating Coherence Across a Range of Strategies and Initiatives

Several themes from the meeting—including the need to connect SEL and academic learning, to work closely with adults to advance SEL, and to attend to issues of race and equity—emerged both from the specific sessions in which they were introduced and in conversation throughout the two-day convening. An additional theme did not appear in the meeting agenda but was one of the most frequent observations throughout the meeting: the need to bring coherence to the work of SEL. Across topics, participants talked about the opportunities and challenges associated with effectively integrating SEL into a district's overall improvement efforts.

Provide Clarity About What SEL Is

If districts hope to effectively build social and emotional competencies into their improvement strategies and practices, they need to clearly and concisely help people throughout the system understand what it is they are trying to incorporate. In Oakland and other contexts, educators often conflate SEL with particular programs or interventions. For example, many mistakenly define SEL as synonymous with PBIS or restorative justice. Similarly, many adults consider SEL an add-on to the core work of teaching and learning. One key challenge is to help stakeholders instead understand SEL as the connective tissue that strengthens and ties a range of approaches together. An OUSD district leader described how this dynamic plays out in Oakland:

> We have [restorative justice] and PBIS and AAMA, but we have different departments and languages … Now imagine if we took enough time to develop a language and a through-line, and then we located that at a school site. I'm hoping the system will move to that, but for now, for principals it's a big challenge.

To help provide clarity, participants offered some advice for district leaders. First and foremost, keep SEL-related discussions and practices simple. Using fewer words can help educators remember key concepts and avoid the confusion that sometimes comes with too many lists and frameworks. Participants also suggested that the greatest need for clarity is around the goals and outcomes the system hopes to achieve. If everyone understands what the finish line should look like, it is more likely that the steps to get there will align with one another. Finally, participants advocated for examples of where the work is going well. When teachers, principals, and central office leaders can understand what success looks like, it can help them understand the underlying concepts and find ways to apply strong models to their own context.

Build on the Work Already Taking Place

Districts can combat initiative overload and confusion by building on the work already underway. As one participant explained, "They're more likely to get traction if it's built into another initiative because everything we name something different, it's like, 'Oh, here we go again.'" Moreover, not all of the work is actually new. In many cases, SEL might be a new label for what many educators have long understood to be best practice. Rather than start from scratch, district leaders can call out the effective practice that aligns with what they are trying to achieve and then help teachers and principals see how that practice reflects SEL principles. Another individual made a similar point: "I struggle with SEL as something separate. In order to explain it to a teacher it has to make sense to them…Our team needs to think about mapping SEL to what we already have in place."

Meeting participants identified some of the common vehicles to which districts might attach their SEL efforts. Finding teachers who are already doing the work and shining a spotlight on them can help. Another existing initiative that already has momentum in many districts is Common Core implementation. By demonstrating how SEL efforts support and advance academic standards, districts may find more traction. As one participant offered, "If you can show that SEL activities reinforce Common Core activities, you have a winner on both sides and a lot of influence." At the secondary level, Linked Learning might also be a

useful vehicle. If districts can position SEL as an integral component of high-functioning pathways that develop college *and* career skills, they may foster deeper understanding and greater buy-in among teachers.

Take Active Steps to Create Demand and Buy-In

Participants also offered cautions and advice about managing change. One participant began by warning, "Any initiative's death is the mandate." Although new requirements can offer an enticing means of encouraging desired practices, they can also create misunderstanding and foster resistance. Instead, some participants suggested that district leaders begin with listening and empathy. When district leaders understand where teachers are struggling and what students say they need, they can design and promote new ideas in ways that address those needs.

District leaders can also look for ways to catalyze a sense of agency among teachers, leaders, and other stakeholders. Even if the district knows where it wants to go, building in some level of choice can help stakeholders feel they have a voice in designing how to get there. One possible approach is to have people or schools opt in to new ideas, then build interest across the district by spreading the word of success. The advantage of such an approach is that those people most invested in new ways of doing things will give more thought and energy to exploring innovative approaches and navigating challenges. Encouraging these individuals to advocate for new ideas and to enlist stakeholder support can also be more effective than edicts or requests from the central office. Other meeting participants cautioned, however, that such efforts sometimes fail to spread beyond the invested early adopters. District leaders need to think carefully about how to take new practices to scale.

Again, district leaders can also take steps to show people what success looks like. As one participant observed, "The more a district makes categories and bureaucracy, the more professionals—teachers—are turned off … Seeing colleagues' examples is what motivates change."

Harness and Unite Central Office Support

If districts hope to integrate SEL into adult and student practices at the classroom and school levels, comments in the meeting suggested that they need to do so within the central office as well. One individual observed, "Part of what strikes me about the through-line is that there's a challenge when there are three or four people in the district who think about this instead of it being everyone." If meaningful SEL practice is to be seamlessly integrated into academic instruction and learning, it will require work across departments. In addition, any strategy for growth needs to be implemented on a scale the district can support. The successful promotion of new ideas will require communication and professional learning, and district leaders should take care not to extend such initiatives beyond their districts' capacity to provide needed resources and support to schools or individuals.

Next Steps for the Collaborative

The Collaborative will reconvene at the San Bernardino City Unified School District in March 2016 to examine approaches to collective impact in San Bernardino and in the Oceanside Unified School District. In the meantime, the Collaborative staff will continue to follow up on a November 2016 convening of stakeholders to apply design thinking to address the shortcomings of California's Local Control Accountability Plan. Staff will also continue to pursue publications that share key lessons from our core meetings with the broader field of California educators. As always, resources from this and previous meetings, updates regarding Collaborative members, and information concerning upcoming events are available on our website at www.cacollaborative.org.