THE California Way

The Golden State's Quest to Build an Equitable and Excellent Education System

Roberta C. Furger, Laura E. Hernández, and Linda Darling-Hammond

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Executive Summary

California students, families, educators, and policymakers are at the center of one of the country's most ambitious equity-focused education reforms. In 2013, the state adopted its Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), which has shifted billions of funds to districts serving high-need students and provided all districts with broad flexibility to develop—in partnership with parents, students, and staff—spending plans aligned to local priorities and needs. These structural reforms coincided with the state's implementation of the Common Core State Standards and Next Generation Science Standards, implementation of the Smarter Balanced Assessment System, and development of new educator preparation and licensure standards to support the more rigorous academic goals.

In what has come to be known as the "California Way," the state defined a new era in its educational history. The California Way differs dramatically from both the state's prior approach and that initiated by the federal No Child Left Behind Act. It replaced a "test and punish" philosophy—focused on driving change in a highly inequitable system through sanctions for schools, educators, and students—with one that seeks to "assess and improve" through data analysis and capacity building. The new approach also focuses on developing 21st-century skills of critical thinking and problem-solving, more positive supports for students, and reduction of exclusionary discipline practices. Educator preparation standards have been updated to provide new teachers and principals with the skills needed to advance student learning in supportive and productive ways.

Instead of the "culture of compliance" that had permeated the public education system, the California Way reorients districts, counties, and the state to the principle and practice of "subsidiarity" or local control. In partnership with students, families, and communities, school and district leaders are charged with assessing local needs, identifying priorities, making decisions collaboratively, and focusing on progress on a "whole child, whole school" agenda.

In place of the state's test-based accountability system, the LCFF established multiple measures of student and school success—eight priorities in all, ranging from availability of resources to parent engagement; from opportunities to learn a full and rich curriculum to wide-ranging indicators of academic and other outcomes. These measures are used in every community throughout the state to guide planning and budget decisions and to assess school progress and improvement efforts. Districts are expected to meaningfully engage communities in the development of their Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAP), an integral component of the LCFF. County offices and state agencies support these efforts and intervene where progress is not being made.

In place of the state's test-based accountability system, the LCFF established multiple measures of student and school success—eight priorities in all.

This report analyzes the forces that contributed to passage of the LCFF and concurrent reforms and the implications of these efforts for implementation and outcomes. We then draw on major research studies, reports, and original interviews to provide an analysis of changes and improvements to date across key areas: equity-focused shifts in funding and district practices; investments in strategies and structures to support the instructional shifts required to transform learning; efforts to improve school climate and culture; and district practices to support the engagement of students, families, and communities in budget and planning processes.

Equitable Funding and Practices

Since passage of the LCFF in 2013, researchers have documented important shifts in practices and spending. The funding formula has created a more equitable distribution of the state's k–12 resources among districts. It has also changed the conversation in districts throughout the state, focusing greater attention on equity among students and schools and the specific needs of students identified in the new funding formula. Throughout the state, districts are hiring additional staff and experimenting with new strategies for addressing structural inequities, including sending money to school sites based on need. Despite these promising shifts, ongoing challenges need to be addressed. The first is the still-low level of k–12 funding. Even with significant increases in overall funding since 2013, California districts still struggle to provide all students with a quality education using just their base grant. And while in-district equity gaps are shrinking, challenges with the LCAP template have made it difficult to get a full picture of how districts are spending supplemental and concentration funds to support high-need students.

Districts are experimenting with new strategies for addressing structural inequities.

Pursuing Deeper Learning

Five years into California's reforms, reports suggest districts are using their flexibility to invest in resources and promising practices to foster improved teaching and learning. Many California districts are allocating increased funds to professional development around new standards and instructional strategies for the LCFF target groups. Educators are also increasingly leveraging professional learning networks or cross-district learning opportunities, that enable the systematic sharing of expertise to improve teaching and learning for all students, including the students explicitly identified in LCFF. In the context of these reinvestments in professional learning, researchers are finding evidence of instructional and programmatic changes in California schools—shifts that are often Common Core–aligned. While this evidence is promising, ongoing challenges related to professional learning, instructional support for underserved student groups, and teacher shortages persist, suggesting areas for further attention across the state.

School Climate

The LCFF appears to be prompting some changes in efforts to improve school climate. Research suggests some districts are using their additional funds to increase student access to staff who can address students' holistic needs and to implement programs and practices that aim to build community and improve school climate. They are also engaging in efforts to conduct and interpret climate surveys, which can inform ongoing improvement around the creation of more supportive learning environments. While these efforts are noteworthy, districts still face obstacles to ensuring their efforts improve school climate, including the effects of the state's ongoing teacher shortage, challenges in implementing and interpreting survey data, and the need for ongoing professional development to improve social and emotional supports for students.

Engagement

Embedded in the LCFF are groundbreaking engagement requirements designed to help realize the law's vision of local control. Every year in every school district around the state, district leaders are required to convene and solicit input from students, parents, staff, and the broader community on their LCAPs, which detail district priorities and spending. The new requirements have been embraced by organized parents and students, in particular, who have leveraged them as an opportunity to advance their interests and priorities. The requirements have also prompted significant outreach efforts on the part of many districts. Researchers have identified exemplary districts that have taken an in-depth approach, often by partnering with local community groups. They also note, however, that many districts struggle to engage families in meaningful ways, particularly those from marginalized communities, and that engagement can be more pro forma and superficial.

Assessing Impact

While it is impossible to directly link particular outcome changes to specific policy decisions, the general trends suggest progress accomplished and areas of need. Whereas California once ranked in the bottom five states on every achievement measure on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, it has improved in both absolute and relative terms. California has shown some of the greatest gains of any state in the last few years, and now typically ranks between 25th and 35th among the states. While the state is no longer at the bottom, there is still ample room for improvement overall and in closing the still-large gaps in performance between students of color and White students.

High school graduation rates, now at 83%, have also increased in California since 2010, when they were 75%. All groups have improved substantially, although as with test scores, gaps remain. In 2018, African American students graduated within 4 years at rates of 73% and Hispanic American/Latino students at rates of 81%, compared to 86% for White students and 93% for Asian and Filipino students. A study of the effects of the reforms found that, in districts that received the most substantial funding, an increase of $1,000 per pupil in LCFF funding was associated with a 6 percentage point increase in graduation rates as well as improvements in mathematics and reading achievement.

Similarly, a review of data on exclusionary discipline practices and school climate paints a picture of steady—and in some cases significant—improvement, although there is variation across the state. Suspension rates decreased by more than one third between 2012 and 2017 and are now below the national average. Researchers found that these declines have held true for all racial and socioeconomic groups and school levels, narrowing disciplinary gaps among racial and ethnic groups across the state.

Meanwhile, schools have become safer. According to national data, school-based firearm incidents in the state, which were well above the national average from 2009 to 2010, were far below the national average by 2015–16, declining by more than 50% in the 7-year period. Significant decreases also occurred in rates of school-based fights, bullying incidents, and classroom disruptions over that period of time. Despite positive trends, however, students of color continue to be disproportionately impacted by exclusionary practices.

Looking Ahead

While considerable progress has been made, there is much more work to do. Research suggests that major tasks remain in at least three areas associated with funding, capacity-building, and staffing:

1. Funding: Support LCFF fundamentals and strategic educational investments.

- **Continue to refine current policies and deepen their implementation**. The massive change in funding and accountability that occurred with the LCFF, along with new standards and assessments, has taken root. While there is much work to be done, districts are beginning to make progress in this system. It is important that the new administration maintain stability for schools and districts to continue to move forward. At the same time, California must develop revenue streams and spending plans that will move the state toward adequacy as well as equity in funding and invest more strategically in a well-functioning early learning system.

- **Refine and strengthen the accountability system**. The state board has done considerable work to implement the LCFF's accountability framework, but there is ongoing work to be done. This includes fine-tuning the LCAP template so that it is accessible and useful to districts and stakeholders, completing work on indicators that are still under construction, clarifying what supports and actions will occur for districts and schools that are struggling and require intervention, and building a system of support that is able to truly help these schools and districts. The state can also strengthen the ability of schools and districts to create safe, inclusive, and welcoming school environments by supporting their capacity to administer, analyze, and address concerns identified in school surveys.

- **Address concerns about lack of transparency in local budgeting and planning processes**. Clear, actionable information about district-level budgets, including planned and actual expenses, is foundational to the democratic decision making that undergirds the LCFF. The recently developed Budget Overview for Parents may be a step toward this transparency.

2. Capacity building: Strengthen the capacity of districts, schools, and educators to address the state's priority areas.

- **Build on existing assets to create a more comprehensive professional learning infrastructure** that can ensure that every teacher and every school leader has the support and professional learning opportunities needed to create supportive and inclusive classrooms and to shift their instructional practices to align to new standards.

  A professional learning support system could guide investments in leadership training and the expansion of content-based supports that are proving successful so that they are available to all schools. It could also guide supports for developing social and emotional skills; engaging parents and families as partners; and effectively teaching students with disabilities, English learners, students who have experienced trauma, and others with exceptional learning and support needs. These supports, which may be provided through districts, county offices, universities, and nonprofit organizations, should be coordinated centrally to ensure ready availability and access to educators across the state.

- **Develop and support networks and exemplars for professional learning**. The success of professional learning networks, such as those supported by the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE), the Instructional Leadership Corps, and the collective work of the CORE Districts, demonstrates the value of creating strong and supported networks to build the capacity of educators and district leaders to increase opportunity and advance student achievement. Similarly, the state has much to learn from schools and districts that are leveraging new flexibility and increased resources to improve practice, experiences, and outcomes across the range of state priority areas. A critical role for both the California Department of Education and CCEE, as part of the Statewide System of Support available to all schools and districts, will be to cast a broad net to identify these exemplars and create a statewide infrastructure to support learning from these best practices and skilled practitioners and leaders.

3. Staffing: Strengthen the educator workforce.

- **Build a strong, stable, and diverse teacher workforce**. Persistent teacher shortages undermine efforts to improve educational opportunities and outcomes, particularly in schools serving large numbers of students from low-income families and students of color. Building on recent investments, the state can strengthen both recruitment and retention efforts. Forgivable loans and scholarships, teacher residencies, and Grow Your Own programs, which underwrite preparation and are repaid through service for several years in the classroom, can help recruit new teachers to shortage fields. Adequate mentoring for beginners, ongoing learning supports, and supportive administrators who create collegial environments can help increase retention.

- **Invest in school and district leaders**. Skilled school and district leaders are also critical to building a strong and stable workforce—and to making the important shifts in culture and practice envisioned by the LCFF and the new standards. Many states are tapping Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Title II funds as one support for leadership training. Some analysts have also suggested that California consider reprising the state leadership academy that was once so successful in preparing leaders for high-need schools and turnaround situations, as well as leadership in general.

California has entered a new era in its decades-long quest for equity and excellence. With substantial new investments, coupled with a laser-like focus on students with the greatest need, the state has made important strides in creating the framework needed to provide every student with an excellent education. Continued progress will depend on deepening these strategies and investments, as well as a focused effort to build the capacity of everyone in the system—teachers, school and district leaders, county and state officials, and families and communities—to capitalize on the new resources, flexibility, continuous improvement commitments, and community-based decision making that are the cornerstones of the California Way.

Introduction

> The students sat for 2 hours in the packed California State Board of Education chambers, waiting for a turn at the podium to share their 2-minute testimony. It was May 2014, and they came from different school districts and communities around the state, including the Coachella Valley, Fresno, Los Angeles, and Oakland, but shared a common purpose: to make sure that their voices—and the voices of students of color from low-income families around the state—were included and valued during implementation of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), the state's groundbreaking funding and accountability reform.
>
> One by one, Jalisa, Te'Ausha, Tony, Shaw, Kennedy, Christian, Genesis, Brianna, and Anna shared their stories and urged state board members to formally approve a role for students in the local budget and planning process required in every district as part of the shift to the LCFF. Behind them, students sat throughout the room, their faces hidden behind cardboard paddles with numbers emblazoned on the front. Their collective message to the board: We are more than a statistic. Our voice matters.
>
> "You see them, the students in the crowd.... Thousands of us have gone unheard and unseen," Jalisa, a senior from Long Beach, told the board. "This is how it feels to be seen as an index score, a college-going rate, a dropout, a percentage, a number.... We must be part of the decision making that will impact our education.[1]

Jalisa and her peers are at the center of one of the country's most ambitious equity-focused education reforms. In 2013, California adopted its Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), which has shifted billions of dollars to districts serving high-need students and provided them with broad flexibility to develop—in partnership with parents, students, and staff—spending plans aligned to local priorities and needs.

In place of the state's test-based accountability system, the LCFF established multiple measures of student and school success—eight priorities in all, ranging from availability of resources to parent engagement; from opportunities to learn a full, rich curriculum to wide-ranging indicators of academic and other outcomes. (See Figure 1.) These measures are used in every community throughout the state to guide planning and budget decisions and to assess school progress and improvement efforts. Districts are expected to meaningfully engage communities in the development of their Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), an integral component of the LCFF. The community engagement provisions include the requirement that districts engage parents, students—due to the advocacy of students like Jalisa and her peers—teachers, and other stakeholders as they develop plans and evaluate progress.

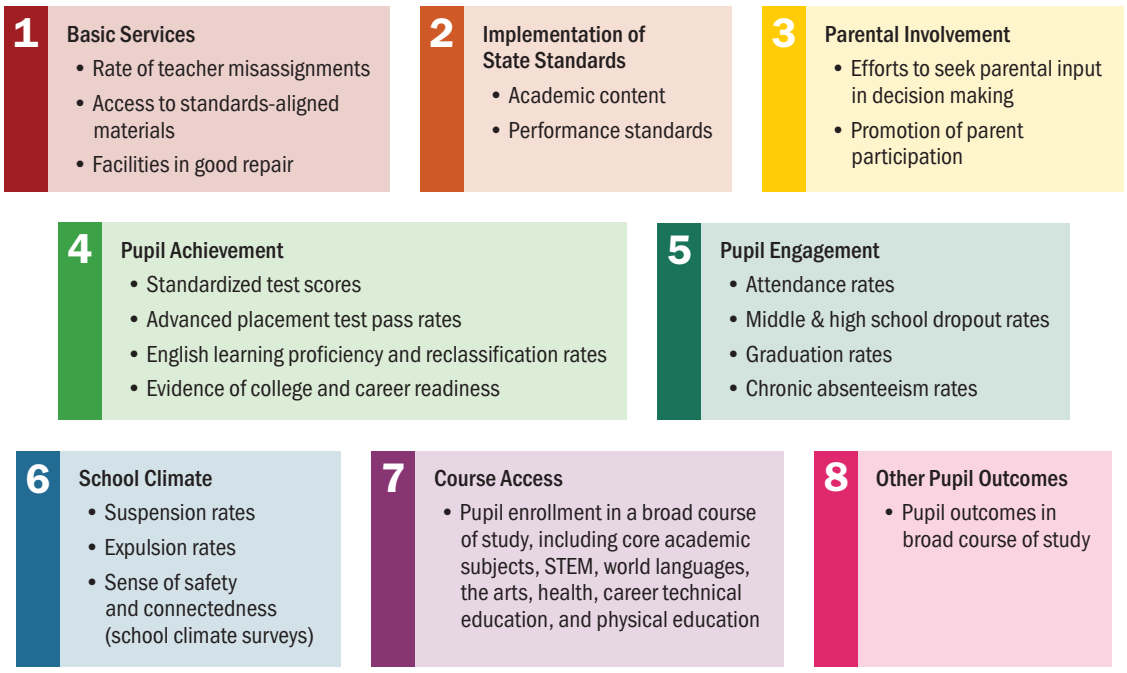
With this bold new approach to equitable funding, a holistic vision of education, and community engagement in decision making, California defined a new era in its educational history, which has come to be known as the "California Way." The California Way differs dramatically from both the state's prior approach and that initiated by the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. It replaced a "test and punish" philosophy—focused on driving change in a highly inequitable system through sanctions for schools, educators, and students—with one that seeks to "assess and improve" schools by tracking multiple measures of both opportunity and student progress.

New standards and assessments have been supported with investments in professional learning, leading to greater embrace of the Common Core standards in California than in many other states. With this new approach also comes a focus on developing more positive supports for students and greater attention to the disproportionate impact of exclusionary discipline practices. New educator preparation standards are designed to ensure that teachers and principals learn how to advance student learning in supportive and productive ways.

Central to the new system is a shift from a culture of compliance with state regulations to one focused on analyzing data to support continuous improvement. It is grounded in an equitable funding base and a commitment to engaging students, families, and communities as partners in assessing local needs, identifying priorities, and making progress.

While still a work in progress, California's new direction has had influence beyond the state's borders. Since passage of the LCFF in 2013, California's use of multiple measures to assess and improve schools has been widely written about,[2] discussed and advocated for in Washington, DC, and the focus of meetings with other states held by groups such as the Council for Chief State School Officers. In the process, California's approach defined much of the framework for the federal reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Passed in 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced NCLB with a multiple-measures system that includes many of these indicators as part of state reporting and allows states to decide which ones they will use for accountability purposes.

Figure 1
California's Eight State Priorities



Source: California Department of Education. (n.d.). State priority related resources. https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/statepriorityresources.asp.

California's new system replaces punitive intervention for low-performing schools—often focused on narrowed curriculum for students—with a theory of change rooted in building the capacity of educators and district leaders to identify and address inequities in opportunities and outcomes and provide all students with a high-quality education. These structural reforms coincided with the state's implementation of the Common Core State Standards and Next Generation Science Standards, implementation of the Smarter Balanced Assessment System (SBAC), and development of new educator preparation and licensure standards to support the more rigorous academic goals.

Although the scope and magnitude of the reforms felt for many as though everything changed overnight, the shifts were more than a decade in the making. They reflect the contributions of a broad cross section of organizations and individuals: students and families from the state's most marginalized and underserved communities and Sacramento advocates, teachers unions and district management, philanthropic and business leaders, and researchers and state policymakers. Their individual and collective work paved the way for Jerry Brown, a seasoned and popular governor, to flex his political and policy muscle to pass the LCFF and a constellation of education reforms, and for an aligned state board and Department of Education to support the implementation of this new approach.

As California transitions to a new governor and state superintendent of public instruction and embarks on the next significant phase of its improvement efforts—enacting the Statewide System of Support—an understanding of how the LCFF and the broader new California education strategy was accomplished, the progress made during the Brown era, and the challenges still to be addressed will be critical to deepening and sustaining the state's landmark education reforms.

With that goal in mind, we have analyzed major studies of the LCFF and the new reforms, reviewed status reports and other analysis of implementation practices, and conducted interviews with a broad cross section of policymakers, analysts, advocates, and education stakeholders. Our goal: to tell the still-evolving story of California's effort to advance a holistic vision of student and school success. (See a full discussion of the methodology in Appendix A.) It is a story of both meaningful progress and significant need; of important shifts in culture and practice and an ongoing struggle to shed a compliance mentality that stifles innovation and growth; of increased resources for students furthest from opportunity, but not enough to ensure all schools provide the opportunities and supports students need to thrive.

A strong foundation has been laid. Deepening and strengthening the reforms will be key to realizing the new vision for California's students and schools—rooted in equity, dependent upon the engagement and capacity of everyone in the school system, and focused on preparing today's students to be tomorrow's leaders in an increasingly complex world.

Setting the Stage: California's Descent From "First to Worst"[3]

In 1969–70, the earliest year for which national funding data is available, California was among the top 10 states[4] in the country in per-pupil spending, thanks to the ability of school boards to raise property taxes to meet local need. But it was a system that worked for many of the state's students, not all of them. Underneath California's comparatively high overall spending levels were deep inequities among districts, based on the wealth of their community and the corresponding property values.

Litigating Disparities

These inequities were the focus of a landmark case in California and national education finance history, *Serrano v. Priest*, filed in 1968. At the time the lawsuit was filed, property tax revenue accounted for about 55% of the total revenue of school districts. Assessed value per pupil and revenue per pupil both varied widely. Although state funding was higher for districts with low assessed values per pupil, significant gaps remained between high- and low-property wealth districts. In unified districts, for example, there was a 70% gap between the top 5% and the bottom 5% in the revenue per pupil.[5]

To illustrate the inequalities in the system, the *Serrano* lawyers juxtaposed the examples of the Baldwin Park and nearby Beverly Hills school districts in their complaint. At the time, Baldwin Park had a per-pupil assessed valuation of $3,706, compared to Beverly Hills' per-pupil assessed valuation of $50,885.

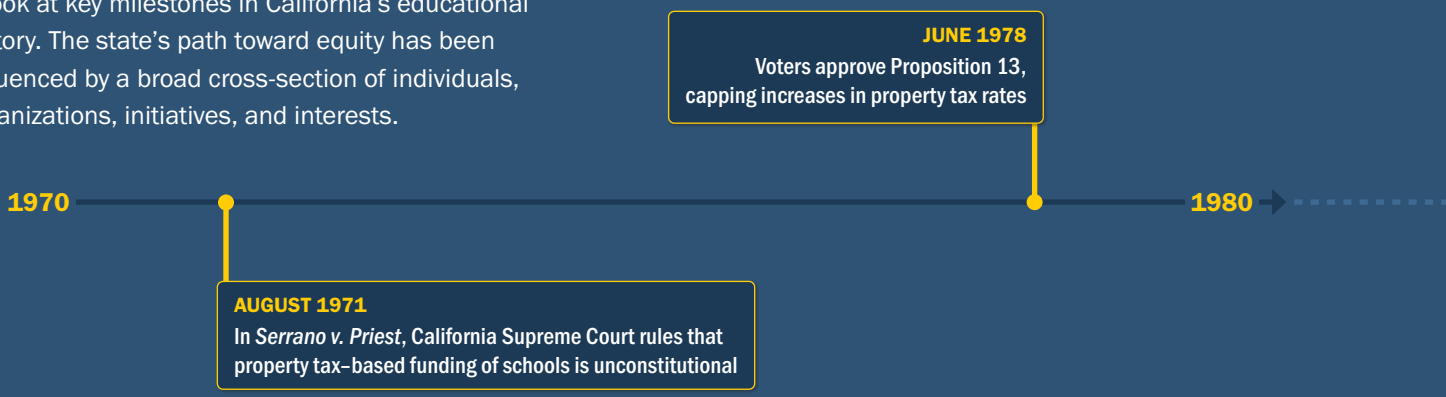
> These disparities were naturally reflected in per-pupil expenditures, where Beverly Hills lavished $1,231.72 on each of its students.... Baldwin Park could afford to spend only $577.49 per student. The difference prevailed in spite of the fact that Baldwin Park taxed itself more aggressively than Beverly Hills.[6]

With those spending differences, plaintiffs argued, came access to unequal educational opportunities, based on the relative wealth of the district a student attended.

California's Quest for Equity and Excellence

A timeline from 1970 to 2018

A look at key milestones in California's educational history. The state's path toward equity has been influenced by a broad cross-section of individuals, organizations, initiatives, and interests.

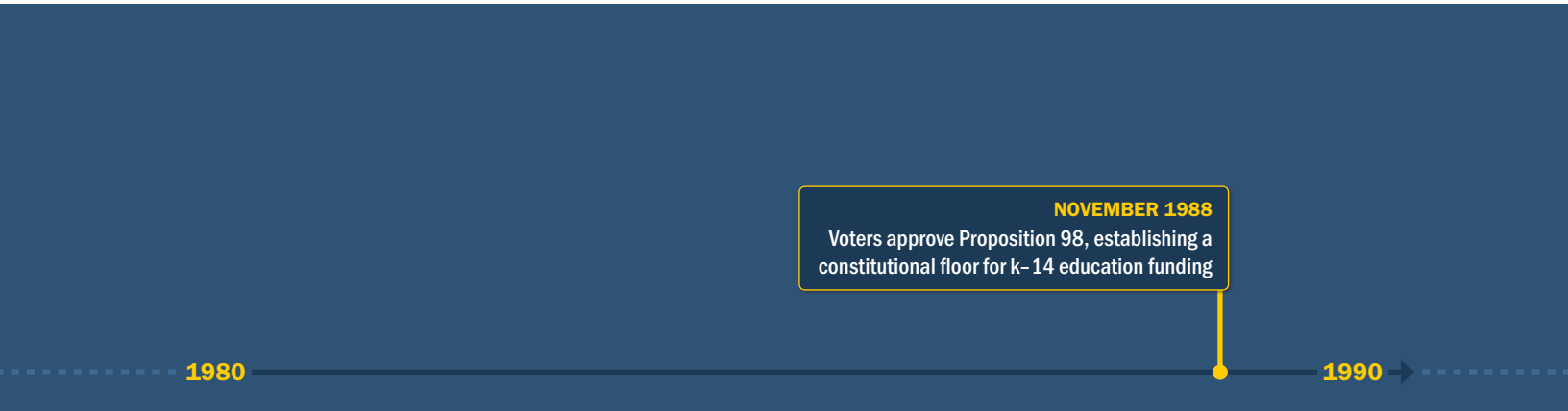


In a series of decisions in 1971, 1976, and 1977, the California Supreme Court sided with the plaintiffs, ruling that education is a fundamental right under the California Constitution and that the state's reliance on property taxes to fund k–12 schools violated students' rights to equal protection of the laws. In its ruling, the Court required the state to reduce wealth differences as a result of property tax funding.

Responding to the *Serrano* decisions, the legislature adopted ambitious reforms, including using surplus dollars so that every school district would receive the same revenue from the same increase in property tax rates.[7] Before the plan could be fully implemented, however, California voters passed Proposition 13, which capped residential and commercial property tax rates at 1% of assessed value and set a 2% annual limit on increases in assessed property value, precipitating a dramatic loss in revenue for local schools and other vital services. Coming as it did on the heels of the state's assumption of k–12 funding responsibility, passage of Proposition 13 meant that school districts would be dependent upon state lawmakers to backfill for the loss in local revenue. The impact: a growing—and uneasy—reliance on the volatility of the state budget and on the ongoing support of the state lawmakers who controlled the purse strings, as well as a hard-to-shake belief that the state could cut taxes without impacting schools and services.

Over the intervening 35 years, California policymakers stitched together a crazy quilt of a school finance system, with many separate categorical programs. Over time, it grew more complicated but failed to solve the inequalities that had prompted reform in the first place. As Stanford Professor Emeritus and then–State Board of Education President Michael W. Kirst described: "The result of California's history is a finance system that has no coherent conceptual basis, is incredibly complex, fails to deliver an equal or equitable education to all children, and is a historical accretion."[8]

Responding to year-to-year funding uncertainty, in 1988 voters passed Proposition 98. The constitutional amendment established a minimum level of k–14 spending, equaling roughly 40% of the state's general fund (unless two thirds of the legislature voted to suspend the requirement) and provided for an annual cost of living increase over the previous year. Districts and education advocates welcomed the funding "guarantee" provided by Proposition 98. But while Proposition 98 was meant to provide a "floor" for education spending in the state, it turned out to be a political

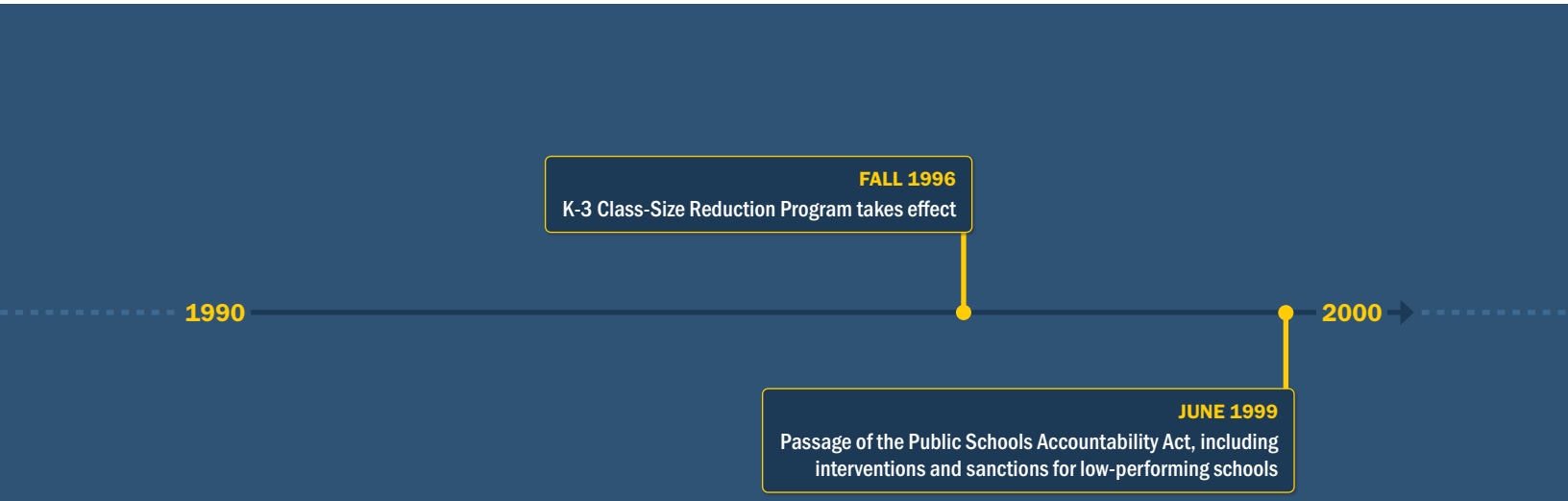


ceiling for Sacramento lawmakers. Education funding continued to descend in the national rankings. In 1977, the year before voters approved Proposition 13, California ranked 8th in the country in per-pupil spending,[9] based on enrollment. By 2013, the state had dropped to 35th.[10]

In addition to Revenue Limit (general purpose) funding, legislators over many decades added dozens of categorical programs. Importantly, funding for categorical programs came out of Proposition 98 funds, but these dollars were not subject to any equalization requirements. Each new categorical program also came with specific guidelines for how the funds could be used. The addition of these single-purpose funding streams enabled Sacramento policymakers to target resources to address a specific need or advance a special interest. However, the proliferation of categorical programs also made for a more complicated and bureaucratic system. Tight spending restrictions also hampered districts' ability to spend funds where they thought they were most needed.[11]

Many of the earliest categorical programs were designed to support the needs of marginalized students—such as English learners and students from low-income families, for example. Over time, however, the list of specialized programs grew, and their use expanded to serve as incentives for districts to adopt a reform strategy, advance a special interest, respond to court decisions, or fill a perceived gap.[12] By 2000–01, the state was funding more than 60 categorical programs, though many more were on the books. They covered such varied uses as transportation, library materials, and tobacco use prevention and ranged in size from the mammoth K–3 Class Size Reduction incentive, which received nearly $1.6 billion in funding in 2000–01, to a variety of smaller programs.[13] By 2008, categorical programs accounted for one third of total education funding.[14]

Despite multiple attempts at equalization in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s and the addition of some equity-focused categorical programs, such as the Economic Impact Aid program (for students from low-income families and English learners), and grants for foster youth, there continued to be stark disparities in curriculum, teaching, and other resources among districts, even those of similar type and size. Those disparities could be seen and felt every day by students, educators, and staff, especially in schools in low-income communities of color. In the late 1990s and into the early 2000s, these inequities became the focus of lawsuits, legislative and budget hearings, and research studies, each an important step in California's long journey to funding equity.



Demanding "Basic Necessities"

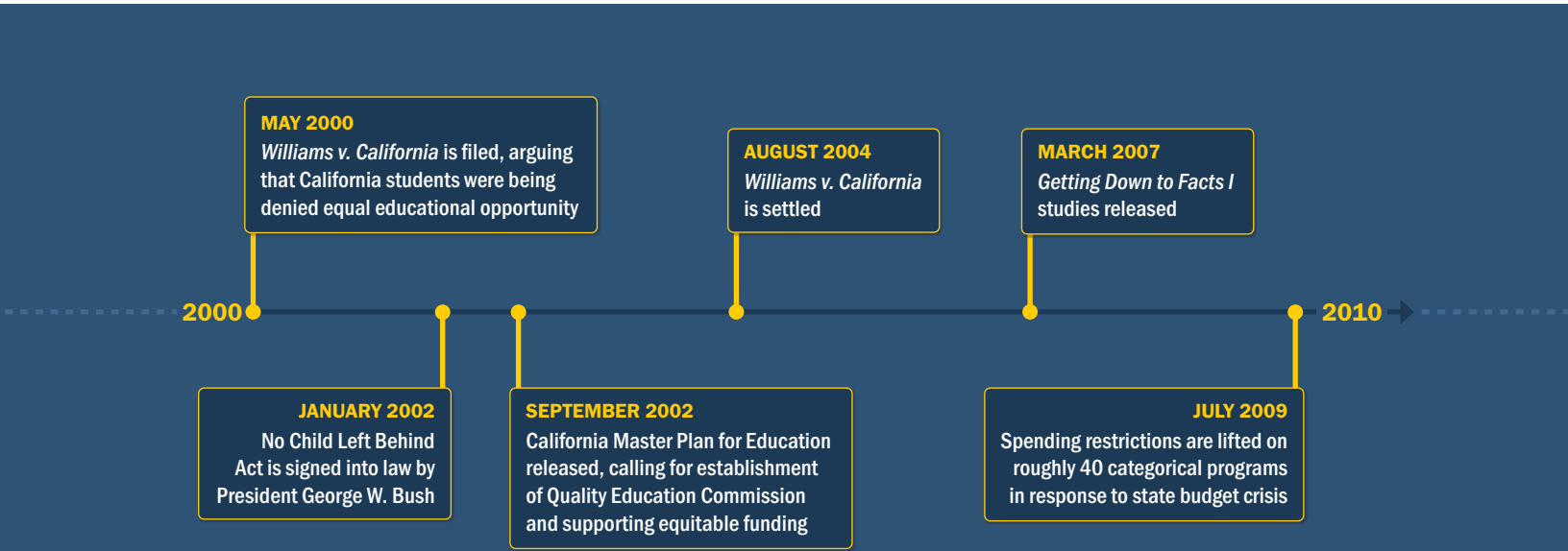
In May of 2000, D'Andre and Delwin Lampkin were attending high school in South Los Angeles. Their school, like many schools in their community, lacked "the basics" that they believed—and research shows—are essential to a quality education: a clean and safe facility, including working bathrooms that remain open all day; intact and up-to-date textbooks for every student; and teachers trained to teach their assigned subjects and students. The Lampkin twins, youth leaders with Community Coalition in Los Angeles, became two of the plaintiffs in the *Williams v. the State of California* lawsuit, which argued that the state was failing to provide students from low-income families and students of color, such as D'Andre and Delwin, with "the basic necessities required for an education."[15] As one high school student who testified in the lawsuit explained,

> [My ideal school] would be a classroom with enough tables, enough chairs, enough books, enough materials and a teacher who cares, not just someone who got a GED or whatever.... Enough supplies, enough security, and just enough everything.... Just because we're smaller, we are still human beings.

Aurea Montes-Rodriguez, Executive Vice President of Community Coalition, recalled a survey the organization conducted with high school students in South Los Angeles in 1997, the surprising results of which triggered the organization's focus on unsafe and inadequate school facilities.

> We conducted a survey of over 1,500 high school students, and we thought that the issue that was going to emerge as the most important was going to be black/brown tensions or interracial conflict. What students actually raised was their concerns about the poor state of ... their schools, their buildings, they didn't have lighting in some of the classrooms, ceiling tiles were falling in some of their classrooms. Some schools had one bathroom with two to three working stalls for 1,800 to 2,400 students.[16]

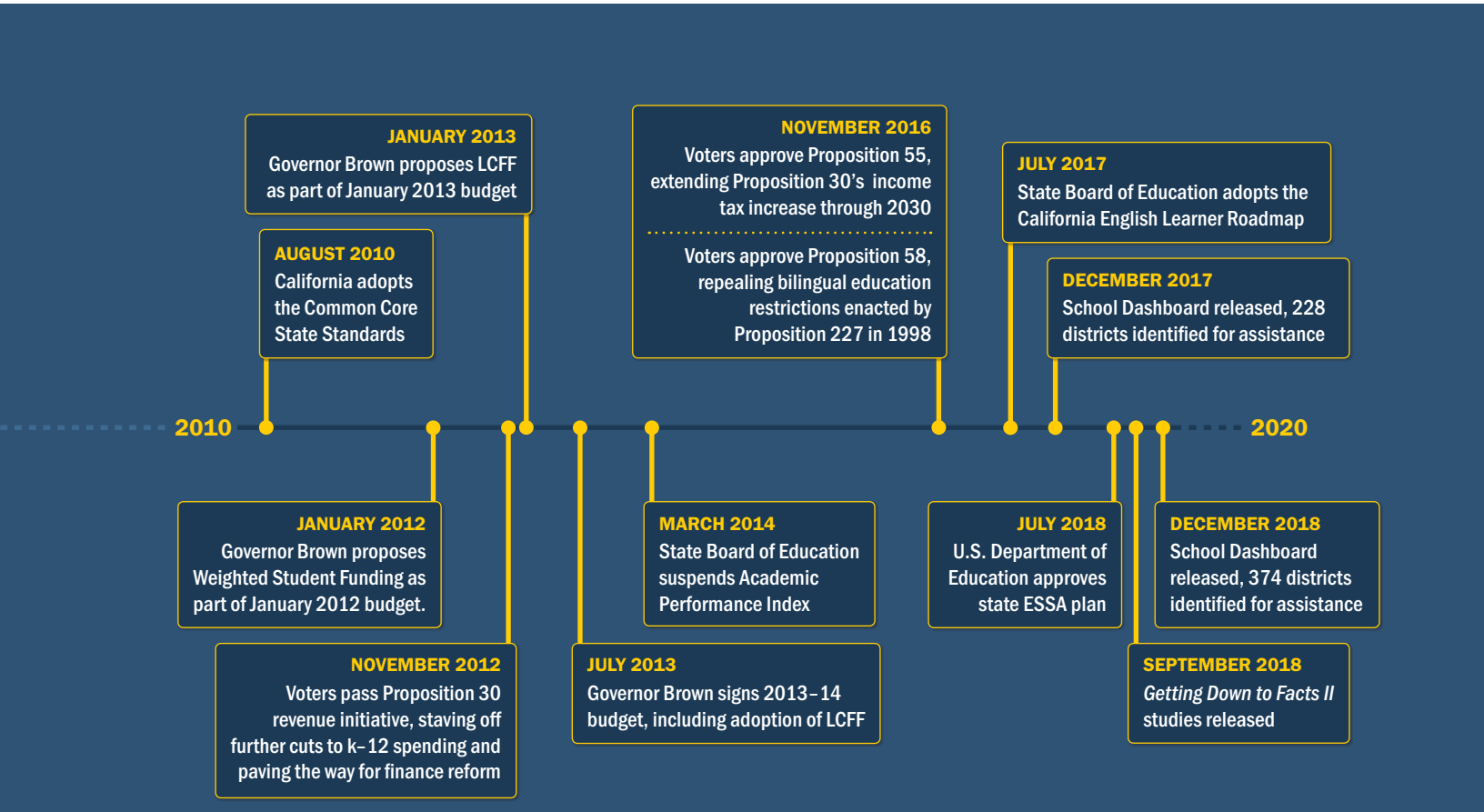
The experiences of the Lampkin twins and their South Los Angeles classmates were indicative of trends throughout the state. In the 20 years following Proposition 13, while California became a "majority minority" state and funding for schools shrank, inequality in educational opportunities



and outcomes increased. By 2000, California ranked 1st in the nation in the number of pupils it served, but 30th in expenditures per student[17] (48th when adjusted for cost of living); 48th in k–12 expenditures as a share of personal income; and 50th in the ratio of students per teacher, despite the class size reductions made during the late 1990s.[18]

As the 21st century dawned, California employed a greater number of underqualified teachers[19] than any other state in the country, with more than 50,000 teachers on emergency permits, disproportionately in the schools serving students of color.[20] The state ranked at or near the bottom among states on class size, staff ratio, library quality, and most other school resources, as well as on measures of student achievement.[21] And while conditions were worsening in schools throughout the state, the impact of the steady decline in state funding was most dramatic in schools and districts serving high percentages of students from low-income families and students of color. The growing inequality was due, in part, to the ability of middle- and high-income districts to raise additional revenue through local fundraising and parcel taxes and the inability of low-wealth districts to produce much revenue in that way.[22]

Gray Davis was governor when the *Williams* lawsuit was first filed. And while k–12 funding increased significantly during the early years of Davis's tenure,[23] he also spent an estimated $18 million fighting the lawsuit before it was settled by his successor, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, in August 2004.[24] Schwarzenegger was elected in October 2003—one of 135 candidates vying for the position—in the same election in which California voters would recall Davis.[25] Before the year was



out, Schwarzenegger had signed a nearly $1 billion legislative package to implement the *Williams* settlement agreement, which focused on providing textbooks and ensuring facilities repairs in the highest need schools.[26] However, in the subsequent years, Schwarzenegger continued to cut school budgets and to eliminate the teacher development programs Governor Davis had started to try to solve teacher shortages and improve instruction.[27]

Many policymakers, advocates, and school finance experts identify the *Williams* lawsuit as an important milestone in the multiyear effort that would lead to school funding reform in California. First, it called attention to deep inequalities among k–12 schools and established a set of "basic necessities of educational opportunity: textbooks and instructional materials, clean and safe school facilities, and qualified teachers."[28] It also provided tools for the public to monitor and track compliance in their schools and districts and assigned county offices of education responsibility for oversight—a precursor to the role of counties under the LCFF.

Just as important, in terms of building understanding and support for equity-focused reforms, the settlement agreement also put in place a formal complaint procedure. In trainings around the state, lawyers and advocates actively engaged students and parents from the lowest performing and highest need schools about their rights and on how to use the complaint mechanism to realize much-needed improvements. Two years after the settlement, 88,000 new textbooks had been purchased and 3,000 emergency repairs had been made.[29]

However, nothing had been done to address the unequal allocation of funds among districts. By 2006, the spending ratio between the state's highest spending and lowest spending school districts was more than 3 to 1 (from just over $6,000 per pupil to more than $20,000 per pupil).[30]

Such differentials might be justified if the high-spending districts were in urban areas with higher costs of living and greater pupil needs. However, this was not the case. Most of the state's districts spent just below the state average, and wealthier districts spent much more.[31]

The *Serrano* remedy was meant to put districts such as Beverly Hills and Baldwin Park on par, but 25 years later, wealthy Beverly Hills was again spending 40% more per pupil than low-income Baldwin Park, which spent well under the state average.[32] This inequitable system of school funding supported unequal salaries for teachers and great disparities in access to qualified teachers. In 2000, salaries for comparably educated and experienced teachers varied by a ratio of 2 to 1, which grew to 3 to 1 when cost of living was taken into account.[33]

While there was much rhetoric about unequal test score results each fall, and sanctions were imposed on schools that did not improve student performance, there was little action on rectifying the severe inequalities in resources and opportunities to learn that had become pervasive throughout the state. The advent of the more assertive consequences for "low-performing" schools under NCLB led to stronger school labeling; more focus on test preparation and less teaching of science, social studies, and the arts; staff reconstitution; and school closings.[34] However, it did not lead to systemic investments in those schools or a restructuring of how the state served the most vulnerable students.

Laying the Groundwork to Fix a Broken System

As the *Williams* case was being litigated, equity issues were also being elevated in the legislature. These Sacramento-focused efforts complemented local campaigns and created an opportunity for parents and students from low-income communities and communities of color to tell their stories of limited access and opportunity to state policymakers. Legislative hearings also helped to orient state policymakers to an opportunity-focused conception of equity, which would later be seen in several of the state priorities enacted with the LCFF.

From 2001 to 2004, bills were introduced by Senate Education Committee Chair John Vasconcellos, who championed much of the early equity-focused efforts, that called for the establishment of "opportunity-to-learn" indicators to track the differences in educational resources available to students across the state—course offerings; qualified teachers; and materials for learning, such as books, computers, and science equipment, for example. Educational equity was also a central theme in the special hearings associated with the development of the September 2002 California Master Plan for Education. The final 255-page document offered far-reaching findings on challenges with pre-k–16 education, including the establishment of a Quality Education Commission to "determine an adequate level of funding necessary to support a high-quality education for every student enrolled in public schools, PreK-12," and a call for a more equitable funding system for k–12, based on student need.[35]

Caught up in the transition from Governor Davis to Governor Schwarzenegger, the Quality Education Commission proposed in the Master Plan never convened. Instead, Governor Schwarzenegger announced plans to establish his own committee to study k–12 education in the state—what became known as the Governor's Committee on Education Excellence. In a rare bipartisan effort, though, the Democratic leaders and the Schwarzenegger administration jointly requested an unprecedented set of research studies to inform future education reform.

Funded by the Gates, Hewlett, Irvine, and Stuart foundations, the resulting *Getting Down to Facts* research project included 23 reports and totaled an estimated 1,700 pages.[36] Released in March 2007, the studies included an unequivocal critique of k–12 funding and governance in the state, describing it as highly centralized, complex, irrational, and inequitable by any measure.[37] "There was a way in which the studies focused everybody's attention on the fact that the education finance system itself was really broken and there needed to be a concerted effort to try and make it better," said Jonathan Kaplan, Senior Policy Analyst for the California Budget and Policy Center.[38]

At the press conference announcing the release, Governor Schwarzenegger stood shoulder to shoulder with then Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez and Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell, among others, and promised to make 2008 the "Year of Education."[39] Before that could come to pass, however, the Great Recession would hit, and Sacramento policymakers and education officials would be consumed with managing the country's largest public education system as it went into budget freefall.

Hitting Bottom

As bad as things had become in the post–Proposition 13 world, school funding had not yet hit bottom. Between 2008 and 2012, k–12 schools in California saw their budgets cut by $7.4 billion, a 15% reduction in spending.[40] In addition to the cuts made as part of the annual state budget process, cuts were also made midyear, an unprecedented step that illustrates the uncertainty of the time. Districts were "facing cuts in real time," observed the California Budget and Policy Center's Kaplan. It wasn't just the severity of the cuts or the size of the economic downturn, he added, "but the quickness in which it all went down.... [It] was traumatic."[41]

As district budgets shrank, class sizes grew further, often hitting 40 students or more in high schools and well over 30 in elementary schools. Meanwhile, enrichment programs and classes in non-core subjects were eliminated, and many important but "nonessential" expenditures, such as building maintenance, were deferred. Over 4 years, the teacher workforce shrunk by an estimated 32,000 positions, due to both layoffs and attrition.[42] Beginning teachers were first in the line of layoffs and were increasingly hired on short-term contracts, thus also denied access to the state's mentoring program as a result.[43] In what became an annual rite of spring, parent, student, and faith-based groups would make the trip from districts around the state to Sacramento for rallies and legislative visits to urge policymakers to save schools from further cuts.

During this same time period, an increasing number of districts were being identified as in precarious financial circumstances, having received either a qualified or negative certification from their county office of education. The number of fiscally challenged districts increased significantly in 2007–08 and peaked in 2009–10, when nearly 180 districts were flagged for concern.[44] Although all schools and districts felt the effects of the cuts, the impact was again most severe in those serving students of color from low-income families. These communities lacked the resources to augment their shrinking budgets with the donations and other fundraising activities that were an important source of additional support for higher income schools and communities. According to one report, "on average, low-poverty schools in our study received $167,797 in donations, or roughly eight times as much as high-poverty schools, which received $21,319."[45]

Amid the budget cuts, a decades-old debate over the relative merits and constraints of categorical programs took on new life.

Amid the budget cuts, a decades-old debate over the relative merits and constraints of categorical programs took on new life. In January 2009, with the prospect of additional cuts to the k–12 budget, the Schwarzenegger administration proposed a plan to remove the spending restrictions on virtually all of the categorical programs.[46] Although the legislature didn't approve the plan as proposed, it did ultimately agree to temporarily remove the spending restrictions on 42 of the roughly 60 categorical programs. Notably, Economic Impact Aid, which was designated for support of students from low-income families and English learners, as well as programs designated for foster youth and English language acquisition, were among those whose requirements were not "flexed," though funding for all programs was impacted by the Great Recession.[47]

Releasing districts from categorical spending requirements was an easier approach for the legislature, recalled Samantha Tran, Senior Managing Director of Education Policy at Children Now. It provided more flexibility for districts and freed Sacramento policymakers from the burden of (and insulated them from the potential backlash from) deciding which categorical programs would be eliminated or severely curtailed.

> So they created these tiers around categorical flexibility, cut funding drastically, and then pushed it down to a local level, essentially saying, "Here you go. You get to make these hard decisions."[48]

As the annual state budget process became an exercise in what—and how much—to cut, constituencies that had advocated each year for their specific categorical program no longer had a ready ear in the legislature. The debate over which programs to keep and which to suspend became a decidedly local issue, with many districts opting to scale back or eliminate programs funded by categorical grants to pay for "core classroom instruction." According to a 2009 report by the state's Legislative Analyst Office:

> In particular, districts reported shifting some funds away from flexed programs that did not support direct k–12 classroom instruction (such as adult education, deferred maintenance, professional development, and school safety) as well as from flexed programs that might be considered enrichment or supplemental student support (such as art and music, gifted education, supplemental instruction, and counseling). Few districts reported shifting funds into flexed programs.[49]

At the same time, cuts at the state level also resulted in the elimination of libraries and librarians, arts and music, counselors and school nurses from low-wealth schools, as well as dedicated funding for educator learning that had been protected by the categorical system. But with each year, districts became accustomed to the flexibility—and the reprieve from the paperwork that had accompanied the strict program requirements—setting the stage for the permanent shift to local control under the LCFF.

Continuing the Equity Drumbeat

Although the fiscal crisis took center stage for local and state policymakers, off in the wings work continued in legislative policy committee hearings, in the courts, and in communities around the state to make progress on fixing what all agreed was a broken finance system. Following the release of the *Getting Down to Facts* research reports, a diverse constellation of individuals, groups, and commissions picked up on the studies' equity themes. They published new data and expanded the analysis and recommendations as they educated a wide range of constituencies and built momentum and understanding for a simpler, equity-focused funding reform. The role of philanthropy was key to the sustained push and the deepening of relationships and partnerships, especially among the equity-focused organizations. Over several years the foundation community invested in a broad ecosystem of interests and groups, from grassroots organizations and equity advocates to business groups, academic institutions, and media outlets.

Equitable funding also found an influential legislative champion in Julia Brownley, a former school board member and then chair of the Assembly Education Committee. In 2009 and then again in 2011, Brownley authored bills (AB 8 and AB 18) calling for the establishment of a working group

on school finance. Both bills were vetoed—the first by Governor Schwarzenegger and the second by Governor Brown[50]—but they succeeded in elevating the issues and providing a platform for parent and student groups and advocates to continue organizing and educating their constituents and policymakers about the need for equity-focused school finance reform.

As the chances for reform through the legislature dimmed, statewide education groups, grassroots organizations, and civil rights attorneys again turned to the courts for relief. In the summer of 2010, amid deep budget cuts and multiple days of action at the state capitol, five grassroots groups with a combined membership of nearly 500,000, along with 22 individual student and parent plaintiffs, filed *Campaign for Quality Education v. State of California* in Alameda Superior Court.

The plaintiffs claimed that "the State's failure to adequately and equitably fund its schools so that all students have a reasonable opportunity to obtain a meaningful education that prepares them for college, career, and civic engagement is a violation of their fundamental right to education under the California Constitution's Education and Equal Protection Clauses."[51] As with the Brownley bills, the lawsuit provided an opportunity for grassroots groups and their partners to elevate inequities in the press and with the groups' constituencies.

At nearly the same time, the California School Boards Association, joined by the Association of California School Administrators, the California State PTA, and several individual districts and student plaintiffs, filed its own "adequacy lawsuit," *Robles-Wong v. the State of California*.[52] Like the Campaign for Quality Education case, the *Robles-Wong* suit provided these associations' members with the opportunity to elevate adequacy issues. Ultimately, the two would be combined and make it to the State Supreme Court, which in 2016 declined to hear a lower court ruling in favor of the State of California, putting off for another day the Court's view on whether the state constitution demands an adequate level of educational quality and associated funding.

The Fiscal Tide Turns

The economy was still recovering when Governor Brown released his budget in January 2012. The centerpiece of his proposal for stabilizing the state's fiscal health was a revenue initiative, slated for the November 2012 ballot, which would raise an estimated $6.9 billion a year. His plan also included an additional $4.8 billion in "trigger cuts" to k–12 schools and community colleges in the event the initiative was not approved by voters.[53]

While the specter of even further cuts to education loomed large, the budget included a bright spot for policymakers, grassroots groups, and equity advocates who been advancing the notion of equitable funding for nearly a decade. Tucked in toward the end of Brown's State of the State speech—between his discussion of the proposed Bay Delta Conservation Plan and a nod to his 12-point plan for pension reform—was a proposal to "replace categorical programs with a new weighted student formula."[54]

The new funding formula was based largely on the ideas outlined 4 years earlier by his current State Board of Education President and longtime education advisor Michael W. Kirst and his co-authors in *Getting Beyond the Facts: Reforming California School Finance*.[55] It included per-pupil base grants, as well as additional per-pupil funding for English learners and students from low-income

families.[56] Explained Brown, "This will give more authority to local school districts to fashion the kind of programs they see their students need. It will also create transparency, reduce bureaucracy and simplify complex funding streams."[57]

It quickly became clear, however, that the proposed overhaul of the school finance system was going to take a back seat to a more pressing issue for the governor and the state—closing the budget deficit and passing a tax initiative to stop further cuts to schools and vital services. Although there were public hearings and closed-door discussions about the proposal, with important changes reflected in the Governor's May Budget Revision, the plan "didn't go anywhere," recalled Rick Simpson, the Deputy Chief of Staff for the Assembly Speaker at the time. "I don't think they'd done much in the way of preparing the education community for as significant a change as they were proposing. And it kinda crashed in 2012."[58]

Ana Matosantos, then–Finance Director for the Brown administration, wasn't surprised that the first run at school funding reform wasn't successful.

> The field was managing some really challenging situations, as was the state, and operating with a great deal of uncertainty.... We had a sense that it was going to be a bridge too far but we wanted to get the discussion going anyway.... A change this big in that environment is rarely a 1-year process.[59]

A big part of that uncertainty concerned the revenue initiative that Governor Brown had proposed for the November 2012 ballot, which included a half-cent sales tax increase and an income tax increase for upper-income earners. Although Brown had been the first to announce a tax initiative, he wasn't alone in exploring revenue options. Longtime education advocates were exploring their own solutions to expand pre-k–12 funding, and a broad coalition of labor, community, immigrant rights, and faith-based groups had been meeting since 2010 to explore options for a broad-based revenue initiative that, like Brown's, would restore funds to both education and other vital services that had been slashed in the Great Recession.

Spurred on by the success and popularity of the Occupy Movement, the groups—led by California Calls, the California Federation of Teachers, the Courage Campaign, and the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment—were coalescing around a millionaire's tax. In early 2012, supporters of the millionaire's tax were busy gathering signatures to qualify their initiative. A third measure, which would become Proposition 38 on the November 2012 ballot, was also in the signature-gathering phase. Supported by Molly Munger and the California State PTA, among others, Proposition 38 would have raised approximately $10 billion annually for k–12 and early childhood programs.

In February 2012, when the Democrats met in Los Angeles for their annual state convention, proponents of all three measures were still collecting signatures—and supporters. Brown seemed unconcerned about the competing initiatives, telling delegates "you'll all get your marching orders soon enough,"[60] but tensions grew in the coming weeks as backers of rival initiatives pressed forward. "If all three [initiatives] are on the ballot, it's a circular firing squad, and all of them will lose and the kids lose," said Steve Glazer, one of Brown's top political aides, referring to poll results indicating that if all three measures were on the November ballot voters would reject all of the options.[61]

With the clock ticking for qualifying initiatives for the November 2012 ballot, backers of the millionaire's tax and the Governor's initiative agreed in mid-March to merge the two measures into a single initiative. The impact of that compromise was significant—for the groups supporting the millionaire's tax and for the state. It was the first time in "contemporary history" in which "community groups had a substantive impact and influence on what was going to be on the ballot," said Anthony Thigpenn, President of California Calls.[62]

The impact on the state budget was dramatic—and immediate. Passage of Proposition 30 eliminated the need for trigger cuts and brought in significant new revenue, thanks to unprecedented economic growth.

> Typically, these things are done by … organized labor, big donors, elected officials, governors [who] decide what's going to happen and then sign us up for the ground troops.… This changed that dynamic because we were actually in the room, writing the proposition, making the compromise, and eventually had seats on the campaign steering committee, which community groups simply don't have.[63]

The details of the new initiative, which became Proposition 30, reflected that input. The new measure still had the more regressive sales tax, but the size of the increase was cut in half. It increased the tax on upper-income earners beyond what was in Brown's original proposal and extended the expiration date from 5 to 7 years.

Once the deal was struck, the new Proposition 30 campaign, as well as the groups that had backed the millionaire's tax, set to work to qualify the new measure for the November ballot. The latter groups also formed the Reclaim California's Future coalition, which organized the field campaign to pass Proposition 30, with a focus on educating and turning out low-income voters and voters of color. The result of their efforts—the first collective voter engagement effort of the statewide organizations—was decisive, with the coalition claiming credit for turning out 6% of the yes votes for Proposition 30,[64] which passed by a 55% majority.

The impact on the state budget was dramatic—and immediate. Passage of Proposition 30 eliminated the need for trigger cuts and brought in significant new revenue, thanks to unprecedented economic growth. It created an opportunity for Governor Brown, riding high on the victory of passing Prop 30, to try another pass at equitable school funding. For the grassroots groups whose parent and student leaders had volunteered thousands of hours on the Proposition 30 campaign, its passage meant that their decade-long campaign for funding equity was one step closer to being realized.

"We had the largest volunteer effort in the state of California … to pass Prop 30," recalled Katy Nunez-Adler, an organizer with PICO California's Oakland affiliate. PICO California was one of the groups anchoring the Reclaim California's Future coalition. "And so out of that, there was this enormous opportunity … to finally win an equitable funding formula."[65]

Importantly, the grassroots groups whose work helped to pass Proposition 30 were from the same communities whose students and schools would benefit from the LCFF's equitable funding provisions. Many of the representatives interviewed said their investment in the passage and

implementation of the LCFF was the result of the direct connection they and their parent and student leaders saw between their work to increase revenue and additional resources coming to their own communities.

Explained Nunez-Adler:

> Elizabeth Devora, [for example], organized parents to come over to her house after drop-off to go door knocking [in favor of Proposition 30]. And those same families, the parents and students, were driving up [to Sacramento] in vans to lobby to pass Local Control Funding Formula. Later, when we got into the regulatory part of the fight, those were the same folks that went up to Sacramento [for state board meetings]. They absolutely understood the connection.[66]

Getting to Yes on Equitable Funding

In January of 2013, Governor Brown again put forth a proposal to adopt an equity-based funding formula in which higher need students would generate additional resources for their districts. The second introduction, however, benefited from a foundation-supported campaign that included a rebranding and strategic outreach to influential organizations and constituencies. Gone was 2012's academic language of Weighted Student Funding. Instead, the proposed policy was dubbed the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). Gone from the January budget proposal was a plan to send targeted funds to school sites. Instead, districts would be the recipient of the new funding for high-need students, and gone, too, was a controversial element from the prior year's proposal that would have placed no restrictions on how districts spent the additional revenue generated by high-need students. These and other changes were made based on feedback from the previous legislative session and from a series of strategic meetings that Brown administration staff held with key stakeholder groups.

The main features of the LCFF proposal were that a base formula would provide equal dollars for each pupil, with additional weights provided for pupils with greater needs—those living in poverty and English learners. (Youth living in foster care would be added in the May budget revision.)[67] These additional weighted funds were known as supplemental grants. Furthermore, districts serving large concentrations of such students would receive a more heavily weighted supplement—that is, a concentration grant—to recognize the many needs they were trying to meet. Importantly, funds were to be allocated based on "unduplicated counts" of students. So, for example, a student who was an English learner and from a low-income family was only counted once. (For more detail, see "Overview: California's Local Control Funding Formula," page 18.)

Unlike in 2012, when school funding took an oratorical and practical back seat to more pressing matters, education was the first policy item discussed in the Governor's 2013 budget press conference. Declaring that the state had a balanced budget after "15 years of fiscal difficulty," Brown asked the rhetorical question, "So what are we going to do with the money we have?" His answer was unequivocal: Restore funding to schools.

"It's going up," said Brown. "But when I say that, it's not just the money that is going in. It's going in under new conditions. We're investing in our schools, but we're doing so in the context of encouraging local flexibility, local control."[68]

And, he added, it would be distributed based on need:

> Our future depends not on across-the-board funding, but on disproportionate funding to those schools that have disproportionate challenges. Aristotle said, "treating unequals equally is not justice." People are in different situations. Growing up in Compton or Richmond is not like [growing] up in Los Gatos or Beverly Hills or Piedmont.
>
> So we recognize that and we put in an equitable formula without bureaucracy, without all the categorical maneuvers and complexity, [and] we send the money based on that formula. That is controversial, but it is fair. It's right and just.[69]

The rebranded proposal "had an air of inevitability about it," recalled Rick Simpson.

> In 2013 it became pretty clear that this was a big deal for Jerry. My expectation, I think my boss's expectation, was that had we not done it, he probably would have vetoed the budget again, you know, as he did in 2011. It was that big of a deal to him.[70]

Given that analysis, Simpson's goal—and that of his counterpart in the senate, Susanna Cooper—was to negotiate a final package that represented good policy, included accountability measures related to both student outcomes and spending, and satisfied enough members for passage.

Early on, three key issues crystalized: (1) a hold harmless provision to ensure that every district would see its funding restored to the 2007–08 level (the year before the bottom dropped out of the economy, triggering unprecedented cuts in education spending); (2) assurances that targeted funds would be used to specifically benefit the students who generated them; and (3) the development of a more holistic and less punitive accountability system.

Leading with the "local control" angle was strategic because it was the element of the plan that was broadly supported by superintendents, regardless of how their districts might fare in the new funding formula. After 4 years without the spending restrictions of most categorical programs, superintendents were loath to return to the tight constraints of the pre-Recession era. Many equity groups and civil rights advocates, however, were wary of relinquishing categorical controls, particularly around EIA. Ultimately, they were willing to do so in exchange for greater transparency and the LCFF's community engagement provisions.

The Brown administration, for its part, "made a conscious decision to say there's no path to continued local control if it doesn't come with a formula that's more equitable," said Matosantos.[71]

But the name change alone was not sufficient to capture the full support of all superintendents—and, by extension, key legislative leaders—who perceived of their districts as "losers" in the new formula. Garnering their support would ultimately require a renegotiation of the proportion of the new dollars that would be spread evenly among all districts (the base grants) and the size of the supplemental and concentration grants, which would be allocated based on the number and percentage of students from low-income families, English learners, and foster youth.

As detailed in the Governor's May Budget Revision, 80 cents of every dollar would have gone toward base grants, distributed equally to every district, with 16 cents going to supplemental and 4 cents to concentration grants. By the time the LCFF was signed into law in July, the base grants had increased to represent 84 cents of every dollar; supplemental grants amounted to 10 cents of every dollar; and concentration grants represented 6 cents.[72]

The final deal included both the adjusted base, supplemental, and concentration amounts, as well as some additional compromises to get the proposal over the finish line. An Economic Recovery Target (ERT), the hold harmless provision, was included for the roughly 230 districts whose funding under the new formula would not have returned to the 2007–08 level.[73] And two categorical programs, Home to School Transportation and Targeted Instruction Improvement Grants, which had been among those "flexed" in 2009, remained, but with no long-term restrictions—a decision due, in large part, to a desire to make sure that Los Angeles Unified, home to more than 655,000 students[74] and important legislative votes, would not lose the funds. The LCFF's funding targets, which called for increases in spending over 8 years, would result in significant new resources to districts but were not based on an assessment of what it would take to provide every student with an excellent education—known in legal parlance as adequate funding—another ongoing point of tension and challenge.

Overview: California's Local Control Funding Formula

California's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) was signed into law in July 2013. The historic reform is composed of four key components, each representing a substantial shift in policy and practice: (1) a new, equity-based funding formula; (2) local flexibility and public accountability, with the requirement that local education agencies (LEAs), such as districts and charter schools, engage stakeholders when determining local priorities; (3) multiple measures of student and school success; and (4) a Statewide System of Support, with an emphasis on continuous improvement.

An equitable funding formula based on student need: The LCFF marked a shift in how the vast majority of k–12 funds are distributed. In passing the LCFF, California eliminated the majority of the state's categorical programs and established uniform per-pupil "base" grants to school districts, charter schools, and county offices of education (LEAs), adjusted by grade level. In addition, the LCFF provides a "supplemental" grant equal to 20% of the adjusted base grant for each English learner, student in foster care, and student from a low-income family who is enrolled in an LEA. LEAs whose enrollment is composed of more than 55% English learners, students in foster care, and students from low-income families also receive "concentration" grants of an additional 50% of the adjusted base funding per pupil for every student above the 55% threshold. The student count for "supplemental" and "concentration" grants is based on enrollment, using a 3-year rolling average. Students who meet more than one eligibility criteria are only counted once.[75]

Local decision making, with new requirements for stakeholder engagement: Under the LCFF, districts are required to use supplemental and concentration funds to proportionately "increase or improve" services for English learners, students from low-income families, and foster youth "in proportion to the increase in supplemental and concentration funds."[76] Using a state-required planning document, the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), LEAs articulate their 3-year policy goals and accompanying budget allocations across the eight priority areas. (For more on the LCAP, see "Local Control and Accountability Plans: One Document, Many Purposes," page 21.) Also new with the LCFF are requirements that districts engage parents, students, and other stakeholders in their local planning process. Although districts have taken a variety of approaches

to soliciting input, all are required to establish a Parent Advisory Committee and, in some cases, a separate advisory committee for parents of English learners. In 2015, a campaign by student organizations led to the State Board of Education clarifying that districts must also engage students as part of their planning process.

Expanded state and local priorities and a new California School Dashboard to show district and school performance: Integral to the LCFF is an expanded view of student and school success. The law specifies eight state priority areas: student achievement, student engagement, school climate, parental involvement, access to basic services, implementation of state standards, access to a broad course of study, and other student outcomes. By statute, districts can also identify additional local priorities. Launched in 2017, the dashboard is the central tool by which districts and their stakeholders understand how schools and districts are doing across the eight priority areas.[77] A key feature of the dashboard is the reporting of both status and change to determine performance on state indicators, creating incentives for districts and schools to focus on achieving significant growth—including across significant subgroups—as well as high overall performance. California's School Dashboard is used as part of the state's accountability system, as well as for purposes of federal accountability under ESSA.[78]

A Statewide System of Support, with a focus on continuous improvement: The LCFF established a new accountability system based on a continuous improvement model that includes three levels of support for LEAs. Level 1 provides resources and tools, available to all LEAs. Level 2 provides individually designed assistance to address identified performance issues, including significant disparities in performance among student groups. The State Superintendent of Public Instruction may require more intensive interventions—Level 3 support—for LEAs with persistent performance issues and a lack of improvement over a specified time period.[79] December 2017 marked the first time that LEAs were identified for differentiated assistance.[80] A new agency, the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence, together with county offices of education and the California Department of Education, comprise the state's system of support.

Funding the LCFF

When adopted in 2013, the LCFF set targets for increases in k–12 funding and established a "hold harmless" for districts whose projected funding levels under the previous system would otherwise be reduced as a result of the new formula. Because of the increased costs associated with full funding of the new formula, the state targeted 2020 (8 years from adoption) to reach the new funding targets. Each year since that time, LEA funding increased based on the "gap" between their 2013 funding level and their target level by 2020. Robust tax revenue allowed the state to reach its funding targets early, in the 2018–19 budget year. Importantly, the LCFF funding targets were not based on an adequacy analysis; that is, the full cost of providing all students with the opportunity to meet the goals set by the state.

The stakeholder meetings between legislative sessions provided important policy feedback and also helped to engage supporters across a broad cross section of interests and roles, all of whom would be critical to the LCFF's passage and would continue to be part of the effort to implement the new law. Among those participating were superintendents from districts that would benefit from the targeted resources, as well as civil rights and business groups, parent organizations, and representatives of the equity-focused advocacy groups in the state. Governor Brown also did not hesitate to step in at particularly crucial times—inviting important advocates and allies to his office for a pep talk, photo opportunity, and press release.[81]

Incorporated into the May Budget Revision was the addition of a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), which districts would develop to articulate how they would spend the resources targeted for English learners, students from low-income families, and foster youth. The idea of a local accountability plan, which was first proposed during a stakeholder meeting, evolved over the course of the budget and policy negotiations to become a more complex and—some would argue—more complicated document. (See "Local Control and Accountability Plans: One Document, Many Purposes," page 21.)

For many legislators and advocates, the LCAP became the vehicle by which they could hold districts accountable for spending the targeted resources (supplemental and concentration funds) on the students for whom they were intended. Explained Susanna Cooper, education consultant for then–Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg:

> The legislature had for many years supported this notion that we'd spend more on poor kids … and [Economic Impact Aid and other categorical programs] were the way to know that the money was being spent on the children for whom it was intended. So, there was groundwork laid, buy-in for that. It was just a question of how do we bring people to a comfort level where they can let loose of these strings? Even if they know the strings are not particularly effective?[82]

There had also been several years of legislative work to move away from a test-based accountability system. In 2011 and then again in 2012, Senate President Pro Tem Steinberg had authored bills to expand the Academic Performance Index (API), California's test-based ranking system, to include multiple measures, including graduation rates. The first version of the bill was vetoed by Governor Brown. He signed the second version in 2012, but before the changes could be implemented, the LCFF became law. In 2013 the state board voted to suspend the API while it developed evaluation rubrics for the eight new state priorities, which would later be incorporated into the California School Dashboard, the primary reporting mechanism under the LCFF.

Of the new accountability system, Simpson said the legislature was

> considering both inputs and outputs. It was to … explicitly take a more robust look at student, at school, and [at] district performance than simply the test score data we'd been using in the [Academic Performance Index].[83]

The final eight priorities (see Figure 1, page 2) represented a balancing of a desire to have a well-rounded view of student and school success and a political calculus of what would be needed to pass the LCFF. Explained Brooks Allen, who held positions inside and outside of government during the LCFF's introduction and implementation, "How were we going to bring everyone together in this broad, and at times fragile, coalition? One of the ways we do that is we acknowledge [the issues] being prioritized."[84] This included school climate, parental involvement, access to a broad course of study, and implementation of the Common Core State Standards, which was just coming online.[85]

As the budget deadline neared, negotiators were not, however, able to reach agreement on one of the legislature's core priorities: how districts would be held accountable for spending funds on English learners, students from low-income families, and foster youth. Instead, they agreed to a compromise, requiring that the funds be used "to increase or improve services for unduplicated pupils [the term the statute uses when referring to the LCFF-identified students] as compared to the services provided to all pupils in proportion to the increase in funds apportioned on the basis of the

number and concentration of unduplicated pupils."[86] The policy baton was then passed to the State Board of Education, which would be responsible for defining those terms as part of the regulatory process. (See "State Board of Education Adapts Practice, Culture in Response to New Engagement," page 60.)

This unresolved tension between broad local flexibility and accountability for spending funds on the students who generated the additional resources would be evident throughout the regulatory and implementation process. Yet, in a remarkable testament to the way in which different voices and constituencies came together to pass the LCFF, equity advocates; policymakers; student, parent, and community groups; and researchers all see elements of their efforts in the final version. That broad sense of ownership has played a pivotal role in the implementation of the new law.

Local Control and Accountability Plans: One Document, Many Purposes

One of the innovations of the LCFF was the notion that local districts—in partnership with their communities—would have broad budget and programmatic decision-making authority. In exchange for this freedom, districts would be held accountable for monitoring student progress, including across subgroups, and instituting programs and practices and allocating funds to promote their success.

To accomplish this, each district is required to develop a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) every 3 years with input from parents, students, community members, and other stakeholders. LCAPs are updated annually in response to data on how students are progressing across the eight state priorities. Charter schools and county offices also complete LCAPs.

By both statute and expectations, the LCAP serves a variety of purposes and audiences: It is a tool for engaging parents, students, community members, and others in developing district plans and budgets. It is also a mechanism for holding districts accountable in several areas: incorporating stakeholder feedback into their plans; articulating goals, challenges, and actions across all state priorities and students (including significant student subgroups); and use of supplemental and concentration grants to increase and improve services for English learners, students from low-income families, and foster youth.

Counties are responsible for approving district LCAPs and for supporting districts in their implementation. Districts are, in turn, placed in charge of monitoring and supporting schools. This marks a significant change from the older system that placed the onus for boosting scores primarily on schools, despite the fact that they had unequal resources and supports to do so.

Striking the right balance—between comprehensiveness and accessibility, between local flexibility and public accountability, for example—has been no easy feat. Responding to concerns and recommendations from district officials, community groups, advocates, and researchers, the LCAP template has been revised twice, with a third revision planned.[87]

Two addendums have also been created. An LCAP federal addendum details how districts intend to use ESSA (federal) funds to "supplement or enhance" priorities or initiatives funded with state funds and how they will align funds and activities across funding streams. Districts will also begin using a new Budget Overview for Parents—an effort to increase budget transparency—with their 2019–20 LCAP.[88]

A Funding System That Centers Equity

> Put the money where the need and the challenges are the greatest. That's what we do with this new formula.[89]

With those words, on July 1, 2013, Governor Brown signed into law the state's ambitious plan to overhaul California's school funding formula and change the way k–12 resources are distributed among the state's more than 2,000 local education agencies (school districts and charter schools), based on the demographics of the students they serve.

Between 2013–14 and 2018–19, Proposition 98 spending increased from $55.3 billion[90] to $78.4 billion.[91] Nearly 90% of this amount goes to k–12 schools. These increases were due to strong economic growth and new revenue from the passage of Proposition 30 and, later, Proposition 55, which voters passed to increase taxes. The vast majority of k–12 funds are sent to districts and charter schools based on the LCFF equity-based funding formula. (See "Overview: California's Local Control Funding Formula" on page 18.)

By 2015–16, although large disparities remained, there was significant progress toward equity: "Three years after LCFF was enacted, district funding became the most equitable that it had ever been among years of available data," according to an April 2017 report from the Education Trust–West, *The Steep Road to Resource Equity in California Education*.

> The highest poverty districts received, on average, $334 more per pupil in state and local funds than the lowest poverty districts. To put this in context, a district of 5,000 students where 90 percent were high-need received $1.7 million more per year than a similarly sized district where only 20 percent of students were high-need.[92]

This greater funding for high-need districts has increased since then as the LCFF has been more fully funded each year.

Changing the Conversation

But passage of the LCFF did more than redistribute resources. By centering equity in budget and planning decisions, it has changed the focus of the budget and programmatic conversations in districts around the state, says John Affeldt of Public Advocates, a public interest law firm that has been active in local- and state-level LCFF implementation efforts. "The mindset of the state has changed.... Equity is a key part of the conversation," said Affeldt,[93] an assessment echoed in interviews with other advocates, representatives of youth and parent organizations, and administrator groups.[94]

Researchers with the Local Control Funding Formula Research Collaborative have also documented this shift among the districts they have studied. In their December 2015 report on the second year of the LCFF implementation they note, "Many of our interviewees reported that the LCFF is changing the conversation in their districts."[95] District officials spoke of increased attention to the needs of English learners, foster youth, and homeless students, as well as issues related to school climate, one of the eight state priorities identified in the new law.[96]

Another strategic—but less visible—impact comes as a result of the increased spending flexibility afforded districts through the LCFF. In what some district officials described as a "culture shift,"[97] researchers have documented increased collaboration between district finance staff and their colleagues in the program and education services departments. In the days of categorical programs, restrictions on how the different funding streams could be spent meant that district finance staff typically informed their counterparts on the program side what resources were available—and for what purpose. Increasingly, however, superintendents report a rethinking of budget priorities and "greater alignment among district goals, strategies, and resource allocation decisions."[98]

Integration of budget and strategic planning processes is one of the best practices identified in an October 2017 Continuous Improvement Brief from Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), which highlights the innovative practices of three unified school districts: Oakland, San Francisco, and Santa Ana.[99] In Santa Ana Unified School District (SAUSD), for example, district officials are using data and "strategic questioning" to align budgets with strategic priorities. The authors of the brief note, "In SAUSD, allocation conversations now focus more on the questions of 'Why?', 'Where's the evidence?', and 'Is this working for our students?' An initial result of this shift in focus has been clearer alignment between resource allocation and important district goals."[100]

Shining a Light on the Needs of Foster Youth

By identifying foster youth as a subgroup, the LCFF has drawn critical attention to the academic and social-emotional needs of this often overlooked and misunderstood student population. On each traditional academic measure (such as test performance, graduation rates, college matriculation, and persistence), foster youth achieve at lower rates than their peers, including those who also have significant economic, linguistic, academic, and social challenges.[101] Also troubling is research that suggests how these educational outcomes are compounded by other factors. For example, academic challenges are more pronounced for students the longer they remain in foster care and are exacerbated by the fact that foster youth are more likely to be enrolled in the state's lowest performing and under-resourced schools.[102] These academic challenges, coupled with the trauma, poverty, and instability many foster youth experience in their daily lives, make attention to their learning needs critical in California schools and beyond.

The LCFF has compelled districts to take stock of their approach to supporting foster youth and to invest in resources and approaches that can meet these students' unique needs and support their academic growth and well-being. Yet some researchers have identified significant challenges that districts face in this process. For example, in their review of more than 80 LCAPs from around the state, researchers with the Local Control Funding Formula Research Collaborative found that identified strategies for supporting foster youth were often subsumed under services for English learners and students from low-income families, leaving this population's needs underspecified. Furthermore, when specific supports such as increased counselors or social workers were identified, district plans rarely named other differentiated instructional supports that would more comprehensively address the needs of foster youth.[103]

Michelle Francois, a Senior Director with the National Center for Youth Law—an organization active in advocating and supporting the education of foster youth—expressed a similar critique regarding the lack of a comprehensive vision for advancing learning among foster youth. She explained:

> Right now, the mental model around students in foster care in a classroom is that we need additional supports that essentially send the student outside of the classroom.

> In our minds … classroom teachers need resources in terms of helping them manage what happens when behavior, as a manifestation of trauma, comes up in the classroom such that it becomes a learning experience for the student and the class and it doesn't disrupt the class. I think that is, to me, the gap.[104]

In her comments, Francois suggests that in addition to identifying critical services that foster youth require, districts need additional support in identifying and implementing approaches that could support the learning needs of foster youth in classrooms to bring about improved outcomes. While there is some evidence that districts are dedicating professional development time to supporting foster youth and trauma-informed teaching,[105] more work is needed.

Other reports also point to logistical challenges districts face in developing their systems of support for foster youth. SRI International researchers noted that districts have struggled to generate accurate counts of foster youth in their schools, due to inconsistent definitions of who qualifies for services under the LCFF and to the lack of a uniform, up-to-date state database that tracks educational records for foster youth.

Compounding the issue of accurate counts are cross-agency data-sharing practices. Researchers identified factors related to balancing student confidentiality with the timely transfer of records. High mobility rates of foster youth and large caseloads for social workers are additional obstacles inhibiting districts from identifying their foster youth and developing targeted supports.[106] These findings suggest that ongoing efforts to build infrastructure related to foster youth can help districts better identify students and inform their vision for meeting their academic and holistic needs.

Despite the daunting challenges, some bright spots are emerging. Francois of the Youth Law Center pointed to Lancaster Unified and Monterey Peninsula Unified as two such examples. She noted that Lancaster Unified had doubled the number of counselors in its most recent LCAP and assigned counselors to every elementary and middle school in the district to support the needs of its foster youth population. She also explained that both Lancaster and Monterey Peninsula had invested heavily in Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and created district design teams of leaders that are specifically looking at the needs of their students in foster care and their students experiencing homelessness. (See more on MTSS in "Nurturing Inclusive and Supportive School Communities.") In doing so, she argued, the districts are "getting at those deeper levels of investment and deeper thinking that are necessary to support students in foster care."

Francois also noted the emergence of cross-district learning networks focused on foster youth, which seek to build knowledge and expertise in similar ways seen across the state around Common Core and instructional support for the LCFF target groups. In one systematic exchange of knowledge, she described how Sanger Unified, a district known for its long-standing focus on foster youth and use of MTSS, is coaching and collaborating with Lancaster and Monterey Peninsula to improve their supports for foster youth. She explained the dynamics of their partnership:

> The districts genuinely come together wanting to know what others are doing and see learning as a two-way street. Essentially, Lancaster has a coach and Monterey has a coach and there are structures by which all of us get together and learn with one another. We just had a convening with Monterey, Lancaster, and Sanger and they were all sharing information about what they are doing and what their LCAPs are looking like, and where they feel like they have gotten it right and what they need to do better.[107]

Increased Support for High-Need Students

What have these culture shifts and efforts to improve coordination meant in terms of district spending choices? To what degree are the conversations about equity resulting in increased and improved services for students from low-income families, English learners, and foster youth, as the law requires? Absent a budget-reporting mechanism that tracks district spending of supplemental and concentration funds, it is impossible to answer these questions unequivocally for every district and charter school in the state. Researchers are, however, beginning to paint a picture of how spending patterns are shifting statewide and elevating promising models in specific districts that offer policymakers, educators, advocates, and community members tangible examples of how the new resources are being targeted to benefit high-need students.

In an attempt to understand how district spending decisions have changed since passage of the LCFF, Marguerite Roza and her team at the Edunomics Lab at Georgetown University analyzed 3 years of budget data from "nearly all of California's more than 900 school systems," beginning in the 2013–14 school year.[108] Although the LCFF gives districts broad flexibility in how they spend their funds, the actual spending practices—that is, what they spent their money on—did not radically change in the first 3 years since passage, according to the analysis.[109] Given the need to recover from the severe budget cuts, this is not surprising. There were some marginal shifts, however, and some early glimpses of customization to meet local needs. The study also notes that the biggest percentage increase in staffing "was in services that tend to support disadvantaged students, such as counselors, psychologists, and social workers. This suggests an increased effort to potentially help the highest need students, as the law intended."[110]

The Steep Road to Resource Equity in California Education also attempts to understand whether and how the LCFF funds are being equitably used by comparing student-to-staff ratios and course access among schools with high percentages of students from low-income families, English learners, and foster youth and those with a low percentage of these students. In the first 2 years of implementation, the results showed shrinking gaps, although access disparities still remained.[111]

A survey of superintendents administered by PACE's Local Control Funding Formula Research Collaborative provides additional detail on how the LCFF is shifting spending to increase or improve services for high-need students. More than three quarters of those responding agreed that the "LCFF has enabled their district to improve services and programs" for students from low-income families, English learners, and foster youth.[112] Among the more frequently reported uses of these funds: professional development focused on the needs of targeted students; counselors, social workers, and other staffing supporting social-emotional needs; tutoring and before- and after-school academic programs; parent engagement to support student learning; and instructional coaches.[113]

Nancy Albarron, superintendent of the San Jose Unified School District (SJUSD), described her district's strategy this way at a 2018 conference sponsored by PACE: "We believe we are going to disrupt inequities and change outcomes for students through the people we have, really building their capacity and using them in ways that help advance learning in our system." To that end, the district has allocated supplemental funds in the form of 20% more staffing to school sites based on their number of students from low-income families, English learners, and foster youth.[114]

SJUSD is profiled in *The Steep Road to Resource Equity in California Education*. The report notes that principals decide how these additional staffing positions are best used. Some hire classroom teachers; others add instructional aides or intervention specialists. The schools with the most high-need students receive as many as eight additional staff positions. Lincoln High School, for example, received seven additional teachers and two additional administrators compared to a school with similar enrollment but different student demographics. The difference has been considerable:

> The school now offers reading and math intervention, a bilingual program, a two-year Advanced Placement English class specifically designed for English learners, a "chemistry in the community" class, and a new project-based learning program that … allows students to participate in hands-on learning across multiple subjects.[115]

As with many districts, San Jose Unified serves diverse students and families with vastly different resources. Those differences mean vastly different opportunities for the families in the district, said Stephen McMahon, the district's deputy superintendent.[116]

> It's hard to convince taxpayers to have unequal distribution of resources. LCFF helped us do that. It decreased controversy in the district because we have been able to say to parents, "Yes, that high school does have seven more full-time teachers than your high school because they have the unduplicated population that the state is funding and that we are obligated to serve." They don't always like that answer, but they accept it.[117]

Creating a Student Equity Need Index

While San Jose Unified's approach to equitable funding was spearheaded by its administrative leadership, engaged community groups provided the catalyst for another innovative approach to school-based equity in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). In 2014, Community Coalition and InnerCity Struggle—two longtime community organizations that work with youth and adults of color in South and East Los Angeles, respectively—partnered with the Advancement Project California to propose use of a Student Equity Need Index (SENI)[118] to guide equitable funding among district schools.

Henry Perez, Associate Director of InnerCity Struggle, explained their analysis this way:

> Everyone [was] talking about what the money should be spent on in terms of programs … but the gap that we felt was missing … was that no one was really talking about where the money should be going. We wanted to make sure that communities and schools that [have] the highest need in the district got their equitable share of the money.[119]

The LAUSD School Board approved the index in 2014, using it to guide the distribution of a relatively small amount of resources to k–12 schools, as well as to inform expansion of its early care and education program. The index was later updated and refined in collaboration with the district. The "2.0 version" builds on the LCFF definition of need by including academic, in-school, and out-of-school—or community need—indicators. For example, indicators include a school's percentage of homeless students, suspension and chronic absenteeism rates, and English language arts (ELA) and math assessment scores, as well as neighborhood asthma severity rates and incidents of nonfatal gunshot injuries.[120]

In April 2018, the LAUSD School Board unanimously approved the revised Student Equity Need Index and voted to distribute $25 million in the 2018–19 budget based on its ranking of schools.[121] Although the first allocation is just a small portion of the district's $7.5 billion annual budget, it will grow in 2019–20 to $263 million.[122]

The settlement of a lawsuit filed by Community Coalition against the district for alleged improper use of supplemental and concentration funds played an important role in advancing the index, says Community Coalition Executive Vice President Aurea Montes-Rodriguez. "The big victory of that lawsuit is that [the district] identified the 50 highest need schools by using the Student Equity Need Index," she explained.[123] The settlement also included $150 million over 3 years to be distributed to the school sites, which will choose how to spend the funds from a menu of evidence-based options, including college access programs, Linked Learning, early learning, wellness supports, supporting students in college-preparation courses, and dropout prevention.

Since passage of the resolution in Los Angeles, the Advancement Project California has been asked to work with other community-based organizations to develop an equity index for their district.

It is unclear how many districts, such as San Jose or Los Angeles, are apportioning some or all of their supplemental funds to school sites based on an equity formula and the degree to which supplemental and concentration grants are diminishing inequities within districts. Identifying and assessing the impact of these and other innovative practices are complicated both by the size of the state and the challenges of tracking funds through the LCAP.

Researchers have, however, documented a growing trend to send funds to school sites so that staff, students, and families can identify and address specific needs.[124] They have also reported a growing use of "interest-based" conversations (such as among English learner families, PTAs, student councils, and office staff, for example). As we discuss later in the engagement section, these practices can make resource discussions more tangible for parents, students, and staff but are not without their tradeoffs. Foremost among these: How do districts taking this approach identify the services/supports ultimately provided at the school level and assess their success as part of the annual LCAP update? And to what degree do these smaller group conversations take the place of important districtwide discussions—about ongoing inequities, difficult budget choices, and setting a collective vision to support the success of all students?[125]

Researchers have documented a growing trend to send funds to school sites so that staff, students, and families can identify and address specific needs.

There are many factors influencing how—and how equitably—districts are spending their supplemental and concentration grants. Chief among these is the degree to which a district's base grant covers its core operating costs.[126] While k–12 spending has grown by approximately $20 billion in the past 5 years, California was still ranked just 25th in per-pupil spending among the 50 states plus the District of Columbia in the 2015–16 school year, the last year for which the National Center for Education Statistics has data on per-pupil expenditures.[127] Adjusted for regional costs, California ranked 44th in 2015.[128] The comparatively low level of funding, combined with rising costs, is raising widespread concerns about the ability of districts to pay their bills using just their base grant.

A "Silent Recession"

While fiscal conditions have generally improved for California schools, a recent report from WestEd provides a red flag warning, documenting what the authors call a "silent recession" that threatens to destabilize school districts, force reductions in services, and exacerbate inequities.[129] One of those pressures is the pace with which district contributions to employee pension funds are increasing, particularly as a result of a 2013 recovery plan for the California State Teachers Retirement System, which lost an estimated 40% of its value in the Great Recession.[130] According to an Edunomics analysis, pension contributions represented the single highest percentage increase in per-pupil spending in the first 3 years following passage of the LCFF.[131] Other expenses that threaten to wreak havoc with district budgets include deferred building maintenance, special education, employee health care, and recruiting and retaining teachers in a tight labor market.[132]

Governor Gavin Newsom's first proposed budget in January 2019 included $3 billion to address the pension system shortfalls, $2 billion for continuing to build the base funding for the LCFF, and $576 million for special education.[133] These additional resources are a reassuring sign that these pressures have his attention. It remains to be seen how the legislature will respond and whether the economy will perform in a way that can maintain forward momentum.

Meanwhile, the state has set ambitious new learning goals for students and expectations for substantially changed practices for educators, both with respect to classroom instruction and the construction of more supportive school environments, which we cover in the next two sections.

Going Deeper: Transforming Teaching and Learning

The adoption of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) marked a sea change in California's approach to accountability and school improvement. In 1999, California adopted the Public School Accountability Act, one of the first high-stakes, test-based accountability systems in the country. The state's approach was bolstered by the 2001 passage of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), and for 14 years California's districts and schools had to meet performance targets established by the state—overall and for significant subgroups—or face sanctions ranging from allowing parents to opt out of the school to possible school reconstitution for chronic underperformance. To much fanfare, districts and schools were ranked and an annual Academic Performance Index was published, based on student performance on standardized tests.[134]

Just as the LCFF was becoming law, the state board undertook moves to adopt new standards for students, new curriculum frameworks, new assessments, and new instructional strategies. These constituted a wholesale change from the approaches that the state board had adopted 20 years earlier, when its standards and tests focused on rote-oriented transmission teaching, rather than the higher order thinking and problem-solving sought by the new Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS).

These earlier standards emphasized decoding over comprehension in reading and memorization over meaning in mathematics. They also limited the use of experimentation in science to no more than 10% of instructional time so that students could focus on memorizing a long list of facts. In 2004, after 7 years of non-inquiry science and the prospect of an even more restricted curriculum ahead, CEOs of major high-tech firms, leading scientists from Stanford and the University of California system, and college presidents wrote collectively to the state board, arguing that:

> US businesses and industry seek from today's high school graduates a high capacity for abstract, conceptual thinking, and the ability to apply that capacity to complex real-world problems. The [Board's] Criteria … greatly restrict access to nationally produced, widely acclaimed instructional materials for grades k–8 that promote these skills and habits of mind. While acquisition of knowledge is essential, it is well known that students do not easily acquire scientific knowledge without, at the same time, learning to understand the facts by engaging in active experimentation.… Thus, the [Board's] Criteria are counterproductive to the hope of expanding California's economy, and they will severely limit the opportunities for California's children to learn science and scientific methods.[135]

At that time, the board responded with permission to districts to engage in a tiny fraction of additional time on inquiry-based science.

But by 2013, the year the LCFF was passed, the new board appointed by Governor Brown was ready to move in a new direction. This included new standards and a more expansive set of measures of student and school success embedded in a new framework that favored capacity building and continuous improvement over intervention.[136]

The previous state board had already adopted the Common Core State Standards in mathematics and English language arts in 2010 and targeted the 2014–15 academic year for statewide implementation. In September 2013, just months after the passage of the LCFF, the state also

adopted the NGSS and was actively developing an implementation plan. The state also adopted the Smarter Balanced Assessment system, now called the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP), which would assess student progress on these more rigorous math and English language arts (ELA) standards starting in the spring of 2015. This assessment system uses a wide variety of items, including performance tasks, to assess students' abilities to apply critical thinking and complex problem-solving skills to real-world tasks and dilemmas.

These new standards and the accompanying assessments expect teaching and learning to focus on problem-solving, investigation, collaboration, use of evidence, effective communication, and self-directed learning. From a transmission curriculum that often featured scripted lessons to a curriculum focused on higher-order thinking skills developed through student engagement and inquiry, from teaching to multiple-choice tests to problem-solving aimed at performance assessments, these shifts require major changes in instruction.

A New Accountability Framework

As teaching and learning goals have been revised, a new accountability system expects improvement across a wider range of educational goals, all of which have implications for the nature of curriculum and instruction in schools.

When ESSA was implemented in 2016, states were called upon to develop new accountability systems based on multiple measures of school progress. California had an early start, having adopted a multiple-measures perspective under the LCFF. (See Figure 1.) The state board worked to preserve the LCFF's conceptual framework as it sought to meet federal requirements for accountability.

Over 2 years, the board hammered out the features of a new system that would track progress on each indicator and include an equity component, which tracks outcomes and progress across student subgroups. School- and district-level results are detailed on the California School Dashboard, which is updated annually. Along with reading and math achievement, the indicators include English language proficiency gains, high school graduation rates, a college- and career-ready index, chronic absenteeism, and school suspension rates. As part of the system used to identify schools for support and intervention, these indicators are all reported by the federally required student subgroups representing race and ethnicity, poverty, language background, and disability status.

In addition, schools are required to conduct student surveys at least once every 2 years to evaluate school climate. Many also use surveys of parents and teachers. Results are reported locally, as are several other priority areas and indicators, including parental involvement, student access to a broad course of study, and access to the "basics" of teachers, instructional materials, and facilities (a carryover from the *Williams* lawsuit settlement). Local districts can also create their own indicators to monitor trends they feel are important in their LCAPs.

These indicators focus attention on a broader set of curriculum and teaching goals than NCLB and the California API had done. In addition to reading and math, schools are encouraged to focus on how to teach English learners effectively, how to engage students so that they succeed throughout secondary school and graduate, and how to provide college preparatory and college-level

coursework (Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and dual credit) to more students, along with high-quality career technical education. California's Linked Learning initiative has created career pathways across the state that offer experiential learning integrated with college preparatory coursework. The college/career indicator encourages expansion of these kinds of programs and also includes credit for students who receive the state Seal of Biliteracy. It will soon include credit for a Seal of Civic Engagement, currently under construction.

In these ways and through the remaining state priorities, the state uses its accountability system to encourage a rich curriculum. And the fact that these indicators are reported for all student subgroups encourages the provision of such high-quality curriculum opportunities to all students. The state further emphasizes equity in opportunity, access, and outcomes by posting equity reports prominently on the California School Dashboard across the range of indicators.

In their LCAPs, districts are now required to comment on student subgroups that the dashboard indicates are performing lower than the overall student population and to indicate their strategies for increasing opportunities and outcomes for these students. Natalie Wheatfall-Lum, Senior Policy Analyst with the Education Trust–West, which has been deeply involved in the LCFF implementation, including reviewing LCAPs from districts around the state, described the change as "a really good step in the right direction for districts, in terms of being reflective around where there are extra needs, and also being more transparent about those, and having those in a document that community members can access."[137]

Indicators of student engagement and school climate—chronic absenteeism, suspension rates, and student climate surveys—have also focused attention on social and emotional learning (SEL) and restorative practices, which are becoming part of the curriculum and instructional approach in many schools.[138] Reductions in disparate disciplinary practices are intended to support greater equity in school engagement and graduation rates.

The state's approach plowed new territory nationally and was emulated by other states looking to place greater emphasis on progress and growth—rather than status indicators highly correlated with family income—as well as by those looking to attend to students' opportunities to learn as well as outcomes.[139] California eliminated the single summative score that had been previously provided by the API, ranking schools against each other on a single indicator. It moved instead to a system that looks at a range of indicators of progress for both sparking continuous improvement and identifying schools that need additional support.[140]

By focusing on all of these indicators in making decisions about schools requiring intervention, the state encourages schools to maintain attention to how students are supported socially, emotionally, and academically and how they are being prepared for 21st-century college and careers, not only how they are scoring in reading and math.

All these changes were part of a shift in thinking toward capacity building, rather than punishments, to stimulate school improvement.

Shifting District Culture and Practice: From Compliance to a Learning Orientation

With the instructional changes necessitated by the new standards, policymakers also sought to refocus the system toward capacity building over intervention.[141] Former State Board President Michael W. Kirst described the evolution in the state's thinking:

> As you ramp up accountability, you need to ramp up professional and school-based capacity in equal amounts. The history of school reform has been that you push really hard on the accountability scale and do very little on the capacity building scale. What will get us to where we hope to get is building the capacity of the local educators who have to do the job.[142]

With California's new approach to accountability, the state's schools and districts have what some researchers call "a unique opportunity to reconfigure themselves as learning organizations, committed to continuous improvement and explicitly organized to support experimentation, evaluation, and organizational learning."[143]

The state's formal approach to continuous improvement has been to

- provide data across the array of state priorities and accountability indicators;
- require that the data be examined regularly with stakeholders as part of the LCAP process and be addressed in planning and budgeting (with review by county offices of education);
- charge county offices with providing assistance in areas in which districts and schools need help; and
- reward progress on each of the indicators in the accountability system, in which each indicator is rated equally on the basis of status and growth.

County offices are receiving support and training from the new California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE) to enable them to learn how to take up this role, and many districts are engaged in professional networks of various kinds to support their learning and problem-solving.

Dennis Myers, Assistant Executive Director, Government Relations for the California School Boards Association, described the act of tying local decision making and continuous improvement to budgeting as a "sea change" for districts:

> The challenge was we had a generation of leadership that looked to the Ed Code and looked to Sacramento for direction. The sea change was you need to look at your own data, and you need to find out what's working. If you've got challenges in certain areas, you need to be able to move resources, make decisions, prioritize. And if you need help, then that's when you rely on your peers around you in various communities or counties around you, who have similar populations, similar demographics, similar needs, similar shortfalls that they have turned around. Learn from them, and implement those kinds of programs.[144]

Maintaining a continuous improvement lens is particularly important, given the far-ranging shifts in teaching and learning associated with the state's implementation of the Common Core State Standards. The concurrent adoption of the LCFF and the Common Core has presented substantial challenges to educators and district officials. The LCFF not only requires districts to employ new budgetary and engagement procedures, but also challenges the compliance mindset that has resulted from years of high-stakes accountability and categorical funding, which tends to emphasize meeting bureaucratic requirements over problem-solving and collaboration.[145]

District schools are expected to adapt to this new context while enacting standards that advance deep changes to teaching and learning. This transition is particularly challenging for the teachers and leaders who entered the profession during the time when California's test-based accountability policy was in place. They need support in shifting their mindsets and practices to align with the new, more rigorous standards and the collaboration and shared learning that a continuous improvement model requires. Eric Heins, President of the California Teachers Association, observed:

> We are really shifting from a compliance-based system to a system more of empowerment, and one of more possibility with *local control* [emphasis added]. And that is a big shift … in thinking. And because we had lived under a compliance system for so long … many administrators and many teachers … didn't know anything different.[146]

Five years into these changes, reports suggest districts are using their flexibility to invest in resources and promising practices to foster improved teaching and learning. Many California districts are allocating increased funds to professional development around Common Core and instructional strategies for the LCFF target groups. To improve their practice, leaders and educators are also increasingly leveraging networks, or cross-district learning opportunities, that enable the systematic sharing of expertise to improve teaching and learning for all students, including the LCFF target groups.[147] For example, the CORE Districts have worked together to develop indicators of and strategies for strengthening SEL, sharing practices, and engaging in joint evaluations of progress.[148]

In the context of these reinvestments in professional learning, researchers are finding evidence of instructional and programmatic changes in California schools—shifts that are often Common Core–aligned.[149] Although this evidence is promising, ongoing challenges related to professional learning, instructional support for underserved student groups, and teacher shortages persist, suggesting areas for growth across the state.

New Resources for Professional Learning and Common Core Implementation

Like many other features of California's educational system, professional learning structures were greatly affected by the Great Recession. In the context of statewide budget cuts, districts scaled back on professional development, including support for beginning teachers, such as the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program. As budgets were cut, many districts either required teachers to assume the financial burden for participation in these critical professional learning spaces or cut them entirely.

Recognizing these trends and the increased demands presented by the shift to the Common Core, California policymakers have taken steps toward rebuilding instructional capacity. In 2015, for example, the legislature allocated $500 million in one-time funds for districts to reinvest in professional learning focused on supporting the transition to the new standards.[150] Additionally, in 2013–14, the Governor's budget allocated $1.25 billion in one-time funds to support adoption of new technologies and professional development to support standards implementation.[151] To support schools in using these funds, the Department of Education provided guidelines for implementing the standards, curriculum frameworks for most subjects, professional learning modules, and approved instructional materials that had been vetted and selected by accomplished teachers, along with professional learning provided by the California Subject Matter Project and other providers.[152]

The state's renewed focus on professional learning around Common Core also yielded significant revisions to California's licensing and accreditation standards. As a part of its overhaul of standards for teachers and administrators, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing incorporated into its expectations for both teacher and leader preparation programs attention to the new student learning standards and curriculum frameworks, as well as competencies for teaching higher-order thinking skills and providing social-emotional supports to diverse learners.

District reinvestment in professional learning

In addition to state-provided resources and guidance, research suggests that many districts are using their resources to reinvest in building educator capacity. As district spending on instruction grew in total dollars during the first 3 fiscal years under LCFF,[153] district leaders have indicated that the funds have supported the systematic rollout of Common Core across the state. In the survey of superintendents conducted by the Local Control Funding Formula Research Collaborative, over two thirds of respondents reported that additional LCFF funds have been essential for Common Core implementation—a belief that was even more likely to be expressed by leaders in districts with large English learner populations and high rates of poverty.[154]

Analyses of district LCAPs corroborate these findings and demonstrate the ways that local leaders allocate funds to implement Common Core and build instructional capacity. For example, in an analysis of 75 LCAPs of representative districts in California during the LCFF's second year of implementation, researchers found that districts reinvested in a range of professional learning supports, including induction programs, increased professional development time, coaches, and/or Teachers on Special Assignment who could provide instructional and Common Core–related support.[155]

These districts often reported that the new or expanded efforts were focused on improving teaching and learning for all students, while suggesting that they held particular benefits for the LCFF target groups. When districts more clearly specified how professional learning was designed to support specific subgroups, they often identified plans to dedicate professional development time to the English Language Development (ELD) standards, effective teaching strategies for English learners, discussions of foster youth, supports for students from low-income families, and trauma-informed teaching.[156]

Investments in professional learning and Common Core implementation have remained priorities in more recent LCAPs. In a study of eight representative school systems in Year 3 of the LCFF implementation, researchers noted that most districts in their sample allocated funds for the adoption of Common Core–aligned texts and materials, often selecting resources with teacher input and collaboration.[157] Districts in the sample also indicated that the LCFF funds would be allocated to Common Core–related professional development, which typically included dedicated days and times for practitioners to grapple with the standards and their associated instructional shifts by grade, teacher experience level, or content area.[158]

A 2018 report by the Local Control Funding Formula Research Collaborative highlighted Anaheim Union High School District (AUHSD) for allocating funds to create a system of reinforcing and coherent instructional and professional learning policies.[159] Anaheim has sought to advance equity and success for all students through what it calls First Best Instruction, which seeks to guarantee access to high-quality learning environments—every day and for all students.

To this end, AUHSD has prioritized ongoing professional development as essential to its instructional vision and Common Core implementation. Specifically, the district invested in instructional support personnel, such as curriculum specialists and coaches with expertise in lesson design; codified time for professional learning communities at school sites; and instituted reflective learning walks, wherein teachers participate in nonevaluative classroom observations followed by conversations about teaching practice. The district has also allocated funds so that each school has a coordinator charged with monitoring the academic and nonacademic progress of students in target groups to help teachers garner and manage additional supports to meet students' holistic needs.[160]

Taken collectively, these professional learning structures and supports have set the stage for AUHSD educators to work collaboratively with peers and experts in striving to improve their instruction and supports for students, all with an eye toward all students meeting or exceeding the more rigorous Common Core standards.

Site-based collaborative learning to spur improvement

Research suggests that districts are not just spending more money on professional learning, but that they are employing new approaches with a focus on increased collaboration and job-embedded supports, such as coaches, for teachers.

Since the onset of the LCFF, California teachers have reported shifts in their professional learning experiences and opportunities. A WestEd knowledge brief, *California Standards Implementation: What Educators Are Saying*, surfaced these patterns. The report analyzes data amassed through the RAND Corporation's 2017 American Teacher Panel survey, which is administered to teachers across 12 states, including California, to understand the implementation of Common Core and other college- and career-ready initiatives.[161]

In their analysis, WestEd researchers found that California teachers reported a substantial increase in peer observation to inform instructional improvement, with 54% of surveyed teachers noting participation in this practice in 2016–17, up 9% from the previous year.[162] California teachers were also more likely than their counterparts in other states to agree that teacher leaders, or those "who influence instructional practice at your school," helped them make progress in implementing the standards. Instructional support provided by teacher leaders affiliated with the Instructional

Leadership Corps (ILC) is one such example. Through their participation in a statewide network aimed at cultivating instructional leadership, ILC teachers are prepared to lend their expertise and engage staff in embedded professional learning around Common Core at their sites and districts.[163] (See more on ILCs in "The Growth of Professional Learning Networks," page 37.) Among the types of supports identified were providing access to Common Core–aligned materials, guidance and expertise during peer collaboration, and professional development around the standards and their related instructional shifts.[164]

As one of the brief's researchers indicated in a recent interview with EdSource, "The upswing in California teachers' perceptions partly reflects a shift in professional development to the form that teachers prefer: school-based, teacher-led collaboration. District administrators and principals have come to recognize that centralized, off-site, top-down training is less effective."[165]

The Chula Vista Elementary School District (CVESD) is one California district that is leveraging funds to codify a promising system of more collaborative and immersive professional learning opportunities. The district has hired resource teachers, school-based instructional coaches who work collaboratively with teachers in a nonevaluative fashion to support Common Core implementation. Each of the district's 46 schools has an assigned resource teacher whose work with classroom teachers includes support with lesson and unit design, creating or recommending Common Core–aligned resources, analyzing student data, and conducting peer observations and model lessons to experiment with new practices.

CVESD has also used funds to secure consistent collaboration time for teachers to work with their peers and resource teachers by hiring visual and performing arts teachers who instruct students in the arts, while releasing grade-level teams on a weekly or biweekly basis to collaborate. Dr. Gloria Ciriza, CVESD's Executive Director of Curriculum & Instruction, explained:

> We were able to invest a considerable amount of money, about $15 million, in hiring arts teachers. The benefit of that is not only are we able to provide arts instruction for our students, but when the art teachers are teaching the children, the teachers are released to collaborate. We've now built into their day an opportunity for them to collaborate around an instruction.[166]

Through the use of resource teachers and additional collaboration time, Chula Vista teachers and leaders indicate, the district's professional learning structure has built districtwide capacity and engaged teachers in a cycle of continuous improvement. Specifically, they noted that educators in Chula Vista are collectively grappling with Common Core standards, discussing the implementation of related instructional strategies, and analyzing formative data to inform their ongoing instructional improvement.[167]

Investments in capacity building in Chula Vista are paying off. CVESD is one district that Stanford University researcher Sean Reardon and researchers at the Learning Policy Institute have dubbed a "positive outlier"—a district in which students of color as well as White students have outperformed predicted outcomes on the new math and ELA tests.[168] Other positive outlier districts are engaged in similarly intensive work in professional learning communities, organizing teachers to work with each other and with coaches to develop new skills.[169]

The growth of professional learning networks

As California teachers increasingly engage in collaborative and ongoing professional learning at their sites, the convergence of the LCFF and Common Core has also spurred several cross-district collaborations to support instructional improvement. In fact, professional learning networks, often comprising diverse districts and practitioners with varied expertise and perspectives, have proliferated across the state.

Teacher-Led Networks. Many of these initiatives are practitioner-led and aim to both leverage and build teacher and leader expertise. A prominent example among these is the Instructional Leadership Corps (ILC), an initiative launched and supported by the California Teachers Association, the National Board Resource Center, and the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education in 2014. The ILC aims to support the successful implementation of Common Core and the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) in participating districts.[170] Like the Chula Vista example, the ILC is grounded in a "teachers teaching teachers" approach to professional learning.

More than 200 accomplished teachers, many of them National Board certified, plus a smaller number of administrators, have been trained as instructional leaders by the ILC. Regional and statewide convenings gather these leaders to learn from and with experts and scholars about Common Core– and NGSS-aligned instructional strategies and successful approaches to professional development. ILC participants then design and lead their own sustainable, in-district professional development to support instructional improvement. To extend and sustain local capacity, the ILC also helps teacher leaders develop partnerships with school districts, county offices of education, institutes of higher education, and their local teacher associations.[171]

Not only do ILC-participating teachers make instructional shifts to better align with the new standards, they also express increased levels of efficacy and greater receptiveness to engaging in professional learning with their peers who understand their students and school context.

To date, the ILC has served more than 100,000 teachers from more than 2,000 schools in 495 districts across the state. Areas of focus have included an emphasis on using academic language across subject areas; formative assessment; and other Common Core– and NGSS-aligned instructional practices, such as student-centered and experiential learning.[172] A study conducted by researchers at the Learning Policy Institute found that beyond the ILC's wide reach, educators identify positive and tangible effects from their participation in the initiative. Not only do participating teachers make instructional shifts to better align with the new standards, they also express increased levels of efficacy and greater receptiveness to engaging in professional learning with their peers who understand their students and school context.[173]

The case of the Madera Unified School District reveals the power and impact of the ILC on local professional learning and instructional practice. In 2014, three teacher leaders were tapped to participate in the ILC to support teachers in their district in Common Core implementation. Prior to Common Core, teaching in Madera Unified was dominated by explicit direct instruction, adherence

to pacing guides, and the use of mandated curricula. Recognizing that Common Core–aligned teaching and learning would require significant shifts in policies and practices, the three teacher leaders formed the district's first ILC cohort to develop a vision for professional learning that would support teachers and meet them where they were.[174]

Together they examined discipline-specific instructional practices required by the new standards, looking for commonalities upon which they could build a comprehensive professional development plan to engage all Madera teachers. Through this process, the ILC identified academic discourse—or the development of students' academic language competencies—as a central focus and have since engaged educators to learn about and work on these practices throughout the district to support their implementation of Common Core.[175] With the sustained professional development focus on academic discourse, classroom observations and interview data suggest that instructional shifts are beginning to take hold: Madera students are increasingly engaging in collaborative academic conversations and becoming more active participants in the learning process.[176]

Other communities of practice have also formed to focus on core subject areas and their Common Core–related shifts. For example, the NGSS Early Implementers Initiative is a program focused exclusively on enhancing practitioners' understanding and implementation of the NGSS, adopted in California in 2013.[177] This professional learning collaborative, established in 2014, gathers teacher leaders from eight districts and two charter management organizations[178] to dissect the standards and understand their approach to inquiry-based science. Member districts of the NGSS Early Implementers Initiative then act as "labs" where teachers "beta-test NGSS-aligned instructional materials, implementation tools, and performance assessment(s)."[179] Practitioners and researchers affiliated with the collaborative hope to share lessons learned from their efforts to inform upcoming statewide curriculum adoption.

The Math in Common Community of Practice program operates similarly, convening practitioners from 10 districts[180] serving more than 300,000 students in grades k–8 with the aim of developing expertise around teaching and learning practices that support the implementation of Common Core mathematics standards.[181] Math in Common convenes educators, district officials, and principals from participating districts to discuss instructional and capacity-building strategies, to grapple with emerging problems of practice, and to exchange tools and lessons learned about standards and strategy implementation.

While the collaborative is designed to support each district's unique standards implementation approach, this community of practice has generated collective lessons that can inform instructional improvement in math across the state. Notably, a series of mixed-methods evaluations conducted by WestEd, which analyze observational, interview, survey, and performance data, suggest that teachers and students in the 10 districts benefit from institutionalized cultures of continuous improvement in their schools and the presence of a coherent and multifaceted system of supports (such as coaching, peer observation, and teacher collaboration) to implement the new standards.[182]

State-Led Professional Learning Networks. The California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE) is charged with supporting school districts, charter schools, and county offices of education (local education agencies, or LEAs) in improving outcomes in the state priority areas. While the CCEE's role in the Statewide System of Support is evolving,[183] in its first few years of operation it has been focused on providing support to LEAs that choose to participate to improve

outcomes and reach the goals identified in their LCAPs.[184] Josh Daniels, the Director of Finance and Operations at the CCEE, described the importance of the agency's aim to build local capacity to meet student needs:

> When we talk about systems capacity, I think that can include formal systems like who reports to who and your policies. But it also includes individual expertise, like how comfortable is your system superintendent in understanding the relationship between general education and special education, for example?[185]

To this end, the agency has launched professional learning networks to build systemwide capacity around implementation of the LCFF. Composed of county office of education leaders, school district officials, and charter school educators, these networks bring "education stakeholders together for an ongoing exchange of knowledge and capacity building" to continually improve student learning.[186] To date, the CCEE supports 56 of these voluntary learning communities, connecting more than 300 LEAs with differing strengths and challenges in professional learning around topics ranging from supporting English learners to data analysis and usage practices, all in the context of local control.

One network, for example, convenes local educators and staff from the California Association for Bilingual Education and Californians Together—two statewide advocacy coalitions dedicated to improving instruction and outcomes for English learners. With support from these two organizations, participants are building their capacity to implement comprehensive and research-based programs to support English learners as part of their LCAPs. Gatherings of this group also discuss how to build support among content area specialists for addressing English learner needs and how to best support the work of English learner coordinators in their respective districts through the LCAP process.

These intrastate collaborative learning experiences facilitate what WestEd researchers refer to as "systemic knowledge sharing,"[187] a valuable practice, given the shift in instruction, budgetary, and accountability processes ushered in by the LCFF. In particular, the networks that have adopted a continuous improvement model are helping local education leaders transition to this new way of working and problem-solving, which emphasizes capacity building, co-learning as a means to sustainable change, and the creation of professional climates of transparency and productive experimentation.[188]

With the LCFF's shift to local decision making, local officials are tasked with developing coherent, research-based, and often innovative approaches to professional development to facilitate instructional improvement and Common Core implementation. Collaborations can be a valuable resource for augmenting local capacity by facilitating the exchange of resources, strategies, and expertise and allowing practitioners to collectively develop their instructional and improvement practices.

Shifting Curriculum and Instruction

The approaches to professional learning that have emerged in California in the context of the LCFF and Common Core offer some promising forums and practices that can support educators and leaders in making the key instructional shifts that go along with the more rigorous standards. However, these mostly bottom-up initiatives are much more available in some of California's nearly 1,000 districts than others, and their effects are just beginning to be studied.

To what extent have these professional learning experiences translated into changes in classroom and school practice? Are California teachers beginning to more widely employ pedagogical practices that are aligned with Common Core? Have schools adopted programs and curricula that nurture the learning environments that Common Core seeks to create, particularly for the LCFF's target groups? Much of the research on the LCFF has analyzed funding allocation, the depth and breadth of its LCAP engagement processes, and districts' capacity to respond to the changes the law requires, but a growing subset of research provides insights into these important questions.

Results from the RAND Corporation's American Teacher Panel survey indicate that ELA teachers are perceiving shifts in their teaching practices, prompted by the new standards. They identified Common Core–related shifts, including having students engage with multiple complex texts and use evidence to develop their reasoning in written and oral arguments. A majority of surveyed teachers also reported increases in instructional practices advanced by Common Core, such as having students explain their reasoning in solving problems, constructing arguments supported with evidence, and analyzing how two or more texts address similar themes. A smaller proportion of ELA teachers indicated increases in less robust learning activities, such as test preparation, in their responses.[189]

Math teachers noted similar increases in Common Core–aligned teaching. With the new standards, math teachers aim to build students' conceptual and procedural understanding of math by providing them with the opportunity to develop their reasoning and to apply their knowledge to real-world problems. A majority of California math teachers, particularly at the elementary level, reported doing just that. Surveyed educators indicated increases in opportunities for students to explain their reasoning and methods in problem-solving, to apply math to solve real-world problems, to consider multiple approaches in problem-solving, and to work in small groups to build shared knowledge. Conversely, fewer math teachers reported increases in more traditional math practices, such as providing direct instruction or having students practice computations.[190]

Beyond shifts in classroom instruction, California districts are implementing programs and courses that can advance student learning and the implementation of Common Core. For example, in an analysis of first-year LCAPs of 15 representative districts, researchers with the Local Control Funding Formula Research Collaborative noted that districts increased student access to rigorous coursework, such as AP/IB course and A-G aligned classes, California's college preparatory sequence, alongside the growth of enrichment and interdisciplinary programs, including those that specialize in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) and science, technology, engineering, the arts, and math (STEAM).[191]

Districts in this sample also allocated funds to the creation or improvement of real-world learning opportunities, such as Career and Technical Education pathways and the integration of technology in schools,[192] which can support student-centered learning by providing students with opportunities to investigate and apply their knowledge in authentic contexts.[193]

While access gaps to these more rigorous and student-centered programs persist among high-poverty and low-poverty districts,[194] more districts are nonetheless aligning their programmatic approaches to the increased rigor and application of knowledge called for by the college- and career-ready expectations as well as the Common Core.

Instructional approaches to support English learners

Similarly, research finds that districts are incorporating more specific interventions and extended learning opportunities for English learners, identified in the LCFF for additional resources and support. While analyses of LCAPs typically found investments such as increased funds for English Language Development (ELD) support classes, materials, and instructional assistants and specialists,[195] some districts have gone further and adopted more comprehensive programs to support this subgroup. To this end, reports show that these districts are leveraging external partners and communities of practice to academically support English learners.

Growing district partnerships with the Sobrato Early Academic Language (SEAL) program is a prominent example. Since 2008, SEAL has supported the implementation of a comprehensive and assets-based model designed for English learners in preschool through 3rd grade. The model is now used in over 100 schools across 20 demographically and geographically diverse districts. SEAL is grounded in research-based practices shown to be effective in supporting English learner success, including an instructional emphasis on academic language development, the creation of language and text-rich environments, and the use of interdisciplinary and integrated language instruction.[196]

To support teachers in enacting their multifaceted instructional model, SEAL facilitates ongoing professional development for teachers over a 3-year period. Learning supports include topical and experiential workshops, job-embedded coaching, observations of model lessons, and the co-creation of thematic units that synthesize Common Core, Next Generation Science Standards, social studies standards, and California's ELD standards.[197] Dr. Anya Hurwitz, SEAL's Executive Director, explained the centrality of professional learning in the SEAL model:

> In SEAL, we are professionalizing teachers. We're saying that teachers can't be given a teacher-proof curriculum—that their expertise and professionalization has to be central to changing what's happening in classrooms.... We have teachers saying to us, "This is a lot of work!" But that's what it takes to be responsive to students' needs. Teachers need that time and we try to create the conditions so that we're really professionalizing teachers and giving them the support that they need to do this very complicated work.[198]

While the organization has partnered with districts for over a decade, SEAL officials shared that the state's concurrent adoption of the LCFF, Common Core, and the ELD standards created the instructional and fiscal conditions that have allowed "SEAL to take root and districts to prioritize their investment" in English learners.[199]

In fact, this policy window has fueled SEAL's growth across the state. Since 2013–14, the organization has partnered with an additional 71 schools, with its greatest expansion occurring in 2015–16, when SEAL doubled in size by adding 33 partnership sites. Oak Grove School District is one such district that has leveraged new resources to foster a partnership with SEAL to improve English learner performance. This strategic partnership not only has led to improved

redesignation rates and ELA and math student performance among the district's English learner population, but also has enabled Oak Grove to be included in a pilot effort to expand the SEAL model to grades 4 and 5.

The cross-district community of practice between Sanger Unified School District and Firebaugh-Las Deltas Unified School District, two districts outside of Fresno, is another instance in which districts are leveraging partnerships to hone their instructional supports for English learners. While the two districts have been working together in their improvement efforts since 2011, they have increasingly engaged in conversations on how to increase supports for long-term English learners since the onset of the LCFF and the inclusion of English learner proficiency data under ESSA and on the California School Dashboard.

Through their work, the districts have developed tools to build teacher capacity in meeting the need of long-term English learners across content areas and expanded course access for this student population, creating a multifaceted approach to supporting EL performance.[200] These efforts have fueled the onset of dual language programs in Sanger Unified and supported educators in both districts to emphasize academic discourse and Integrated English Language Development across content areas in their classrooms. Through these efforts, over three fourths of English learners in both districts have made progress toward English proficiency—a number that has steadily increased in both settings since the onset of Common Core and the LCFF.[201]

Comprehensive approaches to supporting English learners, such as those seen in the cross-district partnership between Sanger and Firebaugh-Las Deltas and districts that partner with SEAL, have the potential to grow with the State Board of Education's California English Learner Roadmap, which was adopted in 2017.[202] This tool aims to help LEAs create asset-based, coherent approaches to supporting English learners. To this end, the California Department of Education has created materials that highlight research-based ELD approaches that "move beyond improvement efforts focused solely on language of instruction to programs and pathways that effectively develop academic content knowledge, discipline-specific practices and academic language uses, and bilingual-biliterate proficiency."[203] In this way, this 2017 State Board of Education tool represents another avenue for systemic knowledge sharing that can increase the capacity of local officials in allocating their LCFF funds in their continuous improvement efforts.[204]

Ongoing Challenges in Teaching and Learning

As we have described above, there is growing evidence that many California districts are using their new flexibility—within the parameters provided by the state's adoption of new standards and accountability indicators—to reimagine their approach to teaching and learning. These districts are creating systems for continuous improvement—systems that immerse educators in collaborative and ongoing learning opportunities to develop their ability to enact Common Core–aligned pedagogy. The changing dynamics of professional learning are also coinciding with shifts in instruction. As professional learning structures seek to develop and strengthen Common Core–aligned pedagogy, California teachers are noting changes in their teaching. Evidence points to increases in student-centered instructional practices, including those that support the development of the deeper learning competencies associated with Common Core, such as increased rigor, interdisciplinary investigation, and real-world application of knowledge.

While research suggests that promising instructional and curricular shifts are beginning to take hold, reports also shed light on ongoing areas for improvement around professional learning and instructional supports for underserved subgroups and point to compounding factors, including the ongoing teacher shortage, that can undermine continuous improvement efforts.

Improving professional learning for teachers and leaders

Although some districts have developed or gained access to high-quality professional development, many California districts continue to struggle in this critical arena. Almost all of the statewide supports that California once had in place to support capacity building were zeroed out or severely cut back during the Schwarzenegger administration and have not been reinstated in the era of the LCFF. The state's School Leadership Academy, state-funded professional development days, investments in beginning teacher induction (the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment program, or BTSA), and forgivable loans and scholarships to entice new recruits into teaching were all eliminated, while funding for the Subject Matter Projects was dramatically reduced.[205] Some of this funding—such as BTSA's state matching funds for hiring mentors—was "flexed" into district core funding and, arguably, could still be used for that initial purpose. But this flexing occurred as budgets were being slashed and, without the state incentives or a mandate to serve beginning teachers, many districts addressed fiscal problems by eliminating the program or cutting it back.

A significant obstacle in developing and implementing robust systems of professional learning—those that would provide educators with ongoing and immersive support to fuel instructional improvement—is leadership preparation. Although California has overhauled its standards for administrator programs over the last 6 years to align them with the Common Core, data suggests that principal preparedness continues to vary.

Although some districts have developed or gained access to high-quality professional development, many California districts continue to struggle in this critical arena.

For example, in a recent report, published as part of the *Getting Down to Facts II* project (a set of 36 studies taking stock of California education released in 2018), LPI researchers analyzed secondary data sets, surveyed a representative sample of principals, and conducted focus groups and interviews with educational leaders to understand the preparation and development experiences of California's education leaders.[206] While over three quarters of the principal survey sample reported that their professional learning had adequately or well developed their knowledge and skills around Common Core, principals in schools serving higher concentrations of students from low-income families and leaders in rural schools felt less prepared to implement the new standards. Moreover, these same subpopulations of school leaders indicated that they remained less prepared to create the collegial work environments that are necessary to establish strong cultures of professional learning and improvement.[207] These findings suggest that ongoing professional development for school leaders is needed to support continuous improvement and capacity building.

On the other hand, the same study found that recently prepared principals were significantly more likely to say they had been well prepared in these and other areas associated with leading and redesigning schools that can serve students' social, emotional, and academic needs. That finding suggests that the state's efforts to improve preparation programs through new licensing and accreditation standards may be succeeding.

The research to date highlights both promising practices and differential access to high-quality learning opportunities for California's educators, many of which have been provided for fortunate groups of districts with philanthropic dollars. The holes left in the professional learning landscape suggest the need for the state to re-establish a professional learning infrastructure that can provide regular access to high-quality professional learning supports in all of the key areas in which progress is expected. Access to regularly available learning resources is a prerequisite for districts and schools to develop and maintain a clear vision for professional development that avoids disjointed, isolated, or superficial learning opportunities that can undermine continuous improvement.

Supporting underserved groups

Research also points to questions about the degree to which instructional improvements have been made to support the LCFF's target groups and other underserved student populations. On one hand, the research above suggests that there is growing attention to the learning needs of target groups in priorities described in LCAPs. Yet although these students are receiving greater attention, researchers argue that districts are still falling short in their support of students from low-income families, foster youth, and English learners.[208] To illustrate, two reports issued by The Center for Equity for English Learners at Loyola Marymount University conclude that the majority of LCAPs present a weak approach to supporting English learners and fail to mention ELD or implementation of the new ELD standards.[209]

Others remain concerned about the pressing need to address the educational opportunities available to students with special needs, who were not included as a target population in the LCFF. There is growing interest in the state to recognize and address the as-yet unmet needs of special education in California. There is also interest in additional supports for African American students. While some districts, such as Oakland, have implemented programs to support the achievement of African American students, many believe that more attention and investment needs to be paid to close the persistent opportunity and achievement gap between these students and others in the state. The state's 2018–19 budget, which allocates $300 million statewide for districts to improve the performance of students with the lowest standardized test scores, may be one way for districts to allocate additional funds and support to African American students and other underserved groups,[210] but it remains to be seen if this is a sufficient and sustainable approach.

Overcoming the challenges posed by the teacher shortage

Local leaders also face a significant challenge in strengthening teaching and learning due to the persistent teacher shortage and high levels of turnover at every level of the system—from superintendents to school principals to teachers.[211] Since 2015, when enough new money had come into the system for districts to shift from layoffs to hiring once again, virtually every district in the state has reported teacher shortages in math, science, and special education. Growing shortages in bilingual education teachers are emerging as the state has re-embraced bilingual education with

a 2017 rejection by voters of the English-only policy passed under an earlier proposition. As is historically the case, shortages are most pronounced in schools serving concentrations of students of color and students from low-income families.

Research tells us that a stable educator workforce is generally associated with increased student achievement,[212] as it provides students with opportunities to have continuity in their learning and relationships. The Learning Policy Institute's "positive outliers" study reinforces these general findings, identifying stability in leadership and the teaching workforce as key elements of these districts' success.[213] Yet teacher shortages inevitably contribute to instability in student learning and can inhibit student progress, particularly among historically underserved student populations in which shortages are most acutely experienced.

At the same time, teacher shortages pose immediate and long-term challenges to successful implementation of the LCFF and Common Core. The teacher shortage has resulted in the hiring of tens of thousands of teachers with substandard credentials across the state.[214] Typically lacking strong preparation and training, these teachers often struggle with enacting the more complex Common Core–aligned instructional practices and the targeted intervention for the LCFF target subgroups.

Teacher shortages pose immediate and long-term challenges to successful implementation of the LCFF and Common Core.

Shortages can also stifle capacity building and continuous improvement efforts that require teachers to engage in ongoing professional learning over sustained periods of time. District officials interviewed for the recent *Getting Down to Facts II* report *Towards a Common Vision of Continuous Improvement for California* noted how turnover, recruitment, and retention issues undercut attempts to build system capacity and to foster the necessary relationships that enable teachers to engage in a cycle of professional learning.[215] Although the state has taken steps to address shortages, more work is needed to build a strong, stable, and diverse educator workforce.

Nurturing Inclusive and Supportive School Communities

Highly skilled teachers are needed not only to teach the new content standards but also to nurture a positive school environment in which all students can learn effectively. Research shows that safe, inclusive, and culturally validating schools help students combat fear and anxiety, two barriers to learning. This is particularly important for historically underserved youth, who face a range of social and economic challenges that can adversely affect their ability to learn.[216]

Research also indicates that students do better academically when they maintain nurturing and culturally responsive relationships with teachers and other adults in schools.[217] The creation and sustainability of positive relationships also extend to how schools partner with and engage families. To foster safe and student-centered personalized school and classroom communities, teachers and school leaders must build in time and support for school staff to engage parents as partners with valued expertise.[218]

These findings come as no surprise to California parents, students, educators, and civil rights leaders who have consistently advocated for the creation of more welcoming and inclusive schools. This work has included state and local-level efforts to eliminate "zero-tolerance" legislation and discipline policies, which have resulted in the disproportionate suspension and expulsion of students of color, and replace them with supportive alternatives, such as restorative justice practices. The inclusion of suspension rates as an accountability indicator reflects these efforts. However, capacity building—or the ongoing professional development of teachers and leaders to develop strategies to create engaging and supportive classrooms—is required to support the needed changes in practice that can enable productive outcomes.

Many have also sought to redesign school environments to foster nurturing relationships between students, families, and adults; to create support systems to mitigate social and economic challenges; and to directly teach students SEL strategies that can help them manage their emotions, attention, and behavior productively.[219] However, under California's previous high-stakes accountability system, which maintained a laser-like focus on standardized test scores as the primary marker of success, efforts to improve school climate were often considered ancillary to school improvement.

The LCFF takes a decidedly different approach. By including both student engagement and school climate as two of the eight state priorities, the redesigned accountability system builds on statewide efforts to create safe and inclusive schools that replace punitive disciplinary practices with a more holistic understanding of the conditions that are essential for students' academic success. Survey data, as well as suspension rates, are used to measure school climate. Graduation rates and chronic absenteeism are the indicators used in the state accountability system to measure student engagement.

By adding these measures, the law encourages districts to identify and enact strategies to improve school climate, to increase attention to the social and emotional dimensions of learning, and to create more personalized learning environments in which students are known and understood. It has also created an opportunity for grassroots groups and advocates to leverage the LCAP process

and other engagement opportunities to increase investments and refine school practice in this arena. Henry Perez, who serves as the Associate Director of InnerCity Struggle, which supports parent and student organizing in East Los Angeles, explained:

> I am hopeful that these new dollars that we have been getting from the state can be used to invest in programs that the community has been advocating for a long time now—like community schools, school-based wellness centers, restorative justice coordinators, and counselors. I also hope that we have school climate programs that we know support students and families holistically.... LCFF is the vehicle to fund these initiatives.[220]

The LCFF appears to be prompting some changes with these goals in mind. Research suggests that some districts are using their additional funds to increase student access to staff who can address their holistic needs and to implement programs and practices that aim to build community and improve school climate. They are also engaging in efforts to conduct and interpret climate surveys, which can inform ongoing improvement around the creation of more supportive learning environments. While these efforts are promising, districts still face obstacles in their efforts to improve school climate, including the effects of the state's ongoing teacher shortage, challenges in implementing and interpreting survey data, and the need for ongoing professional development.

Increasing the Number of Adults in Schools

Several studies have found that districts have used their LCFF dollars to hire more specialized staff who play an important role in providing the type of holistic supports that community groups such as InnerCity Struggle and others have identified as critical to students and families. A 2017 study by Georgetown University's Edunomics Lab, for example, found that in the first 3 years of the LCFF, districts added 17% more counselors, 19% more social workers, and 21% more psychologists compared to pre-LCFF budgeting, aiming to improve access to these critical mental health and social services.[221]

While all students benefit from increased access to counselors and mental health professionals, in interviews with researchers many district representatives described the new staffing positions as an intervention to support the needs of the LCFF's target groups—students who often face economic and social hardships and for whom these services are critical, but often absent or under-resourced.[222] This trend was corroborated in a survey of 350 superintendents or other high-level district officials. Ninety-two percent of surveyed superintendents reported organizing professional development focused on the needs of target students in all or most schools, and 78% reported increasing investments in counselors, social workers, and other service providers in all or most of their schools to support the social-emotional needs of students from low-income families, English learners, and foster youth.[223] (See Table 1 for survey data.)

Table 1
Percentage of Superintendents Using the Following Strategies in All or Most Schools to Support the LCFF Target Students in 2016–17

Strategy Used	All Schools	Most Schools
Professional development focused on needs of target students	84%	8%
Counselors, social workers, and other staff supporting social-emotional needs	65%	13%
Tutoring and non-school hour academic programs	51%	19%
Personnel to engage parents to support their children's learning	48%	14%
Instructional coaches	49%	12%
Reducing class size and/or student-staff ratios	40%	15%
Improvements to facilities	40%	9%

Source: Marsh, J. A., & Koppich, J. E. (2018). *Superintendents speak: Implementing the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF).* Stanford, CA: LCFFRC, PACE.

Districts have also used their increased resources to hire more teachers to reduce class size and student-teacher ratios, both of which ballooned during the Great Recession.[224] For example, Edunomics Lab researchers found that California's teacher workforce grew by 6% between 2014 and 2017 among the 900 districts they studied. In all, these districts added approximately 10 new teachers for every administrative position.[225]

A recent *Getting Down to Facts II* report corroborated these findings, noting that "the LCFF-induced expenditures in district revenue led to a significant reduction in the average school-level student-to-teacher ratio."[226] These smaller classes and reductions in student-to-teacher ratios hold the possibility of fostering more personalized learning environments in which students are known and in which teachers can better attend to students' academic, social, and emotional needs.

However, California still lags far behind other states in its adult-to-student ratios across a range of roles and in the services and supports offered, currently ranking near the bottom of U.S. states in the availability of school-based health and mental services, with access gaps to these services across the state.[227] The 2017 report by The Education Trust–West argues that gaps are felt most acutely in the state's highest poverty schools. In comparing resources of districts in the highest and lowest poverty quartiles, they found that students in California's highest poverty districts still have significantly less access to counselors and other personnel who provide social and emotional supports.[228]

These same schools are also feeling a disproportionate impact of the state's persistent teacher shortage and, in turn, may not be seeing the full benefit of the added teaching staff. Schools with concentrations of high-need students maintain larger class sizes and remain severely understaffed

in critical areas, including science, math, special education, and bilingual education.[229] These schools also suffer from the fact that so many newly hired staff are underqualified and are less prepared to teach the subjects and classes for which they have been hired, much less to foster strong and supportive learning environments for students who often bring high levels of stress and trauma with them into the classroom.[230]

Investing in Programs to Improve Climate and Culture

In addition to increasing the number of adults in schools, California agencies and districts are investing in programs and practices designed to build community and improve school climate, as well as support the building of strategies and tools to resolve conflicts and improve classroom management without resorting to punitive discipline practices.

At the state level, efforts to support educators in improving school climate have been undertaken at the Commission on Teacher Credentialing, which has restructured its standards in this specific arena. These overhauled educator standards place a strong emphasis on all teachers and school leaders understanding student development, how to create a positive environment, and how to use restorative practices in the classroom and school. A recent survey of California principals found that those newly trained under these standards felt significantly more prepared to create school environments that attend to students' social, emotional, and academic development and to implement positive discipline practices, as well as Common Core standards.[231]

A 2018 analysis by the Council for a Strong America found that California districts are also increasingly investing in evidence-based approaches to improve school climate and conditions, including social and emotional learning (SEL), Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS), and restorative justice practices. In their review of LCAPs from the state's 50 largest districts from 2014 to 2017, researchers found that the percentage of districts investing in these programs increased by 22% in the 3-year period, with 92% of districts reporting investments in one or more of these programs overall in the 2017–18 academic year.[232] While acknowledging the positive trends reflected in these data, associates with the Council for a Strong America maintain that greater and ongoing investments in these programs are necessary to ensure that these alternative programs are implemented in effective and responsive ways.[233]

The San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD), the state's second-largest school district, is a case in point. Since the summer of 2014, SDUSD has embarked on a multipart strategy to become a restorative justice district—first by eliminating its zero-tolerance discipline policy and then by piloting restorative justice approaches in select high schools to build infrastructure and support broader implementation. In this process, the district has established a restorative justice department to support professional development at pilot sites and to expand professional learning opportunities on restorative practices for leaders, teachers, and school personnel across the district. Additional resources through LCFF have been instrumental in supporting district efforts. While SDUSD supplements its restorative justice program with external grant funding, the district's 2017–18 LCAP notes that it allocated more than $52 million of its $1.3 billion budget to the expansion of restorative justice and PBIS practices to improve school climate and learning conditions districtwide—a number that has risen each year under the LCFF. San Diego is one of the positive outlier districts that has also shown extraordinary success in educating African American and Latino/a students.[234]

Districts are also increasingly coming together to reimagine and revitalize the climate and conditions in their schools through professional learning networks. One prominent example is the CORE Districts, which have engaged in ongoing dialogue to define SEL and what high-quality SEL in districts and schools looks like.[235] These eight districts,[236] representing a range of geographic regions and together educating over 1 million students, have operated as a cross-district learning community since 2010, bringing together local leaders to develop systems and processes for school and district improvement through ongoing dialogue and idea exchange.[237] The cross-district collaborative initially focused its efforts around the assessment and instructional shifts brought on by the Common Core State Standards, but it has more recently made SEL a critical focal point for student success, particularly for its socioeconomically disadvantaged students.[238]

With this focus, CORE Districts have identified and implemented research-based practices related to SEL. A 2018 report conducted by researchers with PACE studied five CORE Districts—bright spots within the collective that received high ratings on SEL on administered student surveys—to share the promising practices emerging from their learning.[239] Common strategies and approaches that may have contributed to a strong presence of SEL in these districts included SEL-specific classroom practices and curricula (such as strategies for managing emotions and modeling language and mindset), the presence of electives or extracurricular activities that promote relationships and SEL-related skills, and strategies that promote positive school culture and relationship building (e.g., advisories, inclusion, whole-school culture building). CORE Districts with high SEL also had district-level supports (e.g., SEL frameworks, curricula and programs, dedicated staff, professional development, and assessment) that enabled schools to successfully enact their practices.

Moving toward more effective school climate data

Another source of work in California districts has been around the use of climate surveys—tools that can garner broader perspectives from students, teachers, and parents on their experiences of school environments. Under the LCFF, districts are required to conduct student surveys to elicit students' perspectives on the sense of safety and school connectedness in schools, making California one of a small subset of states to do so.[240] With this requirement, the law aims to support districts and schools in gathering a more nuanced understanding of school climate from those most affected by it.

The CORE Districts, which developed their own indicator system, have engaged in collective learning around how survey data measuring school climate and SEL can be interpreted and used to inform renewed action. Of particular interest to the CORE Districts has been the relationship between survey results—covering such areas as students' feeling of safety or staff's sense of agency in their work—and academic and nonacademic outcomes for students, especially those who have historically been marginalized due to race, gender, or socioeconomic status. Through their work, officials from the CORE Districts learned that SEL and school climate survey data are related to academic indicators (such as academic performance, graduation rates, EL reclassification, and high school readiness) and nonacademic indicators (such as chronic absenteeism and suspensions and expulsions), and can illuminate differences among schools and subgroups.[241] In their next area of work, the learning collective will continue grappling with how to use these data to improve district and school practice.

Although efforts such as these are promising, implementation challenges persist. For example, districts, to date, have been required to conduct student surveys only every other year and are not required to report how they will use these results to inform their improvement efforts.[242] The inconsistent administration of surveys and their use is also complicated by the fact that districts can identify and adopt their own survey tools. The State Board of Education suggests that LEAs adopt vetted surveys, such as the California Healthy Kids Survey. However, the state has not yet been able to provide a set of recommended or approved survey instruments that can ensure valid and reliable indicators of school climate.

To address the ongoing challenges of collecting and using surveys in continuous improvement efforts, in October 2017 the state's School Conditions and Climate Working Group—a group of practitioners, researchers, and advocates convened to study and guide the State Board of Education's implementation of measures and supports—generated recommendations to improve survey use. In addition to suggesting that districts and schools annually administer surveys to their parents, students, and teachers, the working group recommended the development and identification of state-vetted and supported surveys to ensure that districts are using reliable and valid tools. They also suggested that within the Statewide System of Support, attention be given to building the capacity of districts and county offices of education to make meaning of survey data and to translate that meaning into relevant actions for improvement.[243] Thus far, however, the board has not acted on these recommendations.

Looking ahead: Reducing suspensions and building capacity

Education leaders and policymakers across the state recognize the need for ongoing improvements in school climate and are continuing to take action. For example, legislative efforts to expand the state's ban on willful defiance suspensions to students in 4th through 8th grade will likely continue.[244] (The ban has been in place for students in grades k–3 since 2014.) An expanded ban—such as the bill approved by the legislature in 2018 but vetoed by Governor Brown—could fuel continued decreases in suspension and expulsion rates, which are still more widely observed in secondary classrooms.[245]

In addition, for the first time since the passage of the LCFF, the 2018–19 state budget includes $15 million in dedicated resources to improve school climate. The new funds will be used to support teacher and leader training on school climate throughout the state and to support the implementation of alternative disciplinary approaches. The Orange and Butte county offices of education are partnering with UCLA's Center for the Transformation of Schools to develop and refine a training curriculum based on multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), a comprehensive framework and approach that aligns resources, initiatives, and interventions to support students' academic, behavioral, and social needs. In this training, the county offices of education will also emphasize "restorative justice, social emotional learning and other alternatives that prioritize mediation and building healthy relationships over traditional punishments."[246]

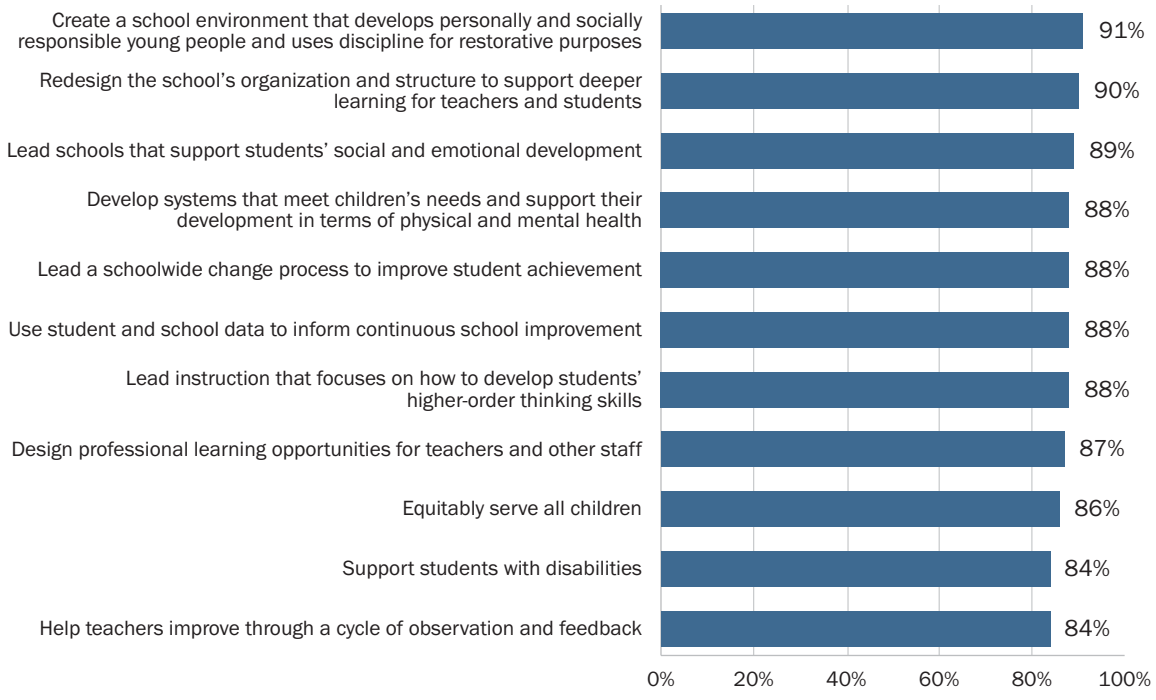
In an EdSource article announcing the pilot, Pedro Noguera, Professor of Education in UCLA's Graduate School of Education and founder of the Center for the Transformation of Schools, underscored the link between school climate and culture and student achievement: "The achievement gap and the discipline gap are two sides of the same coin. You can't, for example,

address the racial disparities in discipline without addressing them in all the other aspects of a student's experience at school."[247] A research synthesis presented in a Learning Policy Institute report underscores Noguera's statement. The report explains:

> School discipline policies that exclude students through suspension and expulsion create a range of dysfunctional consequences: The more time students spend out of the classroom, the more their sense of connection to the school wanes, both socially and academically. This distance promotes disengaged behaviors, such as truancy, chronic absenteeism, and antisocial behavior, which in turn exacerbate a widening achievement gap. The frequency of student suspensions is linked to academic declines and an increased likelihood of dropping out.[248]

Curriculum and professional development supports for educators and leaders such as those described above come at an important time, as a recent survey of principals identified a significant capacity gap in the area of school climate. In the survey, fewer than one third of the principals who responded feel that their pre-service and in-service professional development prepared them "well" or "very well" to lead schools that address the needs of the whole child.[249] While more recently prepared principals and those leading schools with higher concentrations of students of color report more exposure and fluency on this topic, over 90% of surveyed principals still want more professional development in this area. (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2
Proportion of California Principals Who Report Wanting More Professional Development by Topic



Source: Learning Policy Institute. (2017). Survey of California Principals.

Engagement as Key to Local Control and Continuous Improvement

The equitable funding provisions of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)—and the potential impact of the new distribution formula on changes in teaching and learning—tend to take center stage in research studies and policy conversations about the overhaul of California's funding and accountability system. But also embedded in the statute are groundbreaking transparency and engagement requirements designed to help realize the law's vision of local control. Every year and in every school district around the state, district leaders are required to convene and solicit input from students, parents, staff, and the broader community on their Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs), which detail district priorities and spending. Researchers have described these pioneering outreach and engagement requirements as "arguably one of the largest mandates for civic participation in educational decision making in the country."[250]

For parent groups and advocates of greater student, family, and community participation in school and district decision making, the LCFF's engagement requirement was seen as a long-overdue validation of the important role that families and communities can and should play in setting and enacting a vision for student and school success. The enhanced engagement requirements were essential in getting civil rights advocates and community groups to support the elimination of categorical program protections and expanded local control.[251]

Some of the most robust examples of meaningful engagement, in fact, come from districts with strong organized parent and student groups or other partner organizations. Five years into the LCFF implementation, while the majority of superintendents agree that requiring parent and community involvement in the LCFF ensures district goals and strategies align with local needs, less than half rate their stakeholder engagement as good or excellent, with 65% reporting they struggle to engage parents and guardians of students who are English learners, in foster care, or from low-income families.[252] One study also suggests that engagement is particularly challenging with families of foster youth.[253] With insufficient infrastructure for tracking foster youth and their education rights holders,[254] districts are struggling to build structures for family outreach and relationship building for this subpopulation.[255]

Elevating Parental Involvement in California's Expanded State Priorities

Through California's parental involvement[256] priority—one of several priorities that elevate conditions for learning—the state requires district officials to develop a plan for promoting parental involvement throughout the year, including parent input in decision making and their involvement in school and district programs. This requirement, which focuses on the day-to-day involvement of parents, is in addition to the LCAP engagement requirements discussed elsewhere in this report.

Decades of research affirm California's spotlight on involving parents and families. Research tells us that families who are actively involved in schools can more effectively support student learning and success across a variety of measures (such as graduation rates, school readiness, and English language arts and math performance).[257] Strong school-family partnerships also deepen the connection between school and home, generating social-emotional benefits as students see themselves, their family, and their community validated and reaffirmed.[258] As parents lend their

knowledge and expertise, classroom, school, and district practices become more personally, culturally, and linguistically responsive. In turn, educators and families are able to collectively grow their capacity to build trust and work together to help students excel.

As with the LCAP engagement requirements, districts have varying capacity to involve families throughout the school year in authentic, culturally responsive ways. A 2016 report published by the Public Policy Institute of California highlights some of these promising district approaches. This study—one of the few to examine this priority area under the LCFF—analyzed the LCAPs of 15 districts known to be focusing on parent engagement to better understand their strategies across four categories: resource allocation, effective communication, shared responsibility, and the creation of welcoming school environments.[259]

The analysis revealed that the exemplar districts allocated resources to create capacity-building opportunities so parents and families could support student learning at home, navigate schools more effectively, and build their leadership skills. They also communicated in multiple languages and via multiple venues to maximize reach and engaged in two-way communication (such as home visits, surveys, and academic teams) to elicit frequent family feedback. The districts also created welcoming school environments by inviting families into schools and by engaging teachers in cultural competency trainings.[260] Districts tended to focus on one or two main approaches and, in turn, tailored their practices to the strengths and struggles of their local communities.

Anaheim Union High School District (AUHSD), discussed elsewhere in this report, has incorporated many of these approaches into its vision for parental involvement, instituting a series of learning experiences for parents to develop a common understanding of AUHSD's instructional vision and the Common Core State Standards.

Notable among Anaheim's approaches are Parent Learning Academies and their accompanying Parent Learning Walks. Conducted exclusively in parents' primary language, Parent Learning Academies include mini-courses on topics such as financial aid, growth mindset, college and career readiness, and Common Core. To complement their learning, families visit classrooms three to four times a year to see and experience how teachers bring the Common Core and related instructional practice to life. District and school staff debrief the experiences with participants, applying takeaways from the learning walks to how parents can support their children's learning at home. Overall, these learning opportunities have supported AUHSD families in building their own instructional capacity to become true partners in student learning.[261]

While these and other innovative approaches are emerging, questions about the extent, depth, and impact of district practices remain. A 2016 research report produced by Families In Schools (FIS) highlighted why guidance and capacity building may be necessary in this arena. Through interviews with 30 district leaders and staff members across California, FIS researchers shed light on the day-to-day obstacles that impede efforts to meaningfully involve parents in the life and decisions of a school or district. Among these are the challenges of engaging a new and diverse parent base, ensuring the inclusion and use of parent input in decision making, and moving beyond a "check-the-box" culture that prioritizes compliance over authentic partnership with parents.[262]

Some parental involvement advocates argue that the state should transition from its use of a local indicator to a statewide indicator to elevate the status of and attention paid to parental involvement. (Currently, there is no statewide indicator for parental involvement. Instead, it is self-reported by districts as "met" or "unmet.") In particular, they suggest districts need to move beyond the use of attendance counts and survey response rates to monitor involvement, since these tools fail to

capture the depth of involvement that is encouraged or facilitated by school and district efforts.[263] Without indicators that measure both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of involvement, leaders and teachers may be missing opportunities to improve their efforts and to bring families in as true partners in the work.

Glen Price, California's Chief Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction, noted:

> What I think, unfortunately, has played out is that the local indicators receive less focus and less intention. And we need to work hard to ensure that … we can continue to prioritize, or further prioritize, those local indicators, which include parental involvement and school climate.[264]

Despite these challenges, advocates remain optimistic. Sandy Mendoza, the Director of Advocacy at Families In Schools, explained that the LCFF and the LCAP "forced them [districts and schools] to look internally and say, 'We could do better.'… Leaders are welcoming that idea and it's starting to have a trickle-down effect."[265]

Leveraging Engagement Requirements to Advance Priorities

The ink was barely dry on Governor Brown's signature before the LCFF's engagement requirement triggered a flurry of activity, with districts of all sizes experimenting with a variety of strategies to engage and solicit the opinions of parents, students, and community members. In addition to convening the required Parent Advisory Committee, districts have experimented with a wide variety of engagement strategies. They have fielded surveys online and on smartphones; held large, districtwide meetings and smaller focus groups; and hosted "morning coffee" with the superintendent. Early reports described the activities as at times more chaotic than strategic and as more superficial than in-depth, as districts and parents alike explored the basics and limits of the new law.

Knowledgeable parents and organized communities turned out to the early gatherings, signing up for Parent Advisory Committees and capitalizing on the opportunity to leverage new resources to support long-standing priorities. Parent and student groups, sometimes with support from advocacy and legal partners, pushed for restorative justice programs to replace punitive discipline policies that disproportionately impact students of color; organized for increased funding for parent liaisons and parent centers to foster a more welcoming climate on school campuses; advocated for focused resources to support African American males; and made the case for resources for reinstatement of programs and services that had been eliminated during the lean budget years of the Great Recession.[266]

In the Los Angeles Unified School District, Families In Schools was quick out of the gate in the first academic year following passage of the LCFF, leading a public campaign to urge the district to deepen its investment in parent engagement. "We went in and said, 'you can set an example and show parents matter by investing more than you ever have,'" explained Sandy Mendoza, the organization's Director of Advocacy.[267] Staff and parents advocated in meetings for parent engagement resources and through a campaign-focused website where parents could pledge their support. As a result of this effort, the school board voted to nearly triple its parent engagement funding for the next year. While parent engagement remained a relatively small budget line item compared to other areas, it was an important symbolic win, says Mendoza.[268] "It was a big thing for us to publicly show that parents are paying attention."[269]

These early successes were not just important to students and parents. District staff—eager to capitalize on the early interest and excitement—saw the value as well. Researchers studying the LCFF-related engagement efforts "heard stories of [districts] intentionally demonstrating responsiveness as a way to build trust. These central office leaders report conscious efforts to identify actions that could be acted upon quickly to demonstrate 'wins.'" Administrators viewed these acts as both "operational and symbolic," giving the district "an effective boost in participation and better-quality engagement because stakeholders realized the districts was ready to put their money where their mouth is."[270]

The engagement provisions around the LCAP, together with the school climate and student engagement priority areas, were "an accelerator" for the group's multiyear effort to advance relationship-centered schools.

The changes were more than window dressing, however. For Californians for Justice, a youth organizing network with chapters in four school districts throughout the state, the engagement provisions around the LCAP, together with the school climate and student engagement priority areas, were "an accelerator" for the group's multiyear effort to advance relationship-centered schools. "We would not have gotten so far or so deep in this work compared to any of the campaigns we've had in the past," said Executive Director Taryn Ishida. She continued:

> One of our alumni [said] "Oh, man. I remember when we were organizing when I was in high school. It would take us months just to get to that one meeting with the superintendent to put forth our budget recommendations.... Now, we're co-facilitating all of these budget conversations."[271]

Groups such as Families In Schools, Californians for Justice, and other local and statewide organizations working with high-need students and families have played a pivotal role in supporting district outreach to historically marginalized groups. They conduct outreach and invite students and parents to meetings, design and hold trainings to demystify data and budget issues, and build the capacity of the students and adults to engage in meaningful discussions. They also build the capacity of their district partners by modeling culturally responsive engagement strategies.[272] They have pushed districts to stretch beyond the letter of the new law. In the Oakland Unified School District, for example, local student, parent, and community groups were successful in advocating for student representation on the state-required Parent Advisory Committee. Since the first year of implementation, the district has convened a Parent and Student Advisory Committee, whose members are regionally elected by school site council members from around the district.[273]

But in districts without a history of strong engagement with diverse stakeholders or that did not have partners to support their own capacity building, there were and continue to be significant challenges. After 5 school years of implementation, many districts are also still struggling to move beyond a transactional model of engagement in which students, parents, or community members identify their priorities and district staff determine which "asks" the budget can support—a model of engagement that preferences the loudest or most organized groups, not necessarily the ones with greatest need. This type of engagement also falls short, say researchers, of the democratization of budgets and planning that advocates—if not the statute drafters—hoped would be a tool for broader democratic participation.[274]

Concurrent with many districts sending some unrestricted funding to school sites for their discretionary use, researchers also note that districts are shifting their engagement strategies to focus more on school sites—or other smaller group setting, such as English Learner Advisory groups. While the smaller settings and more homogenous groupings might be more conducive to open conversation, researchers wonder whether what gets lost is the kind of broader discussions about what the district wants and needs to do to serve all students—or the difficult conversations about choices, in which representatives of all stakeholders are engaged.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, the Alameda County Office of Education (ACOE) has been partnering with leaders of school districts and community-based organizations to support and build the capacity of teams from eight Alameda County districts through a CCEE-supported professional learning network. Their work together is focused on systems change. Together they engage diverse stakeholders and use a racial equity and social justice lens to assess their family and community engagement; behavioral supports; and student leadership programs, practices, and policies. Parents and students from area community-based organizations have played a valuable role in ACOE's work with districts, not all of which have community-based partners with whom they regularly work. Over the past several years, for example, the county has organized opportunities for parents, students, and organizers to share how they have experienced local engagement efforts and to offer alternative strategies. Professional learning network members and leadership from all 18 county districts have participated in these sessions. "I think [these experiences] really opened up for many people that it's really crucial to look at any type of systemic change … through multiple lenses and multiple voices that impact, and make the changes possible," said Jason Arenas, Director of Accountability Partnerships.[275]

ACOE is applying the learning of the last 4 years to the differentiated support it is providing school districts that have been identified for assistance, based on dashboard indicators. In addition to its work focused on capacity building, for example, the county is working with district staff to assess whether they are developing "clear and collaborative relationships" focused on district communication with stakeholders, community partnerships, and stakeholder engagement. Arenas described this work as counternarrative storytelling designed to shift from the "shaming and blaming" that often happens to families who are not involved in school or district activities to "unpacking the reasons why certain families aren't able to engage." It is a first step, he added, to developing engagement strategies that will be effective and value the cultural assets of diverse families and communities.[276]

Roadblocks to Deeper Engagement

Research points to several roadblocks to deeper, more sustained engagement. For those districts without a history of outreach to historically marginalized groups, the requirement alone did not build that capacity. Lack of trust is another factor, particularly in districts without a respected community partner to build a bridge. Districts have also struggled to engage community members who are not directly involved in the district as parents or staff. One study also suggests that not all school board members have been consistently engaged in implementation of LCFF.[277]

The length and complexity of many districts' LCAPs is also cited by the LCFF researchers as a barrier to fuller engagement. LCAPs often run more than 100 pages, which makes accessing the information difficult and time consuming for parents, students, community members, and other stakeholders. And, despite all the detail, critics also argue that the LCAP does not provide a clear and complete accounting of how district funds are spent, especially supplemental and concentration grants.[278]

Ongoing concerns about the lack of budget transparency speak to an uneasy tension between the principle of local control and the need for local and state accountability. Community groups, along with equity advocates and others, argue that fiscal transparency and demonstration of the benefits directed toward high-need students are key to holding districts accountable.[279] Absent clear state or county-level guidance, researchers have found that districts take a variety of approaches to incorporating financial data.[280]

In some districts, advocacy organizations and equity lawyers have partnered with local parent, student, and community groups. They have provided a deep-dive analysis of LCAPs and requested additional or clarifying information from districts. In several cases, these deep dives have resulted in legal action against school districts when equity lawyers have uncovered questionable budgeting practices, particularly as they relates to the use of supplemental and concentration dollars. These watchdogs play an important role in monitoring implementation but are not a solution for communities and districts throughout the state.

With a new Budget Overview for Parents, approved as part of the 2018–19 budget, state officials have attempted to respond to these and other concerns. The new document will travel with the LCAP and requires districts to detail state and federal funding, as well as look back and provide information about whether budgeted funds were spent and, if not, why. Districts will first begin using the template with the 2019–20 LCAP.

"Fundamental" to Success of the LCFF

The centrality of engagement was underscored in the February 2018 report of the Local Control Funding Formula Research Collaborative. As they wrote in their overview to the study, the researchers "set out to understand three separate topics—engagement, resource allocation, and [implementation of Common Core and state standards]—[but they] ultimately found each … district made meaningful stakeholder engagement a key to their improvement strategies."[281]

In the Palmdale Elementary School District, for example, a broad-based stakeholder engagement process led to the development of a collectively owned strategic plan (the Palmdale PROMISE), developed alongside the district's first LCAP in 2014, which guides the efforts articulated in the district's LCAP. Researchers identify three key elements of the district's successful engagement efforts: "broad and active" engagement, including a large formal LCAP advisory committee as well as other trainings, meetings, and feedback sessions for internal and external stakeholders; increased transparency, including training school and district staff on addressing difficult topics, such as sharing both the positive and negative data or acknowledging mistakes; and, finally, bringing district subgroups together for a "unity theory of action," through shared experiences, cultural

celebrations, and the formation of an African American Advisory Committee, which functions like an English Language Advisory Committee. The researchers explained:

> This allowed the African American community to participate, contribute to and understand that the goal of the district was to address all student needs and that they were not limiting the input to LCFF-targeted groups.[282]

In a commentary published in EdSource following the release of the report, researcher Daniel Humphrey wrote about the need for more focused attention to engagement:

> Much of the conversation about LCFF implementation has rightly focused on the allocation of supplemental and concentration grants to increase supports and services to the target student groups (low-income, English learner and foster youth). Community and parent engagement has received far less attention. The experience of [Palmdale, Anaheim, and the San Mateo-Foster City school districts] reminds us that engagement with these and other groups is also fundamental to the realization of the funding formula's vision. Indeed, it suggests that community engagement is the linchpin of successful LCFF implementation.[283]

With an eye toward building the capacity of school districts to develop and execute meaningful student and family engagement strategies, the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (created by the legislature in 2013 as part of the LCFF to build the capacity of county offices of education, school districts, and charter schools) has partnered with Californians for Justice, Families In Schools, and the Parent Organization Network to lead professional learning networks for districts and charter schools focused on engagement and school climate. Each network consists of representatives from four districts or charter schools, and they meet over the course of 2 years to strengthen their practice. The networks create a safe place for district leaders to learn with peers and to have what Ishida of Californians for Justice described as "tough conversations about equity … and bias."[284]

More recently, the state's 2018–19 budget allocated $13.3 million over 6 years to identify and replicate exemplary student and family engagement strategies. Although a relatively small amount of money, it represents the state's first investment in building the capacity of districts to meaningfully engage students and families, providing both symbolic and practical value. CCEE will jointly lead the effort with Families In Schools, the California Association for Bilingual Education, and the San Bernardino Superintendent of Schools. The initiative will begin with one learning network of 4–6 district teams in 2019 and add five networks in 2020. Network teams will include students, educators, community members, and district officials, among others, to ensure that the learning is broadly held. Challenges and successes will be documented and shared to extend the learning beyond the participating districts and organizations.[285]

For Glen Price, California's Chief Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction, elevating the importance of engagement will be key to student and school success.

> Both on the accountability side, as well as the continuous improvement side, we have a lot of growth to do to be able to provide our schools, districts, and communities with the data that they need to be working effectively in [the areas of

school climate and engagement] … and [with] the resources and tools around the kinds of capacity building that are necessary to really realize the potential of that part of LCFF.

On the engagement side, it comes down to some of these serious shifts that we need to make as a system. It can be things as simple as ensuring that all of our school principals have the kinds of facilitation skills that enable them to conduct effective meetings with their faculties or … parents and community members … to the kinds of practices that we can employ to make diverse communities feel welcome and supported at a school site, to thinking about different ways that we can authentically engage a variety of different kinds of stakeholders in the development of our district and school plans.

And our schools can be super effective places to be able to do that kind of skill building, but we have to realize that, A) there's a need to do that. B) It's not going to happen automatically. C) That it would require resources to make that happen. And then we have to have some really strong intention placed on it. The current state budget is a step in the right direction, but it's nowhere near the kind of shift that we need to make.[286]

State Board of Education Adapts Practice, Culture in Response to New Engagement

Although the engagement provisions in the LCFF were intended to advance democratic participation in local school districts, the law has also been the catalyst for unprecedented and sustained engagement at the state level, as the California State Board of Education has wrestled over several years with complex and often contentious implementation issues. Historically, the board's 2-day meetings—held seven times a year—have been mostly staid affairs, frequented by a mix of Sacramento insiders, local policymakers, and others who had a vested interest in one of the items on the agenda. But as the 10-member board turned its focus to the LCFF, attendance has grown and expanded, creating a unique opportunity for parents and students to engage in real time in the development of state policy—and shifting the culture of the board in the process.

The first of many grassroots mobilizations coincided with the board meeting on November 7, 2013, just 4 months after the LCFF was signed into law. At issue: proposed emergency regulations governing how districts would be able to use their LCFF supplemental and concentration grant funds, generated based on their population of English learners, students from low-income families, and students living in foster care, to increase or improve services for these students.

Hundreds of students, parents, and community numbers attended the meeting, including many who had traveled through the night on buses from Southern California, arriving at the Department of Education offices several hours before the 8 a.m. meeting start time. Public testimony that day lasted nearly 8 hours, and speakers included parents, students, community members, clergy, representatives of statewide associations, local education policymakers, and state Senator Holly Mitchell, then head of the California Legislative Black Caucus.

In the following months and years such turnout became commonplace, and with this increased participation came a shift in long-standing State Board of Education practices. At the urging of community groups and their advocacy partners, board staff began providing a specific date and

time to discuss matters related to the LCFF. Prior to that, the 2-day agenda had been posted a week ahead of the meeting, but the order and even the day on which an item would be considered was subject to change—a practice that made participation difficult for those who were planning to take time off work and school and travel to Sacramento. Simultaneous translation services were provided for non-English speakers, and additional seating was made available to accommodate the overflow. In a nod to the outreach that proved to be instrumental in getting the LCFF passed, board staff also began convening different interest groups to provide updates, gather input, and work through logistics in advance of board meetings.

John Affeldt, Managing Attorney and Education Program Manager at Public Advocates, a public interest law firm, noted:

> [Governor] Brown needed support and not opposition from low-income communities of color and the civil rights advocates representing them. This gave nontraditional voices key leverage in the shaping of LCFF provisions around proportionality (both in statute and the regulations), engagement, transparency, and accountability.[287]

Although historically board meetings would draw large crowds when considering hot-button issues (such as the state's high school exit exam), until the LCFF there was not "ongoing full engagement in the process," observed David Sapp, Deputy Policy Director and Assistant Legal Counsel for the State Board of Education. He added:

> I do think it's become part of the culture … [to have] regular ongoing communication and solicitation of feedback and input. This is the type of stakeholder engagement that we hope would occur at the local level. It's not just "check the box" engagement…. I think you see board members engaging with the feedback the different constituency groups bring, and that it does matter and impact the decision making—not just from a political sort of putting pressure perspective, but from educating the decision maker about the different perspectives around that issue.[288]

Sapp pointed to the successful effort to codify a role for students in the development of district LCAPs as an example of the board listening and responding to concerns elevated by groups actively engaged in the LCFF implementation. The campaign, led by Californians for Justice and involving 30 student and parent organizations and their advocacy partners, documented the uneven opportunities that students had to impact LCAPs in their districts around the state. The 10-month effort included regular trips to state board meetings, including one in which they hid their faces behind cardboard paddles with numbers emblazoned on the front and another in which they staged a die-in. And then, in November 2014, the board approved explicit guidance to districts on how to engage students.[289]

For students and parents from Orange County, participating in state board meetings both created an opportunity to speak directly to state policymakers and built their capacity to have an impact back home in their districts, said Leonel Velazquez Rodriguez, an organizer with the Orange County Congregation Community Organization. "When we go to Sacramento, you can see in their faces that they know they have power, and that they are really able to exercise it. And those same parents, when they return to our city, they return really empowered to be able to support other parents."[290]

Assessing Impact

With all of these changes in funding, accountability, standards, curriculum, and teaching, an obvious question is how educational outcomes are changing in California. While it is impossible to directly link outcome changes to specific policy shifts or decisions, because large-scale changes are determined by multiple factors, the general trends suggest progress accomplished and areas of need.

Academic Achievement

Release of the 2017 results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) offered some good news about reading and math achievement of California students. The test is administered every other year to 6,100 randomly selected 4th- and 8th-graders in every state and in the District of Columbia. In addition to the statewide scores, the assessment also provides district-level data for 27 large, urban districts around the country, including three California districts: Fresno, Los Angeles, and San Diego.

Back in 2007, the state's 8th-grade students ranked 45th in mathematics among the 50 states on the NAEP;[291] 49th in reading, having slipped further behind their national peers over the prior decade;[292] and 49th in science.[293] A decade later, in 2017, California's 8th-graders came within 2 points of the national average in reading (on a 500-point scale), after a 12-point increase since 2007 and a 4-point increase since 2015, one of the largest increases in the country.[294] In math, 8th-graders had gained 7 points since 2007 and 2 points since 2015, cutting the distance to the national average in half (from 10 points to 5).[295]

Whereas California once ranked in the bottom 5 states on every achievement measure, it has improved in both absolute and relative terms and now typically ranks between 25th and 35th among the states. Although the state is no longer at the bottom, there is still ample room for improvement overall and in closing the still-large gaps in performance between students of color and White students.[296]

These gaps have been closing in some districts. California districts all made notable gains in the most recent administration of the NAEP, with the San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) making the greatest progress in both overall gains and improvements for African American and Hispanic students. SDUSD saw a 6 percentage point increase in 4th-grade reading, the highest increase in any large district. The gain put the 4th-grade scores over the national average for the first time.

San Diego is one of the districts that Learning Policy Institute has dubbed a "positive outlier," because its students, 60% of whom are from low-income families,[297] are beating the odds and achieving at higher than predicted levels based on the socioeconomic conditions in their communities.[298] A decade ago, the district's 4th-grade reading scores were 12 points below the national average. The 6 percentage points increase is unusually large.[299] The LPI report noted that San Diego had undertaken an intensive "whole child" and "whole school" approach to improvement that included collaborative learning and coaching for educators around the new standards, investments in restorative practices, family engagement, and cycles of inquiry focused on continuous improvement.[300]

While the most recent NAEP scores provide a snapshot of reading and math achievement statewide and in a few districts from samples of students, a September 2018 study included in the *Getting Down to Facts II* research project analyzes state standardized test scores for all districts and students

over time to assess whether and by how much student achievement is improving in the state. The analysis paints a complex picture of achievement—and achievement gaps—in California. Despite signs of sustained improvement over the last decade, the analysis identifies continuing gaps between California students and their peers nationwide.

In their comparison across districts of similar socioeconomic status (SES), the authors identify gaps between California students and their peers nationally, except in the most affluent districts in the state. They note, however, that these gaps are present at kindergarten entry and narrow slightly by the time students reach 8th grade, pointing to the need for more attention to early childhood education. The authors note:

> In other words, California's low-income districts lag behind their national counterparts primarily because of lower school-readiness levels in the California districts, not because learning rates are lower in California's low-income districts than in similar districts across the US.[301]

Because of the significant size of California's English learner population (21% of California's student population at the time of the study) the authors also examine reading and math achievement patterns from 3rd to 8th grade in comparison to peers nationally. There the news is promising. They find that the gap between non-English learners ("never ELs") and students who at some point have been classified as English learners ("ever ELs") narrows throughout school, although it remains larger on English language arts tests than on math tests, as is generally true nationwide. Note the authors: "The EL gap declines as students progress through school such that relative to their size EL gaps narrow modestly in affluent districts and substantially in poor districts."[302] Over 5 years of schooling in California, the EL gap shrinks in ELA by 25% in high SES districts and by 50% in low SES districts.

While the study's findings paint a generally positive picture of progress once children enter school, the authors also note that the "particularly strong relationship between the socio-economic circumstances of children and their achievement in California is also driving many of the gaps in performance we see," adding that "even children of average SES in California lag their peers in the nation on standardized tests."[303] These findings are likely associated at least in part with both the high levels of student poverty in California—more than half of students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch—and the lower levels of educational investment in California relative to other states. These findings "suggest that efforts to improve student performance need to extend beyond the poorest and neediest districts."[304]

High School Graduation Rates

High school graduation rates have also been increasing in California, growing from 75% of students graduating within 4 years in 2010, to 83% in 2018.[305] All groups have improved substantially, although gaps remain. In 2018, African American students graduated within 4 years at rates of 73% and Latino/a students at rates of 81%, as compared to 86% for White students and 93% for Asian and Filipino students.

Improvements in these rates for students in the highest need districts appear to have been stimulated by the LCFF. A *Getting Down to Facts II* study analyzed the impact of the additional resources and spending flexibility of the LCFF on student outcomes. In *Money and Freedom: The*

Impact of California's School Finance Reform on Academic Achievement and the Composition of District Spending, researchers found that "increases in per-pupil spending caused by LCFF led to significant increases in high school graduation rates and student achievement."[306]

Taking advantage of the early years of the LCFF, when districts were differently affected by the new formula funding due to the crazy-quilt patchwork that had previously existed, and controlling for many other variables that would affect achievement, the researchers found that the new investments had a significant effect on outcomes for the districts experiencing the greatest increases. Of course, outcomes vary across districts, with greater gains in some and smaller in others; however, the average effects were quite significant. Specifically, a $1,000 increase in district per-pupil revenue from the state experienced by students in grades 10–12 was associated with a 6 percentage point increase in high school graduation rates, on average.[307]

The increases in per-pupil spending also improved math and reading test scores, particularly for Hispanic students and students from low-income families, according to the authors.[308] Specifically, for students from low-income families, the researchers found that a $1,000 increase in district per-pupil spending during ages 13–16 increased 11th-grade mathematics test scores by the equivalent of approximately 7 months of learning.[309] That same spending increase during ages 13–16 also was associated with an increase in 11th-grade reading test scores, equivalent to approximately 3 months of learning.[310]

"In sum," the authors conclude, "the evidence suggests that money targeted to students' needs can make a significant difference in student outcomes and can narrow achievement gaps."[311]

Student Exclusions and School Climate

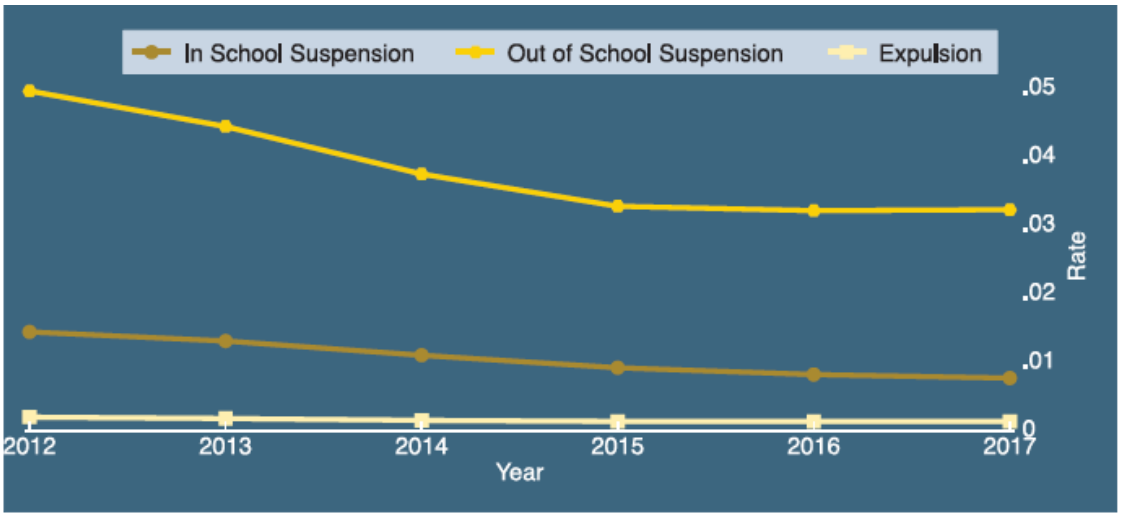
Similarly, a review of data on exclusionary discipline practices and school climate paints a picture of steady—and in some cases significant—improvement, although there is variation across the state, of course. Despite positive trends, students of color continue to be disproportionately impacted by exclusionary practices.

Suspension and expulsion rates declined between 2012 and 2017, beginning even before the statewide prohibition on use of "willful defiance" for expulsions across all grades and for suspensions in k–3.[312] Before and since the state ban, districts have eliminated use of willful defiance across all grade levels, including Los Angeles Unified, San Francisco Unified, and Oakland Unified.[313] These policies, and the fact that suspension rates are required indicators on the California School Dashboard, making them visible indicators of school and district quality, have contributed to ongoing decreases.

A *Getting Down to Facts II* study found that California generally has lower rates of exclusionary discipline compared to the national average, and the sheer number of exclusionary discipline incidents has declined overall. The researchers also found that these declines have held true for all racial and socioeconomic groups and school levels, narrowing disciplinary gaps among racial and ethnic groups across the state.[314] (See Figure 3.)

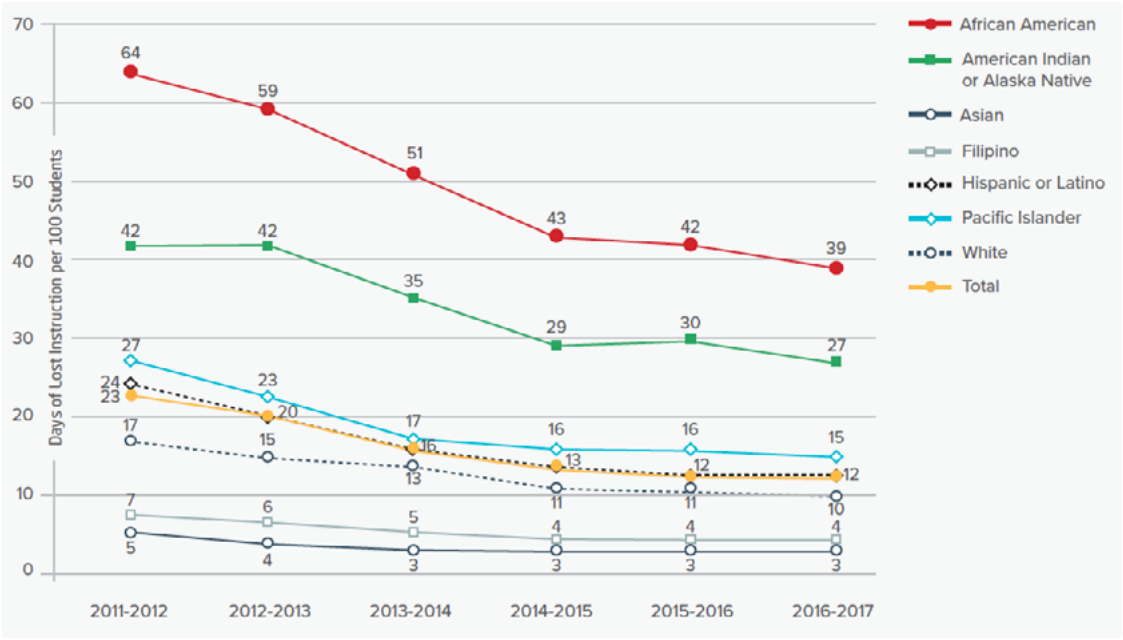
The statewide decline in in-school and out-of-school suspensions has resulted in fewer days of lost instruction and increased learning hours for California students, with the greatest increases in learning time for African American students (see Figure 4), revealing the tangible, positive impact of these declines for the teaching and learning of some of the state's most marginalized groups.

Figure 3
Overall California Discipline Trends, All Levels



Source: Reardon, S. F., Doss, C., Gagné, J., Gleit, R., Johnson, A., & Sosina, V. (2018). *A portrait of educational outcomes in California.* Stanford, CA: PACE, p. 18. http://gettingdowntofacts.com/sites/default/files/2018-09/GDTFII_Report_Reardon-Doss.pdf.

Figure 4
Days of Lost Instruction Due to Suspensions/Expulsions, per 100 Students (2011–12 to 2016–17)



Source: Losen, D. J., & Martin, K. (2018). *The unequal impact of suspension on the opportunity to learn in California: What the 2016–17 rates tell us about progress.* Los Angeles, CA: Civil Rights Project/Proyecto Derechos Civiles, p. 4.

At the same time, however, punitive discipline practices continue to impact students of color disproportionately suggesting that more work is necessary to ensure California schools are inclusive and responsive to all.[315]

Still, the trends are promising. As school exclusions have decreased and more schools have incorporated SEL and restorative practices, federal data show that California schools have become safer.[316] School-based firearm incidents in the state, which were well above the national average from 2009 to 2010, were far below the national average by 2015–16, declining by more than 50% in the 7-year period. Significant decreases also occurred in rates of school-based fights, bullying incidents, and classroom disruptions over that period of time.

Looking Ahead

Nearly 6 years ago, California embarked on a massive overhaul of its education finance and accountability systems—seismic shifts that coincided with implementation of new content standards aligned to the Common Core and new requirements for community engagement. Taken together, these changes have impacted every level of the k–12 education system, requiring changes in both culture and practice at the classroom, school, district, county, and state level.

Around the state, we are beginning to see the impact of these changes. Increasingly, equity is taking center stage in local planning and budgeting discussions. In some schools and districts, families and students are stepping into new roles in their planning processes—throughout the state there is a greater appreciation for the important role this input plays in advancing student success. New resources are being allocated to expand programs, services, and classes to address the needs of students from low-income families, English learners, and foster youth.

Suspension rates are down. New resources allocated through the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) are resulting in improved graduation rates for targeted students, as graduation rates are increasing overall. California's districts are making achievement gains faster than the rest of the nation and are no longer at the bottom of national rankings. Districts are reducing the gap between English learners and other students, and—over the span of kindergarten through 8th grade—reducing the gap between those living in poverty and others.

In short, while significant gaps remain and there is room for improvement across all student populations, schools, districts, and communities are taking important steps to implement the many facets of the LCFF to advance a new vision of student and school success. Achieving that vision, to be sure, requires much more progress. In this section, we describe some of the potential tasks ahead suggested by the studies and data we reviewed.

We note, first, that the gains to date are the result of an approach to education policy that is dramatically different than the test-and-punish strategies focused on low-level skills that dominated the late 1990s and early 2000s. Two years before the federal government shifted from the narrow requirements of NCLB, California took up an accountability approach that focused on a more comprehensive view of education—one that aims for access to a full, rich curriculum and opportunities to learn in a positive school environment and that honors both student and parent engagement as central to the state's priorities. These priorities were also introduced with greater and more equitable funding for schools, acknowledging the needs of students living in poverty or in foster care and those learning English. Rather than being constrained by state requirements restricting the use of these funds, districts are responsible for figuring out how to allocate their budgets to achieve ongoing progress on both state and local priorities.

As investments were increased, so were expectations for learning, with standards, curriculum frameworks, and new assessments focused more clearly on critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, communication, and other 21st-century skills. These were folded into licensing standards for both teachers and school leaders, with a focus on performance assessments to evaluate candidates and programs. These new expectations were, in turn, introduced with supports for educator learning rather than threats of firing or school closings, so that educators could focus

on improvement rather than fear. They were further embedded in a system for reporting progress on key indicators and engaging communities in annual efforts to evaluate areas in which efforts to improve and invest are needed.

As we transition to new state leadership, the studies conducted by researchers across the state and our own interviews for this report make clear that there have been real gains, and there is still much to be done if we are to fulfill the promise of equitable opportunities and outcomes envisioned by the passage of the LCFF.

Much of the achievement gap is caused by the fact that many of California's neediest children are behind before they enter kindergarten.

Researchers in the *Getting Down to Facts II* project and others identified a number of challenges: Funding of pensions, facilities, and special education are all problems not addressed by the LCFF in its first wave. A 2014 recovery plan for the California State Teachers Retirement System, which lost an estimated 40% of its value in the Great Recession,[317] has resulted in pension contributions representing the largest percentage increase in district spending in the first 3 years following passage of the LCFF.[318] Along with deferred building maintenance, special education (particularly in districts with declining enrollment), employee health care, and recruiting and retaining teachers in a tight labor market, these costs are causing a "silent recession" that threatens to destabilize school districts, force reductions in services, and exacerbate inequities.[319]

Ongoing teacher shortages threaten the quality of instruction in many districts, especially in fields such as mathematics, science, special education, and bilingual education. A downturn in enrollments in teacher education has not yet appreciably turned around, and supports that once existed for underwriting preparation have been eliminated. While new investments have been made in teacher residencies, pathways into teaching for classified staff, and new undergraduate programs, it will take time for those efforts to produce enough teachers. Meanwhile much of the demand is a function of high attrition rates, especially in urban districts.

While the state has offered one-time funds for investments in professional learning—and many foundations have designed and funded good models that have made a difference—California lacks a professional learning infrastructure that could guarantee all educators have regular access to the knowledge and skills they want and need. It also has not yet created a comprehensive system of support for districts and schools that need systemic organizational improvement.

Much of the achievement gap is caused by the fact that many of California's neediest children are behind before they enter kindergarten. The state lacks a well-functioning early childhood education system, which has not yet been tackled in the reforms underway.[320] The achievement gap is also the result of the poverty, food insecurity, housing insecurity, and trauma that many students experience. The state needs to bring together health and social services for children along with education reforms, if an intention to educate the whole child is to become reality.

Below we identify the implications of both the hopeful and concerning findings of the California story in three areas that might inform future work relative to funding, capacity building, and staffing.

1. Funding: Support the LCFF fundamentals and strategic educational investments.

- **Continue to refine current policies and deepen their implementation**. Given the hard work educators and community members have invested in the new system, it is critically important to avoid the pendulum swings that so often characterize changes of administration and that disrupt the progress that has been made.

  The massive change in funding and accountability that occurred with the LCFF, along with new standards and assessments, has taken root. While there is much work to be done, districts are beginning to make progress in this system. It is important that the new administration maintain stability for schools and districts to continue to move forward. Culture and practice shifts, such as those necessitated by the LCFF, require an investment in capacity building, a tolerance for innovation and exploration, and a commitment to forging new relationships of trust and partnership. To the degree state policymakers express ongoing support and investment in the still-young LCFF system, while also engaging in midcourse corrections and refinements, local leaders will be inclined to do the hard work of investing in the practices and capacities needed to leverage resources and local control.

- **Develop revenue streams and spending plans that will move the state toward adequacy as well as equity in funding.** Despite significant increases in funding over the past 6 years, funding levels in California remain well below those of most other states.[321] While the LCFF has rationalized the system of finance and has begun to stabilize most districts, there is a consensus among researchers and practitioners that there is not enough money in the system to meet the needs of all students, and that additional, stable revenues will ultimately be required. *Getting Down to Facts II* researchers concluded that $25 billion per year above the 2016–17 spending levels would be required for all students to have the opportunity to meet the goals set by the state.[322]

  It will take additional research to determine how much additional funding is needed and how it should be allocated (questions that are interdependent and that rely as well on other aspects of children's health and welfare). In the meantime, one revenue initiative likely to appear on the November 2020 ballot would reassess commercial property taxes annually. If successful, the initiative would raise an estimated $11 billion per year, roughly 40% of which would go to k–12 education. A recent public poll shows support for this proposal.[323] Other strategies will likely emerge.

  In his first days in office, Governor Newsom announced plans, through his proposed budget, to provide $2 billion in additional funding for LCFF, $3 billion in relief for local districts and community colleges to offset the growing cost of employee pensions, and $576 million for special education.[324] *Getting Down to Facts II* and other studies also suggest that efforts are needed to devise new, more equitable approaches to funding facilities construction and maintenance and special education, as growing costs in both areas threaten the gains that have been made under the LCFF.

- **Invest strategically in a well-functioning system of early childhood care and learning**. As *Getting Down to Facts II* research demonstrates, children in California learn at comparable rates to children in demographically similar districts elsewhere in the country in their k–12 years, but they come to school further behind and with yawning gaps in readiness.[325] Early assessments of the state's new transitional kindergarten program found strong benefits for the 4- and 5-year-olds able to participate.[326] However, the state's non-system, as documented in a recent LPI report,[327] leaves a large share of young children unserved and offers highly variable quality.

  Governor Newsom has recognized the importance of early learning, and his first proposed budget calls for investments in full-day kindergarten and in facilities and professional development for educators in the early learning system. The state needs not only to invest more, but also to rationalize a complex set of currently uncoordinated programs around a master plan for access to high-quality early learning; adequate preparation for educators; and the blending, braiding, and streamlining of services that are currently inefficiently delivered.[328]

- **Refine and strengthen the accountability system**. The state board has done considerable work to refine and implement the LCFF's accountability framework, but there is ongoing work to be done to fine-tune the LCAP template so that it is accessible and useful to districts and stakeholders. In addition, there is work to do to finalize the state accountability system—completing work on indicators that are still under construction, clarifying which supports and actions will occur for districts and schools that are struggling and require intervention, and building a system of support that is able to truly help these schools and districts. The state can also consider how school climate measures can best inform educators and stakeholders and strengthen the ability of schools and districts to create safe, inclusive, and welcoming school environments by supporting their capacity to administer, analyze, and address concerns identified in school surveys.

- **Consider how the measurement of school climate and parent involvement can best inform educators and stakeholders** and strengthen the ability of schools and districts to create safe, inclusive, and welcoming school environments by supporting their capacity to administer, analyze, and address concerns identified in school surveys.

- **Address ongoing concerns about lack of transparency in local budgeting and planning processes**. Clear, actionable information about district-level budgets, including planned and actual expenses, is foundational to the democratic decision making that undergirds the LCFF. The recently developed Budget Overview for Parents may be a step toward this transparency.

2. Capacity building: Strengthen the capacity of districts, schools, and educators to address the state's priority areas.

- **Build on existing assets to create a more comprehensive professional learning infrastructure** that can ensure that every teacher in every classroom—and every school leader—has the learning opportunities needed to create supportive and inclusive classrooms and to shift their instructional practices to align to new standards. The

Statewide System of Support should not only address the needs of struggling schools and districts after they have been identified for intervention but should also create a set of supports for all schools to be successful in implementing the state's priorities.

Rather than a top-down set of state mandates or standardized professional development offerings, the state could benefit from a strategy—such as that developed by state education agencies in some other local control states[329]—for taking stock of, coordinating, and seeding high-quality supports for educator learning. These supports, which address the state's education priorities, may be provided through districts, county offices, universities, and nonprofit organizations in order to be readily available to educators across the state. There are significant assets in the state, such as the state Subject Matter Projects, programs such as Math in Common, strategies such as the Instructional Leadership Corps, and many more. However, they are not currently easily accessible, widely available, or coordinated in a strategic way.

Such a professional learning support system could guide investments in leadership training and the expansion of content-based supports that are proving successful so that they are available to all schools. It could also guide supports for developing safe and inclusive classrooms; working with parents; and effectively teaching students with disabilities, English learners, students who have experienced trauma and adverse conditions, and others with exceptional learning and support needs.

- **Develop and support networks for professional learning**. The professional learning networks supported by the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE), the Instructional Leadership Corps, and the collective work of the CORE Districts demonstrate the value of creating strong and supported networks to build the capacity of educators and district leaders to increase opportunity and advance student achievement. The success of these efforts offers important learning for future efforts.
- **Learn from exemplars**. Throughout the state, schools and districts are leveraging new flexibility and increased resources to improve practice, experiences, and outcomes across the range of state priority areas. The California Department of Education (CDE) has begun work to identify "bright spots" around the state. A critical role for both the CDE and CCEE, as part of the Statewide System of Support available to all schools and districts, will be to cast a broad net to identify these exemplars and create a statewide infrastructure to support learning from these best practices and skilled practitioners and leaders.
- **Build the capacity of teachers and school and district leaders to authentically engage families.** Research on family engagement generally, and on the LCFF implementation specifically, underscores the link between student progress and family engagement at the classroom, school, and district level. And yet it remains an area in which educators and local policymakers often continue to struggle, particularly when it comes to engaging families of students who have historically been marginalized and underserved in the state's public education system. The Community Engagement Initiative funded in the state's 2018–19 budget is a first step in building capacity. The Statewide System of Support should also create opportunities to build district capacity in this critical area.

3. Staffing: Strengthen the educator workforce.

- **Build a strong, stable, and diverse teacher workforce**. Persistent teacher shortages threaten to undermine efforts to improve educational opportunities and outcomes, particularly in schools serving large numbers of students from low-income families and students of color, in which shortages are most prevalent.

  Many strategies can be used to build a pipeline into the profession: Forgivable loans and scholarships, teacher residencies, and Grow Your Own programs that underwrite preparation—and are repaid by service for several years in the classroom—are ways to recruit new teachers to shortage locations and shortage fields such as math, science, special education, and bilingual education. They enable people to choose teaching without incurring debilitating debt. Teacher residencies have received one-time funding from the state.[330] More efforts will be needed until current shortages are finally resolved.

  Since 6 out of 10 positions that need to be filled each year are due to teachers who have left the year before for reasons other than retirement, it is also important to focus on retention. Adequate mentoring for beginning teachers and ongoing learning supports are needed to increase retention, as are supportive principals—always cited by teachers as a key factor in their decisions about whether to stay at a given school.

- **Invest in school and district leaders**. Skilled school and district leaders are critical to building a strong and stable workforce—and to making the important shifts in culture and practice envisioned by the LCFF and the Common Core State Standards. Yet fewer than one third of California principals reported in a recent survey that their preparation emphasized learning how to recruit and retain teachers and other staff.[331] Many states are tapping ESSA Title II funds to invest in leadership training. Some have also suggested that California consider reprising the state leadership academy that was once so successful in preparing leaders for high-need schools and turnaround situations, as well as leadership in general.

Conclusion

With the passage of the LCFF and related reforms, California entered a new era in its decades-long quest for equity and excellence. With substantial new investments, coupled with a laser-like focus on students with the greatest need, the state has made important strides in creating the framework needed to provide every student with an excellent education. Continued progress will depend on deepening these strategies and investments, as well as a focused effort to build the capacity of everyone in the system—teachers, school and district leaders, county and state officials, and families and communities—to capitalize on the new resources, flexibility, continuous improvement commitments, and community-based decision making that are the cornerstones of the California Way.

Appendix A: Methodology

This study sought to deepen knowledge of California's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and concurrent reforms that have created a new approach to education in the state. The aim was twofold. First, we sought to delineate the policy and advocacy factors critical to passing this set of sweeping reforms. In addition, we aimed to assess the impact the reform package has had since its onset, noting if or how the law has contributed to shifts in culture, practice, budgeting, and outcomes in California public schools and districts. With the state's January 2019 legislative and gubernatorial transition, the aim was to provide a comprehensive study of this historic law to inform future efforts to ensure that California's investments, practices, and systems align with the state's goal to prepare all students for college, career, and civic participation, especially those who have been historically underserved.

With these aims, the research sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What research, political, and advocacy efforts preceded the passage of the LCFF? How did these efforts influence the intent and contents of the law?
2. What does available evidence suggest about the implementation of the LCFF and the new student standards across the state with respect to budgetary practices, community engagement, instructional and disciplinary practices, and professional development?
3. What does available evidence suggest about the outcomes of these new state policies with respect to funding allocations, community engagement, student achievement and attainment, and school climate?
4. What challenges remain with the implementation of the LCFF and its ability to improve outcomes and practices in its priority areas?

Data were collected from January 2018 to January 2019. The research is based on an extensive literature review of LCFF research and supplementary, targeted interviews that elaborated upon emergent themes.

Literature Review

To answer these questions, we engaged in a two-pronged approach. First, we conducted a systematic review of existing literature on the LCFF to both delineate the politics preceding the law's enactment and to examine the impact the LCFF has had on district practice since its onset. The review process began with a broad search of research databases (e.g., ERIC, Google Scholar), using key search terms including, but not limited to, "Local Control Funding Formula," "LCFF," and "California school finance." Researchers also used these search terms to identify the LCFF-related articles in education or key California media outlets (e.g., EdSource, the *Sacramento Bee*, *Los Angeles Times*), which could provide additional and/or triangulating details on the passage and implementation of the law. Finally, researchers drew upon their knowledge of the field to identify relevant studies and syntheses to incorporate into their review.

The search process yielded 135 relevant sources, which included peer-reviewed articles, empirical studies, research syntheses, policy briefs, and news articles documenting both rigorously derived empirical findings and public activities and perceptions of the policies. While the search yielded

a variety of sources, the LCFF evidence base primarily consists of reports produced by research organizations, think tanks, and advocacy organizations. Given the range of literature and methodologies, we sought to triangulate findings from multiple sources.

In reviewing the LCFF literature, researchers conducted an initial scan of the reports and articles, identifying their primary topic areas as they related to the LCFF. This initial scan generated the following categories:

- California school finance law
- Engagement
- Resource allocation/district spending
- Outcomes
- Teaching and learning/Common Core
- School climate
- Parent engagement
- English learners
- Foster youth

Studies that pertained to multiple categories were labeled with all that applied. We created a Research Compendium, identifying themes and patterns that emerged across the studies and articles in a given category, basing findings on the convergence of evidence across multiple sources.

Interviews

The research team supplemented the literature review process with 34 interviews. (See Table 2 for a complete list of the study's respondents.) Because interviews were intended to elaborate upon particular LCFF-related dynamics and initiatives that were identified in the review process, interviewees were purposively sampled.[332] The research team identified and interviewed key decision makers (e.g., state policymakers, school leaders, district officials); education advocates; and representatives of parent, student, and community groups that could provide targeted and specific information about the themes emerging in the research. This sampling approach allowed researchers to solicit and leverage the knowledge and experience of those who could best speak to the dynamics surrounding the passage and implementation of the LCFF and the new learning standards.

Table 2
Study Interviewees

Type	Name and Title
Current and Former State Policymakers/ Policy Staff (*n* = 6)	• Susanna Cooper, Consultant and former Education Consultant for Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg • Michael Kirst, former President, California State Board of Education • Ana Matosantos, former Director of Finance, State of California, and current Cabinet Secretary, Office of California Governor Gavin Newsom • Glen Price, Chief Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction, California Department of Education • David Sapp, Deputy Policy Director and Assistant Legal Counsel, California State Board of Education • Rick Simpson, former Deputy Chief of Staff for the California Assembly Speaker
Statewide Associations (*n* = 5)	• Peter Birdsall, Executive Director, California County Superintendents Educational Services Association • Eric Heins, President, California Teachers Association • Dennis Myers, Assistant Executive Director, Governmental Relations, California School Boards Association • Wesley Smith, Executive Director, Association of California School Administrators • Becky Zoglman, Staff, California Teachers Association
Other Policy Staff (*n* = 2)	• Brooks Allen, CCEE Liaison and Legal Counsel, Marin County Office of Education • Josh Daniels, Director, Finance and Operations, California Collaborative for Educational Excellence
Research and Policy Analysts (*n* = 2)	• Jonathan Kaplan, Senior Policy Analyst, California Budget and Policy Center • Jason Willis, Director of Strategy & Performance, Comprehensive School Assistance Program, WestEd
Policy Analysts and Advocates (*n* = 7)	• John Affeldt, Managing Attorney and Education Program Manager, Public Advocates Inc. • Michelle Francois, Senior Director of Compassionate Systems at the National Center for Youth Law • Carrie Hahnel, Interim Co-Executive Director, The Education Trust–West • John Kim, Executive Director, Advancement Project California • Sandy Mendoza, Director of Advocacy, Families In Schools • Samantha Tran, Senior Managing Director, Education Policy, Children Now • Natalie Wheatfall-Lum, Senior Policy Analyst, The Education Trust–West

Type	Name and Title
District and County Staff (*n* = 2)	• Jason Arenas, Director of Accountability Partnerships, Alameda County Office of Education • Gloria Ciriza, Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Chula Vista Elementary School District
Program Provider (*n* = 1)	• Anya Hurwitz, Executive Director, Sobrato Early Academic Language
Representatives, Parent/Student/ Community Organizations (*n* = 8)	• Tom Dolan, Executive Director, Inland Congregations United for Change • Taryn Ishida, Executive Director, Californians for Justice • Celia Jaffe, President-elect, California State PTA • Aurea Montes-Rodriguez, Executive Vice President, Community Coalition • Katy Nunez-Adler, Organizer, Oakland Community Organizations • Henry Perez, Associate Director, InnerCity Struggle • Anthony Thigpenn, President, California Calls • Leonel Velasquez Rodrigues, Immigration and Education Community Organizer, Orange County Congregation Community Organization
Other (*n* = 1)	• Judi Larsen, Senior Program Manager, The California Endowment

Interviews were semistructured and typically lasted 45–90 minutes. Interview prompts asked interviewees to discuss their participation in the passage or implementation of the LCFF and their perceptions of the impact the law and concurrent reforms (e.g., Common Core, EL Roadmap) have had to date. Participants were also prompted to share their insights into past and current challenges with the LCFF implementation and to discuss bright spots—districts, networks, or initiatives that have innovated or excelled with the increased flexibility and resources allocated under the law. At times, the researchers tailored the protocol based on the role of the interviewee and his or her participation in the reform's creation or implementation. This differentiation ensured that particular questions could be explored in more depth with the respondents who were most likely to hold relevant knowledge on the topic. Each interview was audio recorded for transcription purposes if the respondent gave consent to do so. In all cases, careful notes were taken to ensure accuracy in reporting.

Endnotes

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81. Interview with Brooks Allen, CCEE Liaison and Legal Counsel, Marin County Office of Education (2018, March 2).

82. Interview with Susanna Cooper, Consultant and former Education Consultant for Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg (2018, May 9).

83. Interview with Rick Simpson, former Deputy Chief of Staff for the California Assembly Speaker (2018, March 7).

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