Monitoring LAUSD’s progress in keeping the promise to high-needs students and schools

LOCAL CONTROL FUNDING FORMULA COMMUNITY REPORT CARD

August 2015
LAUSD LCFF Community Report Card

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Summary grades capture our assessment of both the District’s **Strategy Development** and **Strategy Execution** for Year 2 of Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) implementation. Based on academic research, feedback from school personnel and community members, and models from around California, we looked for strategy that included a clear **vision**, adequate **training** and **resources**, meaningful **community input**, and an achievable **plan of action**. When considering the District’s execution, we looked for measurable progress toward equity-focused goals.

A
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Strategy included all elements laid out above (1. Equitable, targeted investments, 2. Strategies that were aimed at improving student achievement, and 3. Engagement of parents, students), was fully implemented, and led to strong results on all measures of student impact, particularly for target student populations.

B
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Strategy included nearly all of the elements laid out above, was fully implemented, and demonstrated signs of progress on some of the measures of student impact, particularly for target student populations.

C
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Strategy included some of the elements laid out above, was partially implemented, and demonstrated promising initial results that may not be: a. outcomes based, or b. focused on target student populations.

D
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Strategy included few of the elements laid out above, was minimally implemented, and demonstrated no positive results for target student populations.

F
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Strategy was not developed or was incoherent and demonstrated no positive results for target student populations.
# Table of Contents

Evaluating New Investments Intended for High-Needs Students ............... 4

Aligning Community, State, and District Priorities and Practices in Years 1 and 2 ................................................................. 6

Caveats and Considerations from LAUSD ........................................ 7

Targeting Dollars ............................................................................. 8

**FINDING 1A:** The investment funding set-aside for new initiatives equaled less than 3% of the District’s budget .......................................................... 8

**FINDING 1B:** The bulk of investment dollars were allocated to high schools this past year .................................................. 9

**FINDING 1C:** The District followed a simple needs-based equity formula in allocating investment dollars to high schools .................................................. 10

**FINDING 1D:** The District largely ignored their equity formula in distributing investment dollars to elementary schools .................................................. 11

Map of the Distribution of Local Control Investment Funding .................. 12

Community recommendations for improvement .................................. 13

Strategies that Lift Student Achievement .......................................... 14

**FINDING 2A:** “New investment” funds received over and above what they deemed the Year 1 base would be set aside for high-need students .................................................. 15

**FINDING 2B:** Within the stated program priorities, investment dollars were allocated to a wide array of new staff .......................................................... 16

**FINDING 2C:** During our recent interviews with principals, there was confusion and dismay when asked about LCFF .................................................. 17

Community recommendations for improvement .................................. 18

Profile: A School Where LCFF Works ............................................. 19

School, Student, Parent, and Community Engagement .......................... 20

**FINDING 3A:** As LAUSD begins Year 3 of implementing LCFF, its school principals, teacher leaders, parents, and students remain uninformed .................................................. 20

**FINDING 3B:** Students see plenty of room for strengthening certain areas .......................................................... 22

**FINDING 3C:** Lack of communication around the intention of LCFF dollars .......................................................... 23

Community recommendations for improvement .................................. 24

Community Call to Action ................................................................. 25

Acknowledgments ............................................................................ 26
Evaluating New Investments Intended for High-Needs Students
Supporting LAUSD in Implementing Equitable Spending

The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) is one of the largest public initiatives ever undertaken to match dollars to student need. Under California’s new LCFF law passed in 2013, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) needed to rethink its budget priorities in a way that would direct more resources to the District’s highest need students. The goal of LCFF was clear: increase and improve services for low-income, English Learners and foster/homeless youth to better support and accelerate their academic achievement.

The District received over $800 million in state funds during the 2014-15 school year to specifically focus on the academic, social/emotional, behavioral, and other supports needed to raise achievement among these target student populations. In the 2015-16 school year, the District will receive close to $1.1 billion in revenue generated by these students—specifically, children from low-income families, English learners, foster and homeless youth—funds the District is required to spend on services directed towards improving the students’ academic outcomes. The District enrolls a majority of students the state deems as “high-need” and, therefore, these target student populations are generating the influx of dollars coming from the state.

The Local Control Funding Formula is an equity focused funding measure and is a massive shift in spending and funding practices for all local school districts. The state charged LAUSD, and all other local school districts, to develop their own accountability plans and metrics for demonstrating academic improvement of high-needs students. The District is still in a transition period from previous practices, and community groups are committed to supporting this transition for the benefit of the target student populations that have long been denied needed investments.
The goal the District and schools set for our teachers, students, and parents is continuous reflection and improvement. In the same way, our District’s goal in the budgeting process should be to grow each year, expanding on what went well and improving what did not. With this goal in mind, the Communities for Los Angeles Student Success (CLASS) coalition set out to find these areas of success and growth. To do so, we conducted student surveys; focus groups with pupils, teachers, parents, and principals; and analyzed school-by-school budgets to determine how effectively LAUSD is aligning its academic goals with the resources necessary to improve student outcomes. The budget analysis and synthesis of the survey and focus group data was conducted in partnership with the University of California, Berkeley.

This research brief reports key findings stemming from University of California, Berkeley’s year-long inquiry. We arrange the results in three parts:

- **Targeting Dollars**—To what extent have the LCFF investment dollars been sent directly to the schools serving those pupils who generate the new state funds?

- **Strategies that Lift Student Achievement**—Have LCFF dollars gone to new staff positions and programs that aim to narrow gaps in learning, moving to ensure that all students become college and career ready?

- **School, Student, Parent, and Community Engagement**—Has the District meaningfully engaged parents, students, school-level staff, and community groups in budget deliberations or building long-term capacity?

These sections are directly related to the advocacy efforts of the CLASS coalition and other community groups. Our efforts are directly tied to ensuring the District is supported in honoring the spirit of LCFF.
Aligning Community, State, and District Priorities and Practices in Years 1 and 2

Monitoring the Impact of Specific LCFF Investments

This study specifically examines the portion of LCFF dollars that the Target Student Populations (TSPs)—consisting of children from low-income families, foster and homeless youth, and English learners—generate from the state. These funds, known as supplemental and concentration dollars totaled about $800 million in the 2014-15 year.

More specifically, we will focus on the portion of funds LAUSD received that were over and above its year 1 distribution, funds LAUSD calls “LCFF Investment Dollars.” The Investment Dollars equaled $145 million for the 2014-15 year.¹ The CLASS coalition and other community groups firmly believe these monies should be invested directly in programs to improve the academic achievement of TSPs and the overall outcomes of the schools they attend.

The 2014-15 school year (Year 2 of LCFF implementation) saw fresh District spending on new instructional aides for English learners, a first-ever appropriation to aid children in foster care, and funding to decriminalize student discipline via restorative justice programs. These victories come as a result of large-scale efforts led by CLASS and community partners that helped shape the District’s LCFF spending priorities. These priorities, unfolding over the past year, may help school principals and teachers better engage low-achieving students. However, it is unclear how the District plans to track school or pupil outcomes for these various program models.

While the state has provided minimal guidelines for equitable spending at the district level, LAUSD is expected to engage parents, teachers, students, and community leaders in developing a plan (known as the LCAP) for increasing the academic achievement of high-needs students. The state outlined the following eight priorities for districts to track over the remaining years of LCFF implementation:

1. Sacramento awards supplemental and concentration dollars to LAUSD based on the count of English learners, kids from low-income families, and children in foster care.
Sacramento cut spending on K-12 education by one-fifth statewide in the years following 2008 in the wake of the Great Recession. The impact on LAUSD personnel was immense, losing approximately $2.7 billion between 2009 and 2013. The cuts disproportionately affected high schools prompting LAUSD to prioritize reinvesting in high schools first.

While the initial LCAP in 2014-15 did include a complex and disparate array of priorities, we found no coherent strategy for distributing dollars to schools serving the pupils that generated these new revenues. Nor did any distinct strategy surface that articulates how new positions and programs would nurture school-level efforts to narrow disparities in achievement. We acknowledge the enormity of the task before LAUSD: to restructure its budgeting process with only broad goals provided by the state and with little direction on measurable outcomes to achieve those goals.

That said, District staff and board members have been easily accessible and candid over the past year. District officials and board members appear genuinely committed to mobilizing the tools and dollars now available through LCFF to narrow historical inequalities.
Targeting Dollars
Grounding Investments in Equity to Benefit High-Needs Students

Of the over half a million students in LAUSD, a high number of them fall into at least one of the TSP categories. These students, especially those who fall into multiple categories (an English learner in the foster care system, for example), are often concentrated in certain areas of the district. Given the reality of disparate community resources and needed student supports, community groups fought for an “Equity Index” through the Equity is Justice resolution, to be used in the distribution of LCFF dollars. The District developed a formula based on this Equity Index that was intended to invest more resources into schools with high concentration of TSP pupils.

**FINDING 1A: The investment funding set-aside for new initiatives equaled less than 3% of the District’s budget.** Although LAUSD received its first allocation under LCFF in 2013-14, the inclusive planning process was not yet required. Total dollars generated in the past year (2014-15) by high-needs pupils equaled $820 million, of which just $145 million was designated for new programs for high-needs students.
Placed in the context of the District’s entire budget, LCFF investment dollars equaled just 2.6% of total resources in 2014-15 (Figure 1). This share will grow in future years. The small amount of investment dollars for new initiatives signals the District’s initial priority in re-staffing adult positions.

**Figure 1: LCFF dollars equaled less than 3% of LAUSD’s total budget in 2014-15**

![Figure 1: LCFF dollars equaled less than 3% of LAUSD’s total budget in 2014-15]

**FINDING 1B: The bulk of investment dollars ($145 million) were allocated to high schools this past year.** Figure 2 shows that 55% of this fund was budgeted for staff positions and new program efforts inside high schools, according to District budget data shared at the end of 2014. The District explained this was because high school investments had the most cuts during the 2007-08 recession. This amounts to less than an additional $400 per student for high-need students.

**Figure 2: The majority of LCFF investment dollars ($145 million) went to high schools in 2014-15**

![Figure 2: The majority of LCFF investment dollars ($145 million) went to high schools in 2014-15]
**FINDING 1C: The District followed a simple needs-based equity formula in allocating investment dollars to high schools.** After the LAUSD school board approved the Equity is Justice Resolution in June 2014, District staff calculated the unduplicated count of English Learner students, those from low-income families, homeless, and/or in foster care. For example, if a student is an English Learner and in foster care, they were counted twice. While the state distributed funding to districts based on the duplicated count (counting every high-needs category once), LAUSD used the Equity is Justice Resolution to apply an unduplicated count to school site funding. As implementation continues, we will monitor if this Equity Index is an unduplicated or duplicated count.

Figure 3 shows the generally tight correlation between the unduplicated counts of TSPs and LCFF dollars. We do see a few points (schools) on the graph where allocations were high, while counts of TSPs were low. This includes Pilot Schools. Dollars for foster youth and restorative justice efforts appear to be allocated independent of the equity formula as well.²

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² The 2014-15 budget includes about $930,000 to support restorative justice practices in high schools to address discipline infractions.
FINDING 1D: The District largely ignored their equity formula in distributing investment dollars to elementary schools. LAUSD allocated a librarian position, instructional specialists, and assistant principals to most elementary schools, regardless of the TSP count. Those with higher counts of TSPs did receive additional staff positions and program dollars. However, the distribution across elementary schools looks more like “stair-steps” from small to larger elementary schools, not a continuous function (Figure 4). This appears to reflect the District’s priority on re-staffing adult positions, rather than a strategy for narrowing achievement gaps.

Figure 4: Distribution of LCFF investment dollars to elementary schools did not follow the equity formula

We also mapped the distribution of LCFF investment dollars across all regular LAUSD schools. This display for elementary schools appears on the following page, further showing how the count of weighted TSP students was only loosely related to dollars allocated.
Recommendations to Improve Targeting Dollars:

*Dedicate a greater portion of its LCFF draw-down to directly support high-needs students*

In 2014-15, high-needs students generated over $800 million in revenue to the district, yet only $145 million was set aside by LAUSD for schools to direct services specifically focused on their low-income, English Learners, foster and/or homeless youth. This equals less than 3%, or an additional $400 per year, per high-needs student, of the total amount of money LAUSD received to invest in new and/or improved services for this population.

To improve its grade on *Targeting Dollars*, LAUSD should:

- Allocate a greater portion of its total LCFF supplemental and concentration dollars directly to school autonomy.
- Enhance the current accountability process for sites so that principals are engaged beyond a template, checklist, and email approval from their Education Service Center. Sites should be asked to demonstrate how their selected investments reinforce school-wide student achievement goals and should be required to demonstrate how teachers, parents, and students were involved in the decision-making process around investments.
- Given that TSPs generated more money than what was actually invested directly in programs to improve their academic outcomes, we suggest the District invest the $1.1 billion of supplemental and concentration grants in 2015-16 directly in such programs.
- Apply the Student Need Index across all grade levels in the district, TK-12. More specifically, LAUSD should include student outcomes as a need with the Index. Recommended outcomes include: completion and on-track rates for A-G courses; 3rd grade reading proficiency; reclassification rates; middle-to-high school matriculation; and, 8th-grade Algebra I completion, among others.
Strategies that Lift Student Achievement
Formulating a More Cohesive Vision for Student Achievement Tied to District Investments and Site-Based Decisions

From the outset, the Superintendent and Board were clear about how they aimed to allocate LCFF investment dollars in 2014-15. By then, much of the initial LCFF allocation from the full $820 million had been committed to special education or defined as part of the base budget. Our research found that budget priorities stemmed from advocacy by senior District officials and outside stakeholders. While many of these priorities can help bolster student achievement, there was no directed strategy around high-needs students.
Finding 2A: After establishing a baseline in Year 1 (2013-14), the Superintendent and Board determined that “new investment” funds ($145 million) received over and above what they deemed the Year 1 base would be set aside for high-need students. It appears that this sum of money, 3% of the overall budget, which was intended to directly benefit high-needs students through the Equity Index, only did so partially. The board-approved budget for 2014-15 included this programmatic distribution:

- New staff positions allocated to schools based on an equity index (38%).
- A fifth of the funds allocated to schools with no mention of a school's relative need or count of weighted students.
- Another one-fifth going to schools with historically high rates of teacher turnover defined under the Reed Settlement.
- More dollars for special education (over and above what was already spent in the $800M [15%]).
- Counselors and funds to support students in foster care (7%).
Finding 2B: Within the stated program priorities, investment dollars were allocated to a wide array of new staff. Figure 5 displays how LCFF investment dollars were spent on a variety of new positions, either based in schools or local Education Service Centers. These included new credentialed teachers to help lower class size; instructional specialists; clerical staff; and special education support.

Despite the Board's commitment to college readiness and the push to widen access to A-G courses, only 7% of the investment dollars supported counselors of any kind at high schools in academic year 2014-15. This figure combines psychiatric social worker (PSW), pupil attendance & student services (PSA), and academic counselors, making it difficult to distinguish the full scope and scale of funding set aside for academic advisement related to college and career readiness.

Figure 5: LCFF investment dollars going to high schools were spread across a variety of staff positions, but few new counselors
Finding 2C: During our recent interviews with principals, we heard some positive feedback that was largely eclipsed by their reports of confusion and dismay when asked about LCFF. Looking at the breakdown of new positions allocated to elementary schools, we found that over one-third (37%) consisted of new librarians; one-third, instructional specialists, including aides and tutors for English learners; and about a tenth (10%) for new assistant principals. The final fifth (20%) went to various other positions.

We could find no resources allocated to inform site principals or build their capacity to weave together these disparate strands of positions into school-wide strategies aimed at increasing the academic success of the TSP.

They are appreciative of new staff (some work from regional service centers) and program dollars. But principals remain largely in the dark when it comes to understanding the goals and decentralized spirit of LCFF. They have received few messages from the District when it comes to school-wide efforts for engaging students, implementing the Common Core, lifting English learners, or supporting foster youth.

Principals rarely see LCFF as encompassing a coherent District strategy or model for advancing school-wide efforts aimed at closing achievement gaps. They largely see, based on our interviews and focus groups, a smattering of new positions and disparate program dollars.

“I received a memo from the District in early April. This was the first time I learned we had to write a plan to justify expenditures for our TSP [Targeted Student Population].”

—Principal
Recommendations to Improve Strategies that Lift Student Achievement:
Continue to Increase Funding for Academic Support Services, Particularly Academic Counselors

District leadership might articulate to the public how its vision of, “Every LAUSD student will receive an education in a safe, caring environment and every student will be college-prepared and career-ready,” is carried out through its LCFF investments, specifically those targeting high-needs students. School-level implementation would then be tracked and monitored for progress toward the goal.

To improve its grade on Strategies that Lift Student Achievement, the District should:

- Increase the overall investment in counselors consistent with what’s needed to fully implement the 120 day A-G plan (per the Equity in A-G Resolution, June 9th, 2015). While the current plan approved by the Board in June 2015 sets aside $14 million for academic counselors, this amount only provides for an addition of roughly 30 counselors across the entire district.

- Tailor counselor investments to the appropriate school level (i.e. PSWs and PSAs in Elementary; PSWs, PSAs, and Academic Advising in Secondary).

- Commit to increasing the investment annually in proportion to how well the District is on track toward meeting its stated graduation goals.

- Outline how the District’s vision should be carried out at school sites TK-12, and how this vision is tied to increasing the academic outcomes of high-needs students.
A School Where LCFF Works

“The flexible funding is huge. It allows us to make our own decisions about what our students need without all of the red tape and multiple compliance forms to complete,” said Edward Colación, the enthused principal of Young Oak Kim Academy. These dollars were divided up and given to schools as part of the District’s LCFF investment funds to allow principals the flexibly to purchase the staff positions or program services needed to support their highest need students. “We have gone from ten to five to three funding categories,” said Susie Heydon, the school’s program coordinator.

This middle school of 900 students sits one block above Wilshire Boulevard on the western edge of the Belmont Zone of Choice, attracting a rich diversity of students from across the district. Students wear uniforms and attend single-gender classes, which create an “environment that mirrors many of our parents’ experiences back in their home country,” Colación said (including Mexican and Central American, Korean, Filipino, and Middle Eastern origins).

Mr. Colación believes in the social justice mission of education, particularly as it relates to closing the achievement gaps for black and brown students. Using his background in science, Mr. Colación thinks methodically about staffing, teacher collaboration, instruction, and parent engagement to support an array of student achievement goals tied to a positive school climate and high academic performance.

“New funding doesn’t make you think better,” Colación said, “What matters is what you do with the funds to support your students.” He credits the LCFF dollars with helping to implement Common Core school-wide by his teaching staff, keeping the library open longer hours and on weekends, along with expanding outreach from the school’s parent center. Last year, Young Oak Kim saw an influx of students from Central America, many of whom needed English instruction. With close to 200 students in the afterschool program every day, Mr. Colación focuses this additional time with English Learners and students at-risk of falling behind in math. “The budget that we principals shape for direct services for students speaks volumes about our values and priorities for LCFF-targeted students,” he said.

Alma Salazar, the school’s Title III coach helps to nurture fresh Common Core methods among teachers of English learners, many of whom are collaborating in teams for the first time, thanks in part to the new LCFF funding.

Teachers grade Common Core assessments together to help standardize grading methods on students’ analytic and problem-solving skills, and even their growing ability to work cooperatively. “They [the teachers] become learners again through the professional development process,” Salazar said.

Colación attended a budget workshop last fall, learning from Education Service Center (ESC) staff about the additional funding. Despite what he describes as “good training” from a “knowledgeable” budget team at the ESC, there were no discussions about how LCFF might nudge school wide improvements or focus greater attention to low-performing students. Those efforts were reportedly in place at Young Oak Kim before the new dollars began to flow.

Colación and his leadership team have worked hard to create a supportive climate and culture over the past six years, since this young facility was opened. “We hold everyone to high standards, not just the kids. Teachers, parents, administrators are all expected to contribute to a positive learning environment.” Mr. Colación says that his school participated in District surveys around LCFF but cautions that such an approach can exclude many parents and students, particularly foster youth, who aren’t comfortable with surveys. He adds that, “We do parent focus groups all the time. You get so much more information by talking to them. Parents are the greatest asset at our school so engaging them in what we’re trying to achieve is a high priority for us.”
Governor Jerry Brown accents the potential advantages of democratic engagement when it comes to setting budget priorities for schools: "Instead of prescriptive commands issued from headquarters here in Sacramento, more general goals have been established for each local school to attain, each in its own way. This puts the responsibility where it has to be: in the classroom and at the local District." When it comes to effectively addressing the unique needs of high-needs students in particular, we believe it is paramount that those students, their families, and their support networks are involved in the conversation.

Finding 3A: As LAUSD begins Year 3 of implementing LCFF, its school principals, teacher leaders, parents, and students remain uninformed. The meaningful engagement of school-level educators and parents is minimal, stemming from little information or strategic guidance from District leaders.

The CLASS coalition facilitated focus groups and student surveys over the past year—finding that teachers would appreciate more transparency around how budgets are made at both the District and school level. Teachers and students believe that they could contribute insight regarding how to best support learning and wellbeing in their school communities. Parents were very clear on what their school sites needed, but lacked knowledge about LCFF. If they were aware of potential resources for high-needs students, it was because outside organizations had trained them on the subject.

Drawing from a (non-random) sample of 483 high school students participating in various convenings, we found that while students felt valued in their schools, they believe that much work remains. Note that student leaders and those more engaged are likely over-
represented in this sample. This exercise illustrates the ability of students to offer careful feedback—when asked—on what's working and what's lacking in their schools.

Students generally reported being supported and challenged in their schools, with 90% indicating that they felt respected by adults on campus and were encouraged to attend a four-year college. Many participating students were aware of A-G course requirements, and 84% indicated they were on track to graduate in four years.

When asked about the improvements seen inside their schools over the past year, students emphasized gains in school safety and cleanliness. They also saw improvement in A-G offerings, as well as technology, academic counseling, and support for struggling students. Surprisingly, considering the District’s investment, only about 12% were aware of any increase in the use of restorative justice practices to address discipline problems (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Students point to how their schools are improving**
Finding 3B: Students see plenty of room for strengthening certain areas. Students emphasized the desirability of greater internship opportunities, academic counseling, and support for struggling students (Figure 7).

It was common for students to cite that due to capacity, only the “straight A” students received college counseling. This finding highlights the apparent lack of investment in academic counselors from fresh LCFF funding. When asked what additional services were needed to further support students, over 53% indicated that they would benefit from college preparation workshops.

Overall, the findings show that students often feel supported and recognize gains made within their schools. However, considerable work remains to support pupils in moving toward academic goals and become better prepared for college and future careers.

Figure 7: Students see plenty of room for improvement at their schools
It is evident that these students feel strongly about being engaged in their education, with 87% desiring a voice in the decision-making process at their schools. Yet, only 28% had even heard of the LCFF budget reform. This presents a huge missed opportunity for the District to tap into the knowledge of its most important stakeholders—the students.

**Finding 3C: Lack of communication around the intention of LCFF dollars.** Within the budget itself, there is no discernible funding allocated to inform site principals and build their capacity to weave together these disparate strands of positions into school-wide strategies aimed at increasing the academic success of the Targeted Student Population. Our interviews and focus groups bear this out, with only one principal reporting that s/he received training and/or ongoing support from the local Education Service Center. Anecdotally, some principals expressed an even greater need for training and support for first-time principals whom they observed as feeling overwhelmed in their role and uncertain about how to determine which supports would best serve their target student population.

In addition, Pilot Schools and other “per pupil dollar allocation schools” reported experiencing a lack of communication and timely explanations regarding their budget allocations, leaving some of them uncertain as to why their budgets fluctuated in the back half of the school year. This uncertainty has caused some Pilot School principals to hold back on making program and/or position funding decisions for fear that they may be required to reimburse the District after norm-day settle up numbers are determined.
Recommendations to Improve School, Student, Parent, and Community Engagement:
Supporting Principals to Engage Their School Sites, and Provide Feedback Directly to the District

The lack of training and support for principals inhibits their ability to meaningfully engage their school communities in collaboration for student achievement. This absence of capacity building trickled down to other stakeholders, where principals largely used their school site councils to discuss budget considerations but did not do any meaningful engagement with teachers, students, or parents beyond this. Given the new-ness of LCFF implementation, the District should outline a training and support plan for principals with particular emphasis placed on new instructional leaders and those at sites deemed “per pupil dollar allocation” schools.

To improve its grade in *School and Community Engagement*, the District should:

- Provide LCFF and LCAP professional development for principals and new half-time Assistant Principals that were funded with LCFF, including a general overview of LCFF/LCAP, how it influences their school budgeting, and how to interface with the school community during the budget cycle so that school site can have more say over LCAP funding dollars that are allocated to them.

- Hold multiple LCFF stakeholder engagement events for teachers, parents, and students to collect feedback and use the school community feedback in future LAUSD LCAP decisions. The District must create a system that collects information that disaggregates input by stakeholder type (parent, student, teacher, admin, other staff etc), location (school and local district), allows for analysis, and provides feedback on how all of this information comes together and the specific ways it has influenced the final formulation of the district LCAP.

- Seek input from the PAC, DELAC, and other district advisory committees as a source of more direct and in depth engagement of parents. The District should provide clear guidelines but allow for parents to have input on their governance and agendas. The District should then provide capacity building and contextualized budget and policy information for participants to be able to participate genuinely to provide informed input.
Community Call to Action

Tapping Into Community Assets

In recognizing the important opportunity LCFF presents in closing historically persistent achievement gaps among the District’s low-income, English learners, foster and homeless youth, it’s crucial that LAUSD take full advantage of its financial and human resources to achieve its goal of 100% graduation. At the same time, the entire Los Angeles community has a responsibility to ensure the learning needs of all its students are met, particularly those children most at-risk of not receiving a high-quality public education in LAUSD, so that we can fully develop the human, economic, and civic capital of more than half a million Los Angelenos.

Through our focus groups, surveys, and interviews, it is clear that parents, teachers, students, and school leaders know what they need to support their school communities. It is also clear that the District has much work to do to meaningfully engage and effectively build the capacity of these stakeholders. CLASS and the thousands of parents, teachers, and community stakeholders we represent will continue to monitor LAUSD’s budget, strategy, and engagement process over the coming years.

We invite you to join us in our efforts to monitor and support the District in developing a clear and fully executed equity-based strategy for LCFF implementation. This is not a short-term process and while there are already noted improvements in LAUSD’s budget, we must continue to fight for investments that are proportional to student need.
Thank you to our Advisory Committee for your invaluable partnership and direction on this project:

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