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Governance Brief

Promising Practices for Developing and Implementing LCAPS

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The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) was signed into law in July 2013 to give local education agencies (LEAs) greater discretion over how they allocate funds and to more effectively direct resources to the state's most vulnerable student populations. LCFF also changed how LEAs are held accountable for improvement. All LEAs are required to create a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) that details how they will use funds to improve outcomes for students.

LCAPs require extensive planning and coordination on the part of district leaders, and as with all major policy changes, district leaders need time and support to improve their ability to develop equitable and effective district plans. To support continued innovation in LCAP development and implementation, this policy brief presents findings from interviews with superintendents and board members at the school district and county levels on their promising LCAP practices.¹

This policy brief is an extension of the year three LCAP research, conducted by CSBA in the spring of 2016. The full report of this interview study, *Increasing LCAP Transparency and Reaffirming California's Commitment to Local Control: Experiences of District and County Leaders*, is available at <http://bit.ly/2dhCOI5>.

The brief provides information gathered from school district and county office of education leaders on the role of board members and superintendents in supporting the work of LCAP development, as well as practices related to LCAP development that they found effective. These promising practices fall into four main categories:

1. Collaboration
2. Leadership

3. Community engagement

4. Alignment between goals, programs, and resources

The findings and recommendations in this report are based on interviews with members of the California School Boards Association's (CSBA) LCFF Collaborative Working Group (CWG). In 2014, CSBA formed the CWG in partnership with California Forward, to identify and promote promising LCFF and LCAP implementation strategies, solutions, and effective practices. Members of the CWG meet quarterly for facilitated sessions focused on improving LCFF implementation, LCAP development, and sharing promising practices.

Collaboration

Currently, only limited opportunities exist for county and district board members and superintendents to share experiences and promising practices related to LCAP development. District and county leaders reported that their participation in the CWG was a valuable experience that provided them a rare opportunity to share ideas and address local challenges. Interviews with district leaders further suggest the need to increase the avenues available to share effective practices for LCAP development including strategies for engaging the public; ways to connect LCAP goals to the ongoing work of the board; strategies for making the LCAP more accessible to the public, and ways to structure the involvement of the superintendent and school board members to increase the meaningfulness of their contribution to the development process.

Traditionally, county offices of education have served in a supporting role for school districts. County offices of education review and approve school district budgets, and monitor districts in several areas (e.g., compliance with the Williams

Consent Decree). Likewise, under LCFF county offices of education have been assigned a key role in supporting local districts as they address challenges with the implementation of the new funding formula. Yet, county offices of education are not solely responsible for this important role of support and information-sharing between districts. The California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE), CSBA, and other statewide organizations will have a role in ensuring LEAs do not have to work in isolation on their LCAPs, and can continue to innovate and improve their plans through meaningful collaboration with colleagues. While CSBA's working group and this policy brief — as well as the efforts of other organizations — are critical, developing a coordinated statewide effort to provide districts with opportunities for greater collaboration and information-sharing on LCAP development and implementation is essential if we are to expect large scale systems change.

Leadership

In interviews, county and district school board members were asked to identify their most important role in the LCAP process. Their responses can serve as a guide to new superintendents and board members who want to strategically and effectively engage in LCAP development.

Most important role for board members

Responses from school board members on their role in LCAP development and implementation primarily focused on budget oversight, community engagement, and ensuring improvement.

- » **Budget oversight.** Board members reported that they are responsible for making sure district funds are spent correctly to support the students it is intended for, including state specified groups. Specifically, board members must make sure district priorities are reflected in the budget and to do “big picture thinking” about how limited resources can be used to meet district goals. “Board members have to assess whether the investments we make are going to take us in the direction we want to go,” said one respondent.
- » **Community engagement.** Board members also discussed their role in community engagement. One board member cited the importance of hearing from the community and staff, and assessing their input. “Where’s the data to back them up? Not just ‘do we want to do this?’ but ‘How is it aligned with our district plan?’ ‘Does it align with our data?’” Another board member stated the need “To get as much information as possible from the staff about what the [public

engagement] process is and to push for the kinds of stakeholder involvement that we think are important.” Another board member reported that “School board members have a primary responsibility to assess the effectiveness of the LCAP as a primary communication device.” If the public does not understand the plan outlined in the district’s LCAP, more must be done to ensure transparency in district programs, expenditures, and progress towards district goals.

- » **Ensure improvement.** Board members also reported that they are responsible for ensuring the district and county makes progress towards their goals. Specifically, they have a responsibility to look at the results of the investments that have been made and ask, “Are the process and the investments we make going to get us where we want to go?”

“I never went in [to the public engagement meetings] and asked ‘so what do you want?’ They paid me a lot of money to decide what the district needs. This is what the data says, this is what I’ve heard you say, here’s what I think is the plan, what is your feedback?”

Most important role for superintendent

Not unlike the work of board members, superintendents reported a range of responsibilities for LCAP development and implementation. The duties they cited include responsibility for meaningful engagement with the public and guiding the process to build a strong plan.

Ensure meaningful engagement with the public

The superintendents interviewed for this project stressed the importance of ensuring that those meetings were well-publicized, that the draft plan was clearly articulated at the meetings, and that the public was given a genuine opportunity to provide input. Below is a more detailed list of their suggestions on the most important role of the superintendent in the public engagement process.

- » **Create opportunities for meaningful engagement with the public.** “Set the model for sincere meaningful engagement. This isn’t about jumping through a hoop but really engaging with the needs of teachers and parents that will serve students.”
- » **Model the importance of transparency.** One superintendent reported the need to organize LCAP development and implementation so that the work is transparent to all stakeholders. In particular, the LCAP documents should, “become vehicles for carrying your message rather than just another area of distrust between the district and stakeholders.”
- » **Ensure engagement with the community.** Gather input online. See the themes that independent people have come up with and what they see as the needs of the district. It is not enough to simply hold a public engagement meeting. Districts need to develop strategies for incorporating the public’s feedback into their plans.
- » **Know the data.** The superintendent should know the data better than everyone in the community.
- » **Create a balance between school district and public expertise.** Try to balance efforts to educate stakeholders about the district’s plan with opportunities for public input so that everyone’s voice is heard. Superintendents need to make sure clear procedures are in place.
- » **Create meaning for the public.** The LCAP document on its own may not be accessible to all stakeholders. The superintendent must ensure that district goals and strategies for achieving those goals are clear to all. The superintendent must also articulate to the public and to district and school staff why the LCAP is important and

why it can and should be used as the number one planning document for the district.

Guide the process

Other superintendents stressed the need for the superintendent to help guide the LCAP development and implementation process, to maintain responsibility for the final plan, and to ensure district programs and expenditures outlined in the LCAP result in improvement, especially for targeted student populations.

- » **Facilitate LCAP development, input, and approval by the school board.** One superintendent noted, “Regardless of whether or not you call it LCAP, it’s the role of the superintendent to work with the board, to ensure their priorities are met and that everything we do aligns with it.” This LCAP leadership role includes direct coordination of plan development and interaction with the board to ensure they are “apprised and aware” of the goals, programs, and budget allocations contained within the LCAP document.
- » **Make a coherent plan.** Above and beyond the role of coordination, superintendents also reported that they were ultimately responsible for the construction of their district LCAP. One superintendent remarked, “The superintendent is responsible for making a coherent plan. To bring the mission, the vision, the stakeholder engagement process, values and goals into actions in the LCAP.”
- » **See the big picture.** Moreover, another superintendent stated that “the superintendent’s most important role is to see the big picture and use the LCAP as the plan that really drives that work. The LCAP needs to be the focused plan..The superintendent is responsible for creating and selling the vision of the organization. The superintendent has to understand what that vision is. You need to be the torchbearer for that. You need to go in with your plan. The superintendent brings clarity to the plans and processes and defines it for people. This is not so different from what the superintendent did in the past. You need to have as a superintendent a vision for what you believe. You need to be brave enough to tackle the real issues that are impacting student success. You have to be the bearer of that message. You have to go out and get feedback. Have a vision, go back to the data. Get feedback.”

- » **Ensure improvement.** Finally, the superintendent must “Make sure the work is super impactful for the target populations the state has identified.”

Community Engagement

Several district leaders reported expanded and more meaningful community engagement as a positive outcome of their LCAP, including increased engagement from students, parents, and teachers. In this section, we outline the strategies district leaders reported as most effective in helping them to increase transparency and provide new channels of communication with the public, with school staff, and with other stakeholders about their LCAP. These practices include strategies to simplify the LCAP so it is more accessible to the public and inviting students and members of the community to help facilitate the public engagement meetings.² Specifically, district leaders reported the following practices:

- » **Strategies to make the LCAP more transparent.** Creating an infographic of the LCAP and sending out monthly/quarterly “LCAP Updates.”
- » **Using data to make the work of the district more transparent.** One district leader reported that their district has used the community engagement process to provide additional information to the public about what it really costs to educate students. As a result, “It’s created a lot of conversations around aligning the budget with district priorities.” Another county leader reported that the LCAP has led to greater transparency around student achievement. “The LCAP is one mechanism to report information on student outcomes. These are data they already had but weren’t sharing it.”
- » **Strategies to more authentically engage with the community.** Student facilitation of the student engagement process; parent-led community meetings; and an LCAP parent advisory committee are all strategies districts reported to improve their engagement with the community around LCAP development.

At the same time, superintendents and board members reported several challenges with the community engagement process including the time and resources required to effectively engage the community each year. Accordingly, when asked what they were most interested in learning about LCAP development and implementation, district leaders overwhelmingly responded that they would like more information on other districts’ strategies for engaging the public.

Alignment Between Goals, Programs, and Resources

Several district leaders also reported that the development of their LCAP has led to more regular reviews of the district’s progress towards goals/targets and programmatic decisions through greater alignment between district goals and budget decisions. The following promising strategies emerged from the interviews for creating greater alignment between the district’s goals, programs, and expenditures.

- » **Analyzing the budget to ensure supplemental and concentration funds are being used as intended.** Several district leaders reported on the need to improve their district’s system for tracking how supplemental and concentration funds are spent to ensure that the funds reach the students they are intended to support. These districts are conducting new analyses of their budgets, with a specific focus on how supplemental and concentration funds are being spent within the district.
- » **Setting up budget codes so they correspond with LCAP programmatic goals.** Two district leaders discussed new efforts to assign budget codes so that they correspond with programmatic goals in their district LCAP. In doing so, the district can more easily track the effectiveness of their expenditures in improving student achievement.
- » **More attention to data.** Many district leaders said the LCAP has pushed them to focus more on data to track improvement in the district. For example, one district leader reported that they now have the principals come in mid-year to talk through their data and how they are making progress. According to the district leader, there is a more “heightened awareness around the data...They are talking about ‘How do you know if it’s great, how do you know if it’s working?’” A county leader reported that more districts now make decisions based on data. According to a county leader, “Some of the districts have always excelled in this area. That is what they did before. The LCAP basically standardized this for the rest of the state.”
- » **Connecting LCAP goals to district work.** One district reported that they are using the targets in their LCAP as goals for staff (e.g. counselors have to report regularly on progress towards reducing the number of students receiving D’s and F’s). Similarly, another district has asked that all staff identify the relevant LCAP goals when they make presentations to the school board. A larger district reported that they assigned a specific person who is responsible for each sub goal in

the district LCAP and can regularly report on progress towards that sub goal. Finally, two districts reported that they have used the district's progress on their LCAP goals to evaluate their superintendent.

Policy Implications

The LCAP is a new policy and districts need time and resources (not just funding but also strategies) to implement it well. Strategies in this report may help build the capacity of district leaders to carry out this work. Districts want more information and guidance from the state, but the state does not want to make the process too prescriptive. Information-sharing networks and online repositories of promising practices have the potential to provide district leaders with the resources they need.

As mentioned previously, school district and county leaders are keenly aware of the need for additional training and resources to ensure that LCFF and district LCAPs are implemented properly and with the intended impact. To accomplish this, a comprehensive effort to inform, engage and involve a range of stakeholders — including statewide associations like CSBA — are critical. Additionally, priority should be placed on building multi-agency and cross-cutting collaborative groups much like the CWG, which has been credited with encouraging understanding of the challenges and potential solutions to the most complex issues facing districts in LCAP development and implementation. The CCEE's solicitation and incorporation of key "lessons learned" and promising practices from the field in their work — including ongoing efforts to collect current

information from collaborative efforts — will only serve to strengthen efforts by districts and county offices across the state, and ultimately, better serve the interests of the state's 6.2 million students and their families.

Endnotes

- 1 Throughout this brief, we use the term district leaders to refer to superintendents and board members at the school district and county levels.
- 2 CSBA's *LCFF Rubrics, Issue 1* governance brief includes communication tips for sharing data with the community: <http://bit.ly/2eZHN4O>; The California Collaborative on District Reform's July 2016 brief offers strategies for communicating with the public about district plans <http://bit.ly/2e6IJFc>

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