



# BUILDING A MORE EQUITABLE AND PARTICIPATORY SCHOOL SYSTEM IN CALIFORNIA: THE LOCAL CONTROL FUNDING FORMULA'S FIRST YEAR



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**California's landmark Local Control Funding Formula dramatically changed the way the state funds its school districts, directing greater resources to districts serving large numbers of low-income students, English learners, and students in foster care. LCFF also shifted substantially more control to school districts and communities. This report describes California's first-year implementation of LCFF.**

It is far too early to tell whether student outcomes have improved under LCFF. It's also too early — and frankly not possible — to trace how supplemental and concentration dollars generated by high-need students were spent. What we can describe, however, are the ways in which districts and community stakeholders engaged with one another to develop plans for their LCFF dollars. In describing this work, we draw upon interviews with more than 60 district and community leaders. We also study first-year Local Control and Accountability Plans, or LCAPs, in order to learn about the programs and services districts propose to offer students, particularly high-need students. In addition, we look at how clearly the LCAPs show how these programs will be funded.

We find that LCFF has created an unprecedented level of engagement among school district leaders, community leaders, parents, teachers, and students. This has not been without tension in some communities; and to be sure, not all stakeholders experienced a deep level of engagement.

But the overall trend is toward more participatory planning and budgeting in K-12 schooling.

We also find that, despite a tight timeline, district leaders have oriented themselves to the new law and are collaborating across departments and with stakeholders more than before. In a number of districts, leaders have advanced spending plans that empower school sites to make more decisions. And in some districts, we see that administrators are using LCFF funds to expand parent engagement programs, add new services for foster youth, or improve school climate. However, by and large, these new programs are funded by small budgets.

In general, districts offer modest innovation in this first year. Instead, most districts are shoring up rising staffing costs, restoring programs and personnel cut during the Great Recession, preserving programs previously funded by categorical aid, and adding one or two new programs for high-need students.

**LCFF should help us achieve greater equity, transparency, and participation in our schools.**

# THE LCFF'S FIRST YEAR: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



We observe that most LCAPs present an incomplete picture of a district's programs and services, instead accounting only for the programs and services that align with the state priorities or explaining just a portion of the district's total budget. In all, LCAPs offer frustratingly little insight into how LCFF will help accelerate efforts to close the opportunity and achievement gaps among our state's students. District and state leaders have a chance to address these gaps in the years ahead.

## WE PROPOSE THAT STATE LEADERS:

- Build district capacity to engage stakeholders and offer effective services for high-need students
- Create more funding transparency
- Ensure county offices of education consistently enforce LCAP and spending regulations
- Hold districts accountable for results

## WE SUGGEST THAT DISTRICT LEADERS:

- Make LCAPs easier to read and provide the community with supplemental materials that help explain the plan
- Clarify how supplemental and concentration funding is being spent
- Engage stakeholders early and often, and empower parents by offering them information and meaningful roles
- Innovate by replicating effective practices and experimenting with new ways of serving high-need students
- Monitor the impact of programs over time and be willing to modify or discard what's not working

As California enters its second year of this bold reform, we look forward to monitoring and supporting its implementation so that students and communities realize the benefits of a more flexible, equitable, participatory, and transparent school funding system.

## PHOTO CREDITS

**Terri Brindisi:** Front left photo, back middle photo | **Weingart East Los Angeles YMCA:** Front middle photo | **Glauz Diego, Community Coalition:** Back left photo | **Berkeley Unified School District:** Front right photo | **Educators 4 Excellence:** Back right photo

“We have a golden opportunity between your leadership, parents, community, and schools all working together to erase inequities.”

– Dolores Huerta, speaking to California's State Board of Education on January 16, 2014



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