NEW ORLEANS, LA.

In the Spring of 2020, our network kicked off site visits to engage each charter management organization in collaborative problem definition, classroom observations, and context-building. By mid-March, inaugural site visits were underway in Chicago, Denver, Los Angeles, and the Bay Area. When COVID hit, Collegiate Academies’ Andrea Bond and Quinn Sears teamed up with the Marshall improvement team to reimagine a virtual site visit that brought stakeholders together from around the network. At first we weren’t entirely sure how a virtual visit would go, since previous site visits required hands-on whiteboarding, real-time collaboration, and highly interactive brainstorming. But the Collegiate team was willing to try a virtual visit in order to move the project forward. So in April 2020, amid school closures and transitions to distance learning, we set out to replace our regular programming with a virtual site visit. Andrea, Collegiate’s project sponsor and Senior Director of Scholar Support Services, led the virtual visit with the clear vision of gathering input and insights from key members of the Special Education community on 833 plans, Specially Designed Instruction (SDI), and collaboration structures. Our team, in turn, modified the visit using virtual tools—with a surprisingly productive process mapping exercise enabled by Google Drawings.

Process mapping allowed us to create a shared understanding of the complex student support systems at play. It also helped the team articulate key barriers and priorities for the Fall.

KEY PRIORITIES

- **833 Plans** could be better aligned to the core curriculum.
- **SDI teachers** would benefit from more opportunities to share best practices.
- **Collaboration structures** between general education and special education teachers provide clarity on curriculum adaptations and implementation.

Later on, a series of facilitated focus groups would build on these shared understandings to elevate teacher voices and inform summer professional development. Most crucially, our virtual site visit set the tone for every Improvement Team member’s commitment to equity and inclusion for all students. As Director of Scholar Support Beth Sclama shared of the ‘whole-team’ culture at Collegiate:

> “Teachers are constantly working to problem-solve how to get kids access, learning what we need to do on our part, making sure the expectation is high for all kids.”

Coming out of the process mapping exercise, there was a strong commitment across the team to increase structures and systems that ensure students are getting instruction that best fits their needs. And moving forward, we’re confident that no whiteboard is no problem. The Zoom room can still be a place to map system-level structures, identify opportunities, and bring together multi-level stakeholders for a common aim. Our virtual process mapping exercise demonstrated the adaptability and resilience of the Collegiate team, who didn’t let virtual-only get in the way of coming up with the best solutions for kids. The key? Building team commitment early and often.

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Giovanna Santimauro and Stephanie Lassalle led the reporting of this story. Daria Zhao writes from Marshall Street Initiatives, a K-12 solutions lab that tackles persistent challenges in American public education.