

Advancing Equity Through the Local Control Funding Formula: Promising Practices

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California's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) ushered in a new era for California education policy. Enacted in 2013, the LCFF shifted control of most education dollars from the state to local school districts, allowing them to determine how to allocate their resources to best meet the needs of the students in their community. The LCFF also made it a matter of state policy to shine a spotlight on educational inequities and try to give districts the wherewithal to level the playing field for students who too often are left behind. This brief focuses on promising practices from three school districts as they implement the LCFF's equity mission, and highlights the new role for county offices of education.



California's new accountability and continuous improvement framework relies on district and school leaders using multiple measures of school performance to identify where change is needed, and to monitor carefully the development, testing, and evaluation of improvement strategies over time. This process of continuous improvement requires that local leaders have access to research-based evidence and strategies that they can implement in their schools and opportunities to learn from one another about what works, under which conditions, and for which students. PACE's series of Continuous Improvement Briefs aims to support education leaders at all levels in learning how to improve the performance of their schools and students.

Introduction

California's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) ushered in a new era for California education policy. Enacted in 2013, the LCFF shifted control of most education dollars from the state to local school districts, freeing those districts from the requirements of most categorical programs and allowing them to determine, in conjunction with parents, community members, and other stakeholders, how to allocate their resources to best meet the needs of the students in their community.

Perhaps most significantly, the LCFF made it a matter of state policy to shine a spotlight on educational inequities and try to give districts the wherewithal to level the playing field for students who too often are left behind. Thus, in addition to providing base funds for all students, the LCFF adds dollars for three designated groups of typically underserved high-need students: low-income, English learners, and foster youth. The state apportions these dollars in the form of supplemental and concentration grants to school districts whose student populations qualify for them under the formula. The purpose of these funds is to provide "additional supports and services" to these target groups of students to close opportunity gaps and, by so doing, narrow achievement gaps. Supplemental and concentration grants offer the practical application of the law's equity intent, namely, that ensuring equality of opportunity for all students requires unequal funding.

"A child in a family making \$20,000 a year or speaking a language different from English or living in a foster home requires more help. Equal treatment for children in unequal situations is not justice."

GOVERNOR JERRY BROWN,
2013 STATE OF THE STATE SPEECH

On February 2, 2018, PACE's annual conference, "Fulfilling the Promise of the Local Control Funding Formula," brought together policymakers, educators, researchers, and interested citizens to examine ways in which application of the LCFF is impacting the goal of creating greater educational equity for students in California's schools and districts. This brief, part of the PACE Continuous Improvement series, focuses on one conference session, titled "Leveraging LCFF Resources to Advance Equity." Session panelists included leaders from three diverse school districts—Sacramento City Unified, San Jose Unified, and Kerman Unified—to discuss some of the ways in which their districts are using the LCFF to

advance educational equity. The district officials were joined by the superintendent of the Orange County Department of Education (Orange County Office of Education) who offered a perspective about the county office role in moving towards the LCFF's equity goal.

Promising Practices Moving Towards Equity

Panelists for the conference session were:



Jorge Aguilar
Superintendent,
Sacramento City Schools



Nancy Albarrán
Superintendent,
San Jose Unified School District



Stephen McMahon
Deputy Superintendent,
San Jose Unified School District



Robert Frausto
Superintendent,
Kerman Unified School District



Al Mijares
Superintendent,
Orange County Office of Education

Sacramento City Unified: Using Data to Construct an Equity Index

The Sacramento City Unified School District serves more than 46,600 students on 77 campuses covering 70 square miles. The students reflect California's diversity: Nearly 40 percent are Hispanic, 20 percent are English learners, and nearly 70 percent qualify for free and reduced-price lunch.

Superintendent Jorge Aguilar, in office for just seven months at the time of the conference presentation, described the current situation as "the journey we're on to make it possible for all students to reach their potential." For Sacramento, that journey has at its heart better and more effective use of data.

“ We recognize that our system is inequitable by design and we vigilantly work to confront and interrupt inequities that exist.”

SACRAMENTO CITY UNIFIED'S CORE VALUE STATEMENT

Superintendent Aguilar began his remarks with a stark yet matter-of-fact statement that inequities are built into the Sacramento district's current education system. Under Aguilar's leadership, the district is in the process of defining these inequities and creating processes to ensure they are identified, made visible, and rectified.

The Superintendent noted that in the Sacramento City district, inequities may result from local policies that, even unwittingly, have remained unexamined and led to unintended consequences. He offered as an example the case of a high school senior who entered Sac City as a sixth grader and who was classified as a long-term English learner. This student scored “early advanced” on the state language assessment and continued to score “advanced” on this assessment for several successive years. Yet the district repeatedly classified the student as an English learner because she did not score high enough on the district's internal language assessment, limiting her educational options and opportunities, a situation Superintendent Aguilar described as “educational inequity and social injustice.”

At the time of the PACE conference, Sacramento was in the early stages of developing a district-specific multi-metric accountability system. Called the Equity, Access, and Social Justice Index, the system will use aggregated data in five areas—facilities, instructional technology, staffing, student services, and student achievement—to provide a clear picture of salient issues and a roadmap for determining how to create the conditions for greater equity for students.

The district also is using data to ensure its English learners do not fall through the cracks. A scale of five metrics measures English learners' progress towards proficiency and guides the deployment of resources so that as many of these students as possible complete A–G requirements and graduate from high school.

Sac City displays a strong commitment to take the steps necessary to fulfill the promise of the LCFF for student equity. As Superintendent Aguilar noted in summing up his remarks, “The principal challenge ahead is making the work of closing equity gaps tangible, real, and demonstrable.”

San Jose Unified: Focusing on People to Achieve Equity

The San Jose Unified School District is in the heart of Silicon Valley. Though located in a geographic region that includes great wealth, 45 percent of the district's 32,000 students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch and 22 percent are English learners.

The district's principal strategy to move towards greater educational equity is to invest in its people. Said Superintendent Nancy Albarrán, “We tried the modify, attack, and abandon curriculum approach. We gave that up and [now] focus on people.”

“ Having the right people will drastically change outcomes for students.”

NANCY ALBARRÁN, SUPERINTENDENT,
SAN JOSE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

San Jose uses a unique staffing formula that results in what district leaders describe as “intentional inequity,” in other words, schools are purposely staffed unequally. This formula is the result of negotiations between the district and the local teachers union, the San Jose Teachers Association. Under the staffing formula, each unduplicated student¹ is allocated the equivalent of 20 percent more staffing (in terms of people, not dollars). As a result, schools with higher concentrations of high-needs students are assigned more teachers (or counselors or specialists or whatever kind of staff the school needs) than are schools with lower concentrations of unduplicated students.

While the basics of the staffing formula were in place prior to the LCFF, LCFF's equity mission accompanied by funding for target student groups has made the district's staffing plan more acceptable to the local community. Said Stephen McMahon, district Deputy Superintendent, “It's hard to convince taxpayers to have uneven distribution of resources. [The] LCFF helped us do this.”

Superintendent Albarrán also described San Jose's policy of “intentional hiring,” another strategy to move towards greater student equity. “We determine who can do [the job] the best [and] who brings the commitment and the mindset we're looking for to the work. That's who we hire.” The district makes a concerted and determined effort to place staff in positions for which they are exceptionally well qualified and provide them with the conditions they need to do their best work. Said

Deputy Superintendent McMahon, “If you want to see transformation, it’s going to be in the people you employ and the work they do.”

The San Jose leaders called out the district’s personnel evaluation systems as critical to having the right people to do the work and ensuring those staff members maintain their professional edge. The negotiated teacher evaluation system, for example, is organized around five professional standards. The system provides different and developmentally appropriate processes for probationary teachers, experienced teachers who are performing satisfactorily, and struggling experienced teachers. Probationary and struggling experienced teachers participate in a peer review process; all others are on a continuous cycle of professional growth and appraisal.

San Jose has made the decision that its people are key to the mission of the LCFF. Said Superintendent Albarrán, “What we’re doing is the steady work of continuous improvement.”

Kerman Unified: Tackling Early Learning and Chronic Student Absenteeism to Move Towards Equity

Kerman is a small 5200-student agricultural district in Fresno County. Located 16 miles west of the city of Fresno in the heart of the San Joaquin Valley, Kerman is a fast growing area that works hard to maintain its small town feeling. In the district’s six schools—four elementary, one middle school, one high school—more than a third of the students are English learners and better than 80 percent qualify for free and reduced-price lunch.

The Kerman School District has approached its equity challenge through two principal strategies: (a) broadening incoming students’ access to early learning experiences prior to kindergarten, and (b) focusing on reducing student chronic absenteeism throughout all grades. Robert Frausto, Kerman’s Superintendent, addressed both of these strategies.

More than 30 percent of children in Fresno County who qualify for transitional kindergarten do not attend these programs. As Superintendent Frausto explained, parents in the district’s large Latinx and Punjabi communities generally prefer to keep their children at home for another year rather than place them in a preschool setting prior to kindergarten. Many of these children then begin school without many of the skills an early learning program would offer them and often have a more difficult time keeping up with their peers in their

early school years. Kerman makes a determined effort to supplement early learning experiences, particularly by targeting summer enrichment programs to pre-kindergartners who have not attended preschool. The district conducts extensive community outreach to parents to encourage them to send their children to these programs.

Superintendent Frausto also described chronic student absenteeism at all grade levels as one of the district’s most pressing challenges. Research shows that chronic absenteeism—defined as missing 18 or more days in a single school year—is a strong indicator of lower reading and math outcomes and, especially in younger students, serves as an early warning sign of long-term academic risk, increased dropout rates, and poor socio-emotional outcomes.

Prior to the 2016–17 school year, Superintendent Frausto noted, Kerman did not sufficiently identify chronically absent students. Now the district identifies and tracks these students beginning in kindergarten, focusing on efforts to encourage and increase regular school attendance.

Chronic absenteeism became evident as a serious challenge in Kerman in the course of district LCFF stakeholder engagement activities. Administrators, teachers, and parents together acknowledged they were seeing the impact of high chronic absenteeism rates on students’ academic achievement. The district vowed to take steps to address the issue.

The school district has hired targeted staff—counselors in elementary schools and intervention specialists in high schools—designated specifically to deal with reducing chronic absenteeism. In addition, the district has launched a parent education campaign designed to help parents understand how important it is that their children attend school regularly. As part of this outreach program, members of the District Advisory Committee make home visits to talk with parents in a one-on-one parent-to-parent effort. The district also distributes informational videos, pamphlets, and other materials to further educate parents about the importance of regular school attendance.

The Kerman Unified School District is tackling its equity challenges by focusing on early learning and chronic school absenteeism. Like Sacramento and San Jose, Kerman has analyzed local needs and developed strategies suited to its students and its community.

County Offices of Education: Becoming Service Hubs to Support District Efforts

County offices of education have vastly expanded roles and responsibilities under the LCFF. They must provide technical assistance to districts around developing their Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs) and then approve or require modifications to the completed documents. In addition, under the state's still-developing System of Support, part of the LCFF's accountability and continuous improvement program, county offices serve as one of the key agencies designated to provide targeted assistance to districts in areas in which their Dashboard² results indicate need for improvement.

Al Mijares has served as the Orange County Department of Education³ superintendent since 2012. This county office, located in the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area, oversees 27 school districts (including Anaheim, Santa Ana, Irvine, and Huntington Beach) and encompasses more than 600 schools with a combined population of more than half a million students.

In his conference remarks as part of this equity panel, Superintendent Mijares lauded the LCFF for "moving [the state] in the right direction." The law's focus on students who previously often were left behind academically, he said, is long overdue. Superintendent Mijares has been a catalyst for the critical changes in the county offices' role under the LCFF. Historically charged with tasks such as approving school districts' budgets, overseeing select programs, such as in special and vocational education, and administering court schools, with the advent of the LCFF, county offices of education, Superintendent Mijares

noted, now must act as service and support providers. County offices, he said, "must become service hubs," making it their mission to support the districts in their county to broaden students' educational opportunities and advance towards greater educational equity.

"If we don't have the answer [to a district's question], we have to find it—no excuses."

AL MIJARES, SUPERINTENDENT,
ORANGE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Conclusion

This brief illustrates context-specific promising practices in three California school districts committed to realizing the LCFF's promise of educational equity for all students, as well as new challenges for county offices of education helping districts to reach their equity goals. As implementation of this path-breaking law continues to mature, these examples offer ideas other districts and county offices might adapt to their own needs as they continue on their LCFF journey.

¹ Under the LCFF, students who are classified as low-income, English learners, or foster youth are funded only once even if they are part of more than one of these three target groups.

² The Dashboard is an online tool that identifies districts' and schools' strengths and weaknesses and pinpoints student groups that may be struggling.

³ This is the official name for Orange County's County Office of Education.

About the Author

Julia E. Koppich is President of J. Koppich & Associates, a San Francisco-based education-consulting firm. She has served as a policy consultant for numerous state and federal organizations, including the U.S. Department of Education, National Center on Performance Incentives, Education Commission of the States, National Governors' Association, and National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Dr. Koppich has been a principal on studies of urban school change, teacher peer review, and the impact of federal policy on states and local school districts. She currently is a member the core research team investigating implementation of California's path-breaking school finance law, the Local Control Funding Formula. Her areas of expertise include public sector labor relations and improving teacher effectiveness, with an emphasis on teacher evaluation and compensation. She is the author of numerous articles and co-author of two books, *A Union of Professionals* and *United Mind Workers: Unions and Teaching in the Knowledge Society*.

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- Publishes policy briefs, research reports, and working papers that address key policy issues in California's education system.
- Convenes seminars and briefings that make current research accessible to policy audiences throughout California.
- Provides expert testimony on educational issues to legislative committees and other policy audiences.
- Works with local school districts and professional associations on projects aimed at supporting policy innovation, data use, and rigorous evaluation.

Related Publications

Christopher Edley Jr. & Hayin Kimner. **Education Equity in California**. *Getting Down to Facts*. 2018.

Julia E. Koppich, Daniel C. Humphrey, Julie A. Marsh, Morgan Polikoff & Jason Willis. **The Local Control Funding Formula After Four Years: What Do We Know?** *Getting Down to Facts*. 2018.

Meredith Phillips, Sarah-Reber & Jesse Rothstein. **Making California Data More Useful for Educational Improvement**. *Getting Down to Facts*. 2018.

Linda Darling-Hammond, Dan Goldhaber, Katharine O. Strunk & Leib Sutcher. **Teacher Supply Falls Short of Demand in High-Need Fields, Locations**. *Getting Down to Facts*. 2018.

Harry Brighthouse, Michal Kurlaender, Sean Reardon, Chris Doss, Sarah Reber, Demetra Kalogrides & Sherrie Reed. **Outcomes and Demographics of California's Schools**. *Getting Down to Facts*. 2018.



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