Challenges and Choices:
A Multidistrict Analysis of Statewide Mandated Democratic Engagement

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This article seeks to deepen our understanding of the nature and quality of democratic participation in educational reform by examining the first-year implementation of California's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) mandating civic engagement in district decision-making. Drawing on democratic theory, empirical literature, and data from 10 districts, we find that even when district leaders committed to involving stakeholders in decision-making, achieving this vision was often constrained by power imbalances, deeply engrained institutional habits, and limited capacity. We also find that climates of trust, support from external organizations, and homogeneity appeared to provide the foundation for deeper, broader democratic engagement in a few cases. The article concludes with implications for policy, practice, and future research.

KEYWORDS: community, democracy, education reform, engagement

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Introduction

Policy makers, community leaders, and researchers have long acknowledged the value of public participation in policy decision-making, asserting that such engagement yields more legitimate decisions, enhances social justice, and develops civic skills (Cooper, Bryer, & Meek, 2006; Fung & Wright, 2003; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Head, 2007; McDonnell & Weatherford, 2000b; Yang & Pandey, 2011). From "citizen summits" to deliberative polling to participatory budgeting, cities and states around the world have involved local citizens in public deliberation over important policy matters such as healthcare, city planning, education, and crime prevention. These efforts reflect a belief that sound policy design and thorough implementation of community engagement "is critical to effective, transparent and accountable governance in the public, community and private sectors" (Rawsthorne & Christian, 2004, p. 84). In theory, citizens that choose to participate in such activities identify themselves as a "member of a larger social fabric" and thus recognize that community needs are "partially his or her own" (Ehrlich, 2000, p. xxvi). As a result, advocates argue, civic engagement has the potential to ensure responsible governance and redistribute power to less enfranchised citizens and promote a more equitable distribution of shared resources (Arnstein, 1969). Yet critics point to the limitations of these engagement models, citing struggles to adapt the traditional bureaucratic practices into more inclusive, bottom-up planning processes (Brackertz, Zwart, Meredyth, & Ralston, 2005; Eversole, 2011). Others acknowledge tradeoffs between the values of democratic engagement and efficiency goals of policymaking (Stone, 2001).

Consistent with broader civic engagement goals, in 2013, California passed the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), which decentralizes funding from the state to districts and redistributes more flexible funds based on student factors including status as English language learner (EL), low income (LI), and/or foster youth (FY). The law also requires democratic involvement in district decision-making. Districts must involve parents, pupils, stakeholders, and the broader community in developing its Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), a document meant to define the activities and resources allocated to achieve district goals, particularly improved academic achievement for high-needs (LI, EL, FY) students. The law dramatically changes the public inclusion provision of educational decision-making in California and moves local governance beyond representative democracy, in the form of school board elections, to include participatory engagement in goal setting and budgeting. Taken together these ideas have been proposed in states around the country, although none have passed equivalent reforms. The federal government has similarly endorsed the importance of local control and stakeholder engagement in the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015).

Given the ambitious nature of LCFF's democratic mandate, its national importance, and the significant investments occurring statewide to comply, it is critical to understand how civic engagement efforts are enacted at the local level and the extent to which they achieve their democratic goals. Prior research has examined civic engagement in educational reform at the district and school level (e.g., Bryk, 2010; Fung, 2003; Fung & Wright, 2001; Malen & Ogawa, 1988; Marsh, 2007), yet few studies have examined such a reform at this scale. While advocates argue for the benefits of civic engagement, research demonstrates the difficulty of enacting such efforts and that the quality of implementation greatly determines these outcomes. A poor implementation process may "delay decisions, increase conflict, disappoint participants, and lead to more distrust" (Yang & Pandey, 2011, p. 880). This study examines how democratic principles and community engagement in the early stages of a statewide education reform played out across a diverse set of districts.

This research deepens our understanding of mandates for participatory democracy and informs policymakers, practitioners, and scholars about the challenges of and opportunities for achieving these ideals. The study demonstrates the ways in which power imbalances limit the realization of democratic goals and how climates of trust, partnerships (i.e., internal and external stakeholders, and community-based organizations [CBOs]), and demographic homogeneity (LI, EL) may provide the foundation for deeper, broader engagement. These findings also advance conceptual understandings of democratic practice, providing a framework for analyzing variation in practice.

In the remainder of this article, we first describe the theoretical and empirical literature undergirding our analysis. We then provide background on LCFF and our research methods. Finally, we provide our findings, organized around a set of key tensions and cross-cutting themes, and conclude with implications for policy, practice, and future research.

Grounding the Study

We draw on concepts from democratic theory and public participation to frame our understanding of how stakeholder engagement processes might be designed and implemented. While the democratic theories are normative in nature (scholars claim particular models will lead to better outcomes), we do not advocate one model over another. Instead we use these concepts to identify key dimensions of democratic practice and present our framework as a schematic illustrating possible variation. We later demonstrate that policymakers may have envisioned particular models in their development of LCFF, and it is this intent against which we analyze the implementation observed across case study districts. In the end, this descriptive lens helps elucidate *who* is involved, *what* is the purpose and scope of engagement, and *how* engagement operates (Figure 1). After
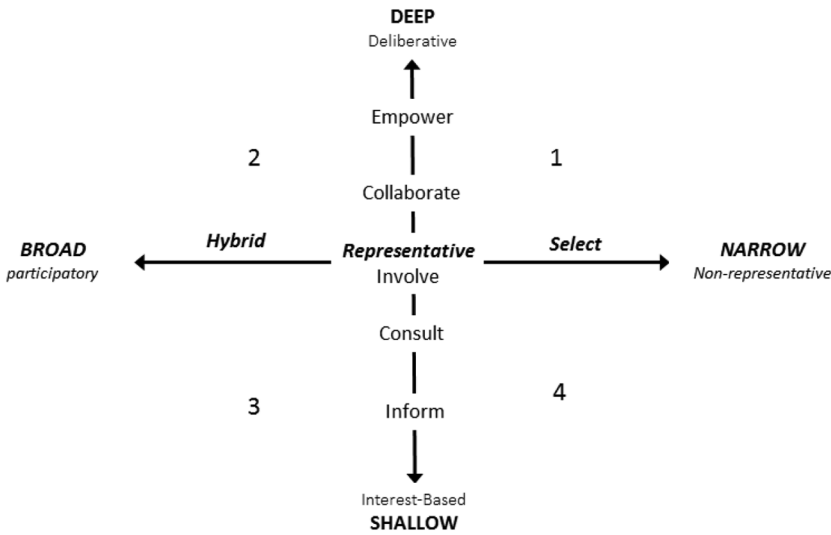
Figure 1. **Models of stakeholder engagement.**

describing the framework of engagement, we turn to studies of civic engagement in education reform and public administration for insights on implementation and the conditions that might influence it.

Democratic Theory[1]

Building on prior work (Marsh, 2007; Marsh, Strunk, Bush-Mecenas, & Huguet, 2015), we start with an understanding that models of democratic decision-making fall along two continua. The horizontal spectrum focuses on *who* is involved, from participatory to representative models of democracy. *Participatory* democratic theory posits that in an ideal process, the maximum number of individuals affected by the decision share equal power to determine the outcome of the decision (Dewey, 1927; Pateman, 1975). According to participatory theories, increasing community participation in governance promotes the development of responsible citizens who learn to incorporate ideas beyond their self-interest, may limit elected officials' abuse of power, and increases the likelihood that individuals will support collective decisions (Barber, 2003; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Mansbridge, 1983; Pateman, 1975).

Conversely, *representative* democratic theory posits that increased engagement may be detrimental to policy formation because the increase may include less informed and interested members of society and weaken consensus around the norms of a democratic electoral system (Pateman, 1975; Schumpeter, 1942). Instead of broad community engagement, the ideal

in a representative democracy is limited participation of a minority of well-informed leaders who represent constituents' interests (all constituencies are not necessarily proportionately represented, but representatives are assumed to act in their best interest). In this model, these well-informed leaders compete for votes, and it is the voter's engagement in the voting process that makes this model democratic (Schumpeter; 1942). Critics often challenge this model, particularly when organizations claim to represent community values and goals. While representative organizations commonly provide services to or advocate on behalf of low-income families, they may not serve as conduits for those families to become engaged participants in democratic practice (Skocpol, 2003).

What the purpose of decision-making is and *how* the process should operate are mapped along the vertical spectrum. On one end of the spectrum is *interest-based* democracy that characterizes the *how* and *what* of democracy as decisions based on competition for the advancement of private interests (Bessette, 1994; Macedo, 1999). Based on a "rational actor," self-interested model, interest-based democracy assumes individuals politically engage in ways that maximize their personal gain (Phillips, 1995, p. 149; also see Bohman & Rehg, 1997). Decisions result from aggregative mechanisms (e.g., voting) and bargaining and do not require deliberation or public accounting for the reasons behind one's decisions (Bohman & Rehg, 1997). Advocates of this model argue that individuals and groups act in self-interested ways and as a result there is no common good (Schumpeter, 1942).[2]

At the other end of the spectrum, a *deliberative* conception of democracy in its ideal form bases decisions on public discourse in which community members consider each others' claims (*how*) and aims to promote the common good (*what*). As Gutmann and Thompson (1996) explain, "when citizens or their representatives disagree morally, they should continue to reason together to reach mutually acceptable decisions" (p. 1). The model of deliberative democracy rests on basic principles: that participants are free, equal, and given proportionate weight in discussion; reasons given for supporting or opposing policy options are based on rational arguments; those participating are focused on achieving the common good as opposed to solely advancing their self-interest; and participants are accountable to everyone likely affected by the outcomes of the process (Fung & Wright, 2003; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Habermas, 1996; Young, 1997).

While described as ideal models, in practice there are likely differing progressions between the ends of the deliberative-interest-based and participatory-representative continua. For example, a representative process becomes more participatory by broadening the representative body to include a wider range of stakeholders. Similarly, an interest-based process becomes more deliberative by including public debate prior to voting. To describe the variation in implementation likely to occur along these

continua, we draw on public administration and political science literature to adapt these ideal models.

Models of Participation in Public Administration

Scholars interested in direct citizen participation in public administration have developed various frameworks for designing engagement processes that help resolve value conflicts and shape public policy (Fung, 2003, 2006; International Association for Public Participation [IAP2], 2007; Nabatchi, 2012). Consistent with democratic theory as outlined above, these frameworks recognize a variety of models resting on a set of "design elements" relating to, among others, who is involved, how they are involved, and for what purpose.

Two interrelated dimensions help elucidate the variation likely to occur within the interest-based-deliberative vertical spectrum (the how and what of participation): the mode of communication and the extent of authority. First, these scholars recognize that how participants interact within an engagement process can vary and that public participation rarely achieves the deliberative ideal of participants meeting as equals to reason together to solve problems. Instead, the mode of interaction generally ranges from one-way communication (information sharing with little opportunity for discussion) to greater opportunities for two-way communication (bidirectional exchange of information, goals, and values) and ultimately to more deliberative communication (a process of reasoned discussion, whereby all participants have an opportunity to speak, an obligation to listen, and consider the contributions of others).[3]

Second, the participation process can vary in the level of authority or influence participants have over decisions. Consistent with the less intensive modes of communication, processes that involve one-way flow of information involve less authority. At the far end are processes to *inform* the public, which are assumed to notify participants more than affect policy or action. The next level includes processes that *consult* the public, whereby policy-makers "listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision" (IAP2, 2007). Next, some processes *involve* the public by ensuring "that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered" and "directly reflected in the alternatives developed" (IAP2, 2007). These processes tend to involve more two-way communication and some shared decision authority. Moving to a higher degree of shared authority, some processes *collaborate* with the public as partners. Fung (2006) calls this "co-governing" and cites Chicago's Local School Councils in public schools as an example. These processes promise to incorporate public advice and recommendations "into the decisions to the maximum extent possible" (IAP2, 2007). Finally,

the highest level are processes that *empower* the public with direct authority over decisions and involve deliberative communication.

The public administration literature also provides insights into the horizontal spectrum of who participates, indicating that not all processes are participatory or representative (Almond & Verba, 1989; Dahl, 1989; Fiorina, 1999). That is, participants may have been appointed and represent some but not all stakeholders that are likely to be affected by the decisions at hand. As such, we have adjusted the horizontal spectrum to situate the more ideal models to the left and narrower forms of participation to the right.[4] In a *narrow* process, a very small proportion of the population participates, participants include external (e.g., advocacy groups, citizens) or internal (e.g., teachers, students, district leaders) actors but not both, and there is no deliberate effort to involve representative groups (e.g., PTA) or underrepresented community members (in the case of LCFF, this would also include target EL, LI, and FY student groups). Such models fail to achieve either representative or participatory processes. In a *select* process, engagement is limited to a slightly larger proportion of the community, and participants may include both internal and external actors and hand-picked preexisting representative groups. In the middle of the spectrum, a *representative* process includes a moderate proportion of the population, and the district involves existing representative groups, creates an advisory body that includes representatives of internal and external stakeholders, and intentionally recruits targeted and/or traditionally marginalized community members. Moving further to the left is a *hybrid* process that includes representative bodies and broadens participation and includes nontraditionally involved parents and community members. Finally, a *broad* process comes the closest to achieving the participatory ideal. It involves a relatively large percentage of the community and attracts participation from internal and external actors and other locally underrepresented groups to ensure that no groups are excluded.

Together, these concepts from democratic theory and public administration paint a nuanced picture of stakeholder engagement that varies along a continua related to *who* is involved—ranging from narrow to broad—and *how* and for *what* purpose—ranging from shallow to deep (Figure 1).

Empirical and Theoretical Research on Mediating Conditions

Along with the conceptual literature, two fields of empirical research provide further insights into the nature and common obstacles and facilitators of public engagement that may relate to LCFF community engagement. This includes studies of (1) democratic engagement in education at the district (Bryk, Sebring, Kerbow, Rollow, & Easton, 1998; Fung, 2001; Marsh, 2007; McDonnell & Weatherford, 2000a) and school (e.g., Hill & Bonan, 1991; Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1990; Murphy & Beck, 1995) levels and (2)

participatory budgeting (PB)—citizen involvement in the deliberation, debate, and allocation of public resources (Arnstein, 1969; Fung & Wright, 2001; Shah, 2007; Wampler, 2012). Collectively, this literature suggests a set of conditions that mediate participation and are associated with deeper and broader forms of democratic engagement.[5]

Capacity. Studies find that the quality of human, social, and physical capital affects engagement. Bryk and colleagues (1998) researching Chicago schools found that stronger forms of democracy (those aligned to deliberative and participatory models) were more likely to occur in advantaged schools. Other scholars identify capacity gaps that limit participation. For example, educators often fail to facilitate two-way dialogue and connect with the community, often dominating discussions (Johnson & Pajares, 1996; Malen, 1994; Malen & Ogawa, 1988). Educators also exhibit limited understanding of parents and students who are of color, low-income, or immigrant (Hein, 2003; Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001). Lopez et al. (2001) found migrant parent engagement was enhanced when school leaders developed an awareness of each family's "social and economic position" and connected those needs to "multiple social services available in the community" (p. 261). PB studies also find that organizers often lack capacity and struggle to engage nontraditional political actors (Koonings, 2004; Lerner, 2011).

Research also indicates that limited capacity of citizens and parents can hinder both the quantity and quality of engagement. Limited access to information (Gyurko & Henig, 2010; Malen & Ogawa, 1988; Menefee-Libey, 2010), social capital (Allensworth, Bryk, & Sebring, 2010; Bryk et al., 1998; Orr, 1996), and available time to devote to the engagement process (Finders & Lewis, 1994; Henry, 1996; Heymann & Earl, 2000) contribute to limited participation and engagement. Language differences and limited English proficiency can also hinder parent participation and understanding in engagement processes (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Marsh, 2007; Shirley, 1997). The parent engagement literature has identified limited economic resources as both an independent contributor to diminished democratic participation and an indirect factor that exacerbates weak parent capacity in other areas such as time (Waanders, Mendez, & Downer, 2007; Weiss et al., 2003).

Given these capacity constraints, scholars often identify intermediary organizations and CBOs as a potential resource for increasing parent capacity. Fung (2004) found that civic associations allowed individuals in marginalized groups to build their political capital, pool their resources, and become more effectual in influencing district decision making. PB studies also find that external organizations (i.e., networked organizations, coalitions) can improve the understanding and depth of engagement of traditionally underserved citizens (Koonings, 2004; Lerner, 2011).

Leadership. Another potential mediator of engagement is leadership. Researchers find that leaders' commitment to and beliefs about community engagement influence the nature and outcomes of this process (Auerbach, 2007; Marsh et al., 2015). While school leadership often reports supporting community engagement ideals, there are frequently gaps between their intention and practice (Gonzales-DeHass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005; Hiatt-Michael, 2006; Stelmach, 2004). Multiple scholars indicate that deeper and broader forms of engagement are associated with particular types of leadership: Barber (2003) argues that "facilitating leadership" ensuring "the rights of the reticent, who need time and quiet and an absence of competitive talk to find their own voices" (p.240) is essential to strong democracy; Bryk et al. (1998) find that "transformative principal leadership" is the most important feature of schools that moved to more collective democratic models; and Marsh (2007) notes that leaders embracing ideas aligned with "new professionalism" (i.e., valuing knowledge and involvement of individuals outside of the profession) better mediated institutional tensions to arrive at more deliberative, participatory practice.

Trust. Democratic theorists (Mansbridge, 1983; Warren, 1999) and researchers (Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1994; Marsh, 2007; Weiss & Cambone, 1994) have long argued that trust shapes the nature and quality of engagement. Studies of district-level reforms have found that trust between and among educators and citizens helps explain differences in democratic reform implementation across sites (Marsh, 2007; McDonnell & Weatherford, 2000b). Without trusting relationships, participants were not likely to consider co-participants or leaders partners in negotiating for the common good. Education research indicates that participants who perceive of "token" engagement and fail to experience two-way discourse grow skeptical, constraining long-term success of engagement (Anderson, 1998; Croninger & Malen, 2002; Malen, 1994; Malen & Ogawa, 1988; Marsh et al., 2015). Studies of PB similarly find that the community may lose confidence in the participatory process and inhibit future engagement when they experience "tokenistic" efforts (e.g., when final allocations shift away from the PB outcomes) (Musso, Weare, Elliot, Kitsuse, & Shiau, 2007).

Studies indicate that when the community shares with educators an experience of mutual respect and responsibility, the ideals of democratic theory may be more easily realized (Giles, 2006; Marsh, 2007; Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Research on decentralization in Chicago identified the value of established trust in facilitating local decision-making (Bryk et al., 1998; Rollow & Bennett 1996; Yanguas & Rollow 1996). Schools characterized by "strong democracy" (similar to a broad-deep model) demonstrated high levels of trust between parents, teachers, and principals, and those characterized by "adversarial politics" (similar to an interest-based model) exhibited high levels of distrust (Bryk et al., 1998).

Institutional factors. Broader norms and values also contribute to educators' stance toward engagement and its enactment. Research finds that district norms that support top-down authority create barriers to incorporating community input into policy decisions (Malen et al., 1990; Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992) and may lead some community members to believe there has been a shift in power when one has not occurred (Hess, 1999; Malen, 1994; Malen & Ogawa, 1988; Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Other studies show that educator taken-for-granted understandings of roles and bias against community involvement in professional domains limit engagement (Anderson, 1998; Johnson & Pajares, 1996; Malen et al., 1990; Weiss & Cambone, 1994).

Size and heterogeneity. Some research indicates that smaller size organizations and communities are better able to achieve more participatory and deeper levels of engagement. While a few scholars argue that smaller scale endeavors allow for more face-to-face structures and facilitate feelings of equal respect (Mansbridge, 1983), others clarify that while important for building trust, size alone does not guarantee positive outcomes without other conditions such as leadership (Bryk et al., 1998). Still others acknowledge the challenge of scale for achieving deeper, broader forms of engagement but recognize that technology can help overcome it (Barber, 2003; Roberts, 2004).

Other research reveals that the level of community heterogeneity affects the nature of engagement, with fewer differences facilitating more deliberative participant exchange (Bryk et al., 1998; Mansbridge, 1983; Marsh, 2007). Mansbridge (1983) notes that conflicting interests limit the likelihood of consensus and that face-to-face forms of engagement are superior when there are common interests. Empirically, Bryk et al. (1998) find that racial diversity provided the seeds for conflict and homogeneous schools more often achieved stronger forms of democratic practice.

Collectively, this literature provides us guidance on assessing the nature and quality of democratic participation in LCFF and a sensitizing lens to understand conditions that might shape it.

Background on LCFF

In 2013, California adopted LCFF, reforming California's education system in three substantial ways. First, LCFF decentralized resource allocation from state control to locally elected school boards and districts. Second, funding was redistributed from a categorical model to a more flexible funding system while allocating additional tax dollars to districts with students who qualify as FRPL, EL, or FY.[6] These ideas in LCFF originated in a 2007 paper included in a California publication known as *Getting Down to Facts* (GDTF) (Bersin, Kirst, & Liu, 2008).[7]

The third significant change was new, more transparent accountability, which requires districts to create budgets with input from a broad group of stakeholders and, in accordance with eight state-priorities,[8] set their own accountability standards for student outcomes in a LCAP. In the first year, the guidelines for developing the LCAP directed districts to consult with and solicit comments of stakeholders "to capture information that comprises a good strategic plan" and to "focus on strategic goals, progression of outcomes, and services and related expenditures based on local need" (California Department of Education & West Ed, 2014). In practice, the LCAPs became lengthy documents detailing districts' estimated service and funds to address state-mandated goals, community desires, contractual mandates, and district needs (Humphrey et al., 2014).

An analysis of policy documents and interviews with state and local leaders (see "Data and Methods" for details) indicate multiple purposes for LCFF stakeholder engagement. First, for transparency and accountability purposes, it is assumed the public understands and has contributed to district goal and resource decisions, so that they can review the district's progress annually to ensure funds are spent in ways that achieve goals. According to a statewide intermediary leader, LCFF intends to support local accountability: "If we're going to have local accountability, then it's no longer about the state watching to see if we use funds right, or spent it, bought the right thing. It is about local communities saying, 'I understand what's happening. I want to see—I'm providing some sense of feedback.'" This transparency is assumed to motivate educators and board members to work hard to meet goals, because in essence "you've gone public," as one study superintendent explained, and watchful citizens can take action when goals are not met (e.g., voting out the board).

Second, there is a belief that by shifting resource decisions away from the state to local arenas LCFF will result in more effective local policy. As the state board president explained:

> We'd had a history in California of everybody coming to the state to get a categorical program to impose something locally. As we tried to reverse the whole flow of power from Sacramento down, we looked at the budget process and if we send the money down there flexibly … if we had a robust democracy at the local level, then we could say there is a lot of public participation that is not dominated by the groups that have lobbyists and can come to Sacramento … [and] change the politics from a top-down politics to a bottom-up politics.

He also noted that the desire for this power shift came from the governor, who had long-touted "humility" and "a feeling that we have 6.3 million students, 11,120 schools … we just don't know how to do this, therefore the politics need to be organized locally." By shifting away from elite Sacramento politics favoring those who "can play the game," LCFF could

empower local leaders to make decisions reflecting local interests, which would lead to more improved outcomes for students.

These two rationales reflect different conceptions of democratic engagement. The first rationale, focused on transparency and accountability, includes a vision of broad participation to *inform* the public. In contrast, the second rationale tied to bottom-up decision-making emphasizes a process to *consult, involve*, and *collaborate* with citizens, be it broad or representative.

As for the mechanics, LCFF spells out several requirements for the *who, what*, and *how* of engagement. As Table 1 illustrates, while state leaders interviewed conveyed a strong interest in broad participation, policy documents are less explicit about breadth. The law and regulations *require* districts to solicit input from, at a minimum, representative groups (parent and English learner advisory groups) and then *recommend* involvement from parents, students, and other stakeholders such as labor associations and individuals connected to subgroups targeted for extra funding (e.g., FY, EL). There are no threshold levels, numbers, or proportions dictated. As for *what*, the policy specifies that districts solicit input on the proposed *actions and expenditures* outlined in the LCAP and provide information to stakeholders on how the district sets LCAP *goals* relative to state priorities.

Finally, the law provides only a few details on *how* districts should engage stakeholders. Beyond the required public hearing and a statement about the "critical" role of "meaningful engagement," the policy does not provide guidelines on how to structure the process. Combining what is known about the *how* and *what*, there is no explicit deliberative (deep) intent in the law—neither the statute, regulations, nor policymakers use the language of the common good, reason-based exchange, or empowering stakeholders. In contrast, the state board president implied a more interest-based (shallow) notion of how stakeholders might engage, noting that they are likely to press for their particular interests and "clash" in ways forcing board members to make "tradeoffs." In the end, the law emphasizes both broad and representative forms of engagement to inform and consult. Returning to our conceptual framework (Figure 1), the design of LCFF's engagement process falls in Quadrants 2 and 3. We anchor our analysis of implementation in this understanding of policy intent.

Data and Methods

This article examines the LCFF stakeholder engagement process during the first year of its implementation (2013–14). We ask: *How did districts interpret and implement the requirement for democratic engagement? What district and community conditions shaped the ways in which democratic engagement played out across districts?* To answer our research questions, we drew on data from a broader study of LCFF implementation in 10

Table 1

Evidence on the Intent of LCFF Regarding Democratic Engagement

	The Law: Chapter 47 (AB 97), Chapter 70 (SB 91), and Chapter 357 (SB 97) of 2013	Regulations and LCAP Template of 2014	State Board President
WHO should be involved	Required parent advisory committee and/or English learner advisory committee established pursuant to § 52063 "in consultation with teachers, principals, administrators, other school personnel, parents, and pupils…"	"Meaningful engagement of parents, pupils, and other stakeholders, including those representing subgroups identified in Education Code section 52052, is critical to the LCAP and budget process"	"You want very broad participation"; "part of the strategy was to involve new people, and in that way, change the local budget politics and deliberations, and hopefully, focus"
WHAT (focus/ purpose)	At least one hearing for public to make recommendations and comments on the actions and expenditures proposed for the LCAP. "The superintendent of the school district shall notify members of the public of the opportunity to submit written comments regarding the **specific actions and expenditures** proposed to be included in the local control and accountability plan or annual update to the local control and accountability plan, using the most efficient method of notification possible" §52056(a)(1).	State Priorities: (A) Conditions of Learning, (B) Pupil Outcomes, (C) Engagement and stakeholders should be provided with timely quantitative and qualitative data/metrics related to these priorities and used by the local education agency to inform the LCAP **goal-setting** process.	*IQ: What is it that the state was expecting community stakeholders to engage in at the local level—was it just about setting goals or was it really about allocating the dollars?]* "It was **allocating the dollars** ... what are the goals of LCFF that I'd like to see play out? The top one was resource allocation." … *IQ: Did you intend the community to really get involved at the level of allocations and budgets?]* "Yes. Definitely."

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

	The Law: Chapter 47 (AB 97), Chapter 70 (SB 91), and Chapter 357 (SB 97) of 2013	Regulations and LCAP Template of 2014	State Board President
HOW it should operate	"Governing board shall hold at least one Public hearing and solicit public comment, superintendent shall notify the public and request comment."	Meaningful and involved engagement in developing, reviewing, and supporting implementation of the LCAP and budget. There is an expectation of authentic engagement that leads to a multifaceted and communitywide effort to support a productive, student-oriented learning community. (California Department of Education & West Ed, 2014)	*[Q: Was the expectation of the LCAP that community members would come to the table and contribute what's best for the community as a whole or what's best for their individual interests?]* "No, it would be, they'd be doing their individual interests, and therefore you want very broad participation because you want a whole bunch of clashing interests there, and you want the Board to have to make the tradeoffs."

Table 2
Case Study District Characteristics

Cases	Geographic Region	Enrollment	Urbanicity	Proportion of EL Students	Proportion of LI Students
Breckinridge	North	<10,000	Rural	50%–75%	50%–75%
Buchanan	North	<10,000	Rural	<25%	50%–75%
Cleveland	Mid	<10,000	Midsized town	50%–75%	>75%
Grant	North	25,000–50,000	Large city	>75%	50%–75%
Harrison	South	25,000–50,000	Large city	50%–75%	>75%
Hayes	North	<10,000	Rural	<25%	50%–75%
Taft	Bay	10,000–25,000	Midsized town	25%–50%	50%–75%
Tyler	Bay	25,000–50,000	Suburban	<25%	<25%
Vanburan	South	>50,000	Large city	25%–50%	>75%
Washington	Bay	<25,000	Midsized town	50%–75%	50%–75%

districts (Humphrey et al., 2014). As Table 2 illustrates, this purposeful sample was selected to represent districts that varied in enrollment, geography, urbanicity, and student demographics. Although based in part on the broader study's intent to capture the range of district characteristics statewide, these sampling criteria align with conditions cited in the literature as influencing democratic engagement, such as capacity, homogeneity, size, trust, and leadership.

Data collected between 2014 and 2015 for this study included interviews, document data (LCAPs, communications, policy documents), and observations (videos of meetings). The research team interviewed state leaders (n = 8), county administrators (n = 20), and case study district and civic leaders (n = 83). Specifically, for each case study district, we interviewed the superintendent and district officials responsible for the budget, programs, and community engagement as well as other district staff (n = 51), school board members (n = 9), union representatives (n = 8), parents (n = 8), and civic leaders engaged with LCFF implementation at the local and/or statewide levels (n = 7). We used semistructured protocols in all interviews, which were audio-recorded and transcribed.[9]

To enhance the internal validity and accuracy of findings, we triangulated data from multiple sources, comparing interview data to documents, and observations whenever possible. Guided by our framework, we coded all data, first analyzing the nature of engagement in each case along the broad dimensions of *who, how*, and *what* of participation, along with *contextual factors*. Next, we analyzed each case individually, developing detailed case memos. We then conducted a matrix analysis to systematically analyze patterns across cases (Averill, 2002; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999) and factors associated with patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1994) (see appendix in the online version of the journal).

First, we identified a set of matrix columns that best captured each district's engagement based on the *who, how*, and *what* and categorized summaries based on column-specific criteria for each level (see appendix in the online version of the journal for more details). In terms of *who*, we identified columns for (a) the estimated percent of participants (turnout in meetings, response rates), (b) participant types (internal vs. external, representative groups, targeted groups, traditionally marginalized groups), and (c) participant mechanisms (e.g., survey, meetings, advisory). We then used aggregate evidence across these categories to plot each case on a horizontal spectrum between broad and narrow engagement.

We identified six matrix columns concerning the nature and content of engagement (*what* and *how*): (a) amount of information provided to the community, (b) the types of feedback solicited from community (e.g., feedback on goals vs. budgets), (c) how often stakeholder engagement was part of the LCAP process (e.g., one-time vs. ongoing), (d) communication flow between stakeholders and district officials (one-way vs. two-way), (e) focus
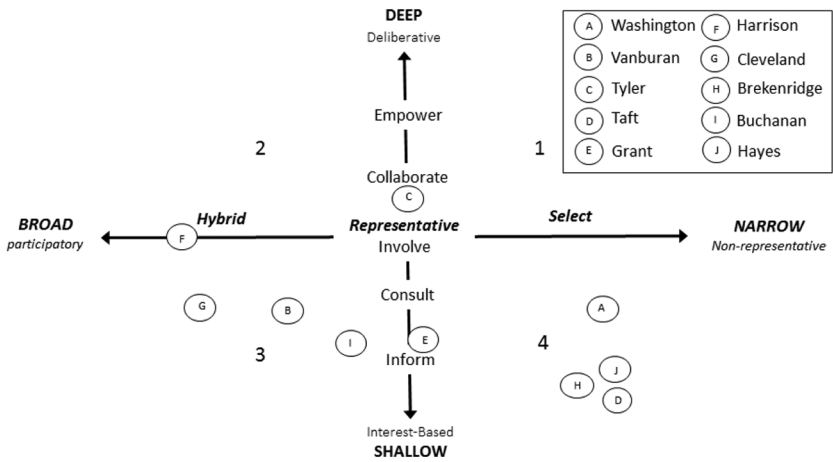
Figure 2. **Stakeholder engagement enacted in case study districts.**

conveyed by district leaders (common good vs. interest-based input), and (f) level of community authority over LCAP (i.e., Did the community provide input and the district control the outcomes, or did the community co-construct decisions?). We then plotted each case along the vertical spectrum between shallow and deep. Figure 2 illustrates the final placement of each case along the two continua based on our evidence.

We also added columns describing contextual conditions of each case, including district size, homogeneity, wealth, capacity, organizational structure, and leadership, and analyzed their association with patterns of engagement type (see appendix in the online version of the journal for further details).

There are several limitations to our data collection and analyses. First, due to finite resources, we were limited to 10 case studies. Although our cases provide insight into the implementation of LCFF engagement efforts in the first year, they do not allow us to capture variation that may have occurred in all California districts. Also, given resource constraints, we interviewed only a sample of stakeholders from each district and thus likely spoke with more engaged participants, limiting our understanding of everyone affected by the engagement outcomes. Another potential limitation was bias from retrospective interviews, yet given the brief time between actual events and interviews (months), interviewee recall was less of a concern. Additionally, to minimize potential bias, we triangulated evidence and had interviewees reflect on artifacts from the engagement process to enhance recall. In light of these limitations, our findings should be interpreted as exploratory.

Findings: Challenges and Choices

In this section, we present answers to our two research questions. First, we describe how the case districts interpreted and implemented LCFF engagement processes, starting with an overview and moving to a more in-depth discussion of key tensions that emerged across sites. Next, we discuss a set of cross-cutting conditions that shaped the quantity and quality of engagement.

Overview of District Implementation

Overall, our findings indicate that our study districts interpreted the democratic engagement requirement in varied ways (Figure 2). First, districts identified *who* would participate in LCAP development and approval in one of three ways. The first group of districts identified the *who* in relatively narrow terms (Taft, Hayes, Washington). They often approached existing groups of select stakeholders (e.g., EL or parent advisories) to provide LCAP feedback and approval and often limited LCAP "community meetings" to a single or few meeting(s) located in district headquarters in which turnout was reported to be quite low and representation limited.

The second cluster of districts—Buchanan, Tyler, and Grant—fell near the middle, representative point on the horizontal spectrum. In this cluster, district leaders reported believing that the LCAP process demanded representation of the full array of stakeholders and that a smaller, representative group could fulfill the district's engagement needs.

Three other cases enacted the *who* in more inclusive terms, falling at the broader end of the spectrum (Cleveland, Harrison). These districts expanded participation beyond representation with strong meeting attendance or survey response rates. They also achieved the largest proportions of community participants and sought out nontraditional parents and CBOs to participate using multilingual print and social media, mail flyers, surveys, school websites, and televised board meetings. Some hosted engagement processes for students, who were then charged with recruiting parents.

Second, our analysis demonstrates variation in district-level interpretations and enactments of the *how* and *what* of LCFF community engagement. The majority of our study districts' depth of engagement was closer to the law's mandate for "consultation," constricting engagement to stakeholder input on existing state priorities or identifying district problems and goals—with virtually no attention to budget allocations. Overall, the majority of districts fell within *inform* and *consult* on the vertical spectrum, seeking stakeholder advice and feedback but no two-way communication. As one observer stated, "I'm not saying that individuals didn't care about what people were saying, but the dialogue and the discourse wasn't deep, at least in most of the sessions. It wasn't a real—it was a brain dump, and it was a rotating active kind of activity; but it wasn't really a discourse, or a dialogue." This type of input from meeting participants, along with surveys, served as the

basis for the majority of district engagement processes. Also, consistent with the policy intent, we did not observe deliberative practice in most districts: That is, stakeholders generally focused on individual not collective interests, and there was little reason-based discussion.

In a few districts, however, representative bodies engaged in a back-and-forth discussion over goals *and allocations* to be included in the LCAP. Tyler, for example, created an LCAP advisory committee with members nominated by constituency groups that included need-defined student groups (e.g., EL, FY), staff, and general student population. The district tasked this committee to develop an understanding of LCFF and LCAP, share input from their respective constituencies, negotiate priorities and budgets between competing demands, and establish goals to reflect district and state priorities. Harrison also created an advisory committee with a similar representation model. Unlike Tyler's, this group was empowered not to directly build LCAP goals but instead to be part of an engagement effort with the goal of informing the process and providing feedback on the LCAP.

Why did we see this variation in who participated across districts? Why did so few demonstrate deeper engagement? The following sections seek to answer these questions.

Who Participated

As Figure 2 illustrates, there was wide variation in the breadth of engagement across the case districts. What explains this variation? The answer lies in the different interpretations of who is "the community" and recruitment strategies. Responding to the LCFF call for stakeholder engagement was not a simple matter, and several tensions emerged within and across districts.

External versus internal stakeholders. District leaders differed in their beliefs about the extent to which internal (educators, students) and external (parents, citizens, community groups) stakeholders should be involved. While all districts agreed that it was important to involve parents, particularly those of students LCFF targeted (i.e., LI and EL), several struggled over the role of *teachers*. Cleveland, for example, prioritized parents and general citizens over representative groups such as teachers in their conception of who should be engaged. "We need to hear the voices from the community," said the superintendent, who explained that principals and school staff were not initially involved in LCAP meetings. A leader from the local teachers' union confirmed, noting that "the way they phrased it was for parents and community members … teachers didn't know that they were invited." While ultimately teachers were advised they could attend, their participation was said to be quite low given the confusion over who was considered "the community." Other districts shared in this debate over educator inclusion, and in a few cases, union officials reported frustration in their omission. In contrast,

a more participatory district, Harrison, deliberately staggered involvement first with internal then external stakeholders. The superintendent explained:

> Well, we actually did the first set of meetings with what I'll call inter-nal stakeholders. The reality was we had to figure out how does this actually go? How do you actually do this stuff? We did it with our teachers. We did it with our classified. We did it with our unions. We did it with 1,700 of our students. Those were actually, to some degree, easier just because there was already a pattern of communi-cation in—as an example, teachers or the teachers' union—having a voice or an interest in certain things. … We did those first, trying to get our head around this thing, before we went out and did the community thing.

Additionally, 3 of the 10 districts were particularly committed to solicit-ing student voice—administering surveys, ensuring representation on LCAP committees, and holding focus groups. Notably, Harrison learned that the majority of secondary students had smart phones and, utilizing that technol-ogy, placed posters with QSR codes linking to the district survey around high schools—enabling students to provide input via their phones and promoting high response rates.

Usual versus new players. Another source of tension for districts was how to involve more than the "usual players" who typically participate in activities but may not authentically represent the community. Leaders in sev-eral districts expressed concerns about the potential biases of those who attended meetings, served on LCAP advisory boards, or responded to sur-veys. "You have parent leaders who've been in certain leadership positions for many, many years, and they don't necessarily represent parents," said one administrator. "They just represent, basically, the school district." Several interviewees observed that higher income parents and women were more likely to participate in meetings and surveys. Others noted the difficulty of getting non-English-speaking and "traditionally disenfranchised" parents to attend meetings or serve on committees—reflecting the ways in which historical-structural issues and power imbalances can shape demo-cratic practice (Mansbridge, 1983; Marsh, 2007; Roberts, 2004). These educa-tors recognized, however, that the usual suspects had a deeper understanding of the district and how to participate and that casting a broader net could bring in individuals who are less "system savvy" (a topic we return to later).

In many districts, we observed attempts to reconcile this tension. For example, most published materials online and in print, translated meetings and materials, scheduled meetings at a variety of times and locations, and provided food and childcare. Several also used the "bring a friend" strategy, encouraging participants to "grab a friend or another parent who is not typ-ically involved and bring them in." Other districts went further. To expand

beyond the usual players, Tyler administrators recruited potential parent, student, and community representatives via extensive marketing on the district website and at district meetings and then carefully vetted them to ensure all major stakeholders were represented on their advisory committee. Administrators trained the committee on state-mandated priorities and district needs, including those of targeted subgroups. Once the group understood the background and priorities, they were instructed to use the input gathered from the district's broader engagement process and their own constituencies to collectively develop goals that would define the district's priorities. The teachers' union in Tyler also took steps to expand teacher voice by providing results of their own membership survey to their representative on the LCAP advisory—a move that might address critics' concerns that organizations do not always represent their "populations" in a legitimate way. As one observer commented, "our teachers' union did their own independent survey … so that when those representatives came to the group meetings they really were prepared about what was important to the people they represented."

Using a different strategy, Grant administrators invested heavily in a recruitment and training process to reach "nontraditional" parents and students. According to the district coordinator, this parent volunteers (PV) process was "a grassroots model utilized to gather authentic input and feedback on LCAP" and depended upon "key community organizing strategies of empowering community members as PVs to solicit their personal and professional networks to share information and gather input." PVs were trained to interact one-on-one with members of their networks to inform and gather input. Administrators then used the PV feedback to "inform decisions" and mandated that LCAP developers share and solicit input on each draft of the plan to ensure the final version accurately reflected stakeholder input. Through this process, Grant committed to inclusion, employing PVs who assisted in "making sure that we had cultural representation, language representation, students, the parents included, as well as parent partners," and were expected to "talk with maybe ten people in their immediate circle" to expand participation.

In contrast to Grant's district-led initiative, CBOs led the charge in other districts, hoping to educate and recruit "new" participants in the LCFF process—a strategy recognized in the literature as reducing participation bias and "mitigate[ing] the natural tendencies toward over-representation of the advantaged" (Fung, 2003, p. 348). (We return to efforts of intermediary organizations later in the paper.) In Harrison and Cleveland, for example, CBOs publicized and transported parents to LCFF meetings, thus broadening the scope of those traditionally engaged in school activities.

Summing up the challenges and choices. Like most democratic processes, LCFF policy called for inclusion of a range of stakeholders likely to

be affected by decisions around district goals, activities, and budget alloca-
tions. In an ideal democratic process, all potential "community" stakeholders
would be either directly involved or represented in the process. As
described, however, districts varied widely in the breadth of participation
they obtained. This variation stemmed in large part from a series of chal-
lenges and choices facing districts. The ambiguity around the definition of
"community" and different beliefs about the inclusion of internal versus
external stakeholders drove different inclusion strategies. Further, challenges
of recruitment were significant and tradeoffs between including usual and
new players were formidable. Historical power imbalances within communi-
ties also limited participation in some cases (a topic we revisit below).
Ultimately, the inability of four districts to achieve broad or representative
participation challenges the democratic nature of these endeavors and mis-
aligns with the state's intent. These limitations, however, could in theory be
attenuated if participants, however narrowly construed, are explicitly
directed to consider the interests of nonparticipants and all stakeholders,
and training and facilitation enforce this expectation. We turn now to an
examination of these dimensions of *how* participants engaged.

How Participation Unfolded

Figure 2 illustrates a clear pattern of relatively shallow engagement across
the case study districts—with stakeholders primarily providing input or con-
sultation on goals and little two-way dialogue or discussion of common inter-
ests (an outcome that in many ways aligns with the state's intent–recall that
while LCFF did not preclude deep models, it was not an explicit goal). Why
did so few districts engage stakeholders in deep ways? A set of tensions
help explain the challenges and choices districts faced as they implemented
LCFF. The first tension pertains to the scope of engagement, while the second
relates to the process of engagement and participant "voice."

Problems and goals versus solutions. One challenge facing districts per-
tained to their interpretation of the focus of engagement. Reflecting an
enduring dilemma in democratic engagement (Dewey, 1927),[10] districts
faced a choice between asking stakeholders to identify problems and
goals—topics in which they may have greater capacity and interest—and ask-
ing them to identify the services to address the problems and goals—topics
that may not align with community capacity or interest. While the transpar-
ency component of LCFF called on districts to solicit, respond to, and docu-
ment stakeholder feedback on budget allocations, only one district chose
this broad scope. Instead, the majority of cases engaged in what one observer
called "visioning exercises," consulting with or asking for input on broad
problems and priorities while leaving decisions on budget and addressing
LCFF-targeted student needs to central office staff who then wrote the

LCAP. Many districts also made important allocation decisions—such as salary and school site funding allocations—prior to or apart from the LCAP development process.[11] Some defended choices to narrow the scope by noting that community members lacked interest in these details (we return to these arguments below when discussing cross-cutting themes).

Not all stakeholders were satisfied with this narrowing of the scope. One observer noted that district meetings included "no meaningful conversation of the budget process" and believed "parents would appreciate knowing more details about the new funding." A CBO leader said:

> It was [central office] staff left at their discretion to use that input and then present it to the board … I don't think community groups like ours and others were really satisfied that parents and community organizations were sufficiently part of the development of the actual LCAP, but we also recognize that the district created a process to engage a large number of parents.

Similarly, in another case, community advisory group members complained to the district that "the structure of their involvement was too narrow and controlled to allow for any meaningful input" (anonymized report, research institute, 2015).[12] Other stakeholders may not have been aware that their input could have focused on budget decisions—an example of a more subtle form of power at play. In fact, the narrowing of scope observed in these districts reflects a long-identified political strategy of agenda-setting as a political strategy. Power is exhibited when issues are prevented from surfacing or being raised (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962)—in this case, when leaders keep budget issues off the agenda because they anticipate possible opposition, conflict, or negative consequences.

All voices versus the loudest voices. In an ideal democratic process, all participants should have equal opportunity to have their voice heard. This is important for ensuring that decisions reflect the needs of the community rather than simply powerful interests and, in some conceptions of democracy, for allowing participants to learn about and negotiate around broader community needs and the collective good. Thus, how the process is structured matters greatly for achieving these aims. Districts in this study, however, appeared to struggle to achieve this ideal. As noted, many interviewees acknowledged the difficulty of recruiting stakeholders, particularly traditionally disenfranchised groups, and reported a struggle to ensure their substantive participation even when they were present at meetings. One district official lamented that there were "many parents from … more well-healed schools" attending meetings even though they "weren't getting a lot of [LCFF] money." These parents, the official explained, "understand that they can put something into the system" and were vocal about their desire to reduce class size and tended to drown out other parents "who

were very interested in helping and doing good, but did not have the system savvy."

We heard a similar narrative in at least five other districts (Hayes, Buchanan, Breckenridge, Washington, Taft). In one, we were told that "a good 20 percent of the first LCAP meeting … was comprised of parents and teachers from that elementary school—that wasn't the target audience [of LCFF], but they were trying to make sure that the needs of their school were met." Observers in other districts reported that higher income parents and parents of gifted children showed up and advocated strongly for expanding programs for their students, resulting in some cases in LCAPS with increased funding for gifted and talented and music programs and AP courses.

In larger districts, observers noted that organized groups and advocacy organizations often held greater influence over LCAP development than unorganized parents or smaller groups. One observer explained, "when the United Way speaks, the district listens." In fact, in these districts, considerable activity occurred outside of the formal LCFF engagement structures, including coalition-building and well-organized lobbying. One advocacy group participating in a state-wide coordinated effort to increase funding for Restorative Justice (RJ)[13] explained, "we actually started a campaign to work with school board members and the superintendent to put in language specifically [to] increase funding to that area." Some organizations defended these tactics on the grounds that they felt excluded from the formal LCAP deliberations. One explained, "because we weren't part of the process, integrated into the internal district process, we had to go beyond. We had to do much more work to make sure that our voices were heard and that we were part of the creation of the LCAP." A critical observer in another district noted "other stakeholders had more freedom to bypass the formal district forums and drive their own agenda" with one-on-one meetings with school board members and community rallies (anonymized report, research institute, 2015).[14]

These examples together demonstrate the ways power imbalances shaped implementation. If in fact engagement led to allocations for the loudest voices, this narrative potentially undermines the democratic nature of LCFF engagement and, in some cases, its intent to target resources to high-needs students. Such allocation decisions may not be as "legitimate" or "fair" because they were not part of a democratic process but instead were based on elite "muscle" to engage directly with district leaders (Fung, 2003, p. 344) or to more forcefully assert their views in meetings (Marsh, 2007). Returning to an example cited above, while RJ programs targeted high-needs students and may have been the best option, the informal lobbying precluded opportunities for the broader community to openly discuss the potential tradeoffs of allocating resources to this program versus others. Interestingly, four of our largest case districts allocated LCFF funding to RJ. Further, expanding gifted programs may not have benefited all students, nor markedly the LCFF target groups.

Nevertheless, in some cases, districts and community members attempted to provide greater balance to the engagement process by aiding the quieter voices. In a few districts (Harrison, Grant), central office staff took on the role of advocate for less vocal stakeholders. One administrator worked to educate parents prior to meetings, noting "my role I think is to engage more nontraditional parents and students … so folks … already have a little bit of familiarity with this issue or LCFF." She also pushed to ensure the voice of foster youth was included in the LCAP development process, organizing separate focus groups for those students: "I felt like it was really important to engage them authentically." In other districts (Harrison, Vanburan, Cleveland), administrators partnered with CBOs to co-facilitate meetings that brought out traditionally marginalized voices.

One of the more deep-leaning districts, Harrison, invested in multiple strategies to address potential power imbalances in participant contribution. District leaders believed that having a website and phone line for anonymous input "allowed for more honest and direct feedback from some that would not feel able to do so in a public forum." To ensure stakeholders felt "they're actually being heard when they talk," meeting facilitators ran meetings without a time limit so that all attendees could say what they wanted ("I'm going to stick around until you're done."). According to observers, facilitators deftly avoided influencing dialogue and taking up "too much air time." In a move rarely heard in other districts, these facilitators also encouraged participants to think beyond their individual interests. In describing his facilitation of student LCAP meetings, one administrator said, "I went out and talked to the high school kids, we talked about …where we were missing the mark in terms of their education. It was, 'what should school be like?' Not, 'what is school, but where should it be going? Don't just think about yourself, think about your little brothers, your little sisters and cousins. This is a long-term conversation.'" A Spanish-speaking parent echoed the perceived focus on the collective good, noting that at meetings "they explained them [powerpoints] in English and in Spanish and we felt very comfortable. … It was very nice because like I said, we were all united for one same cause and that was the children." Yet if lobbying occurred outside of the formal meetings, as described above, one might question whether this parent and others were misled about the authenticity of their voice. In fact, one official acknowledged that despite district efforts to prevent this, "loud voices" remained powerful forces in district decision making.

Interestingly, an important potential mediator of this tension—the school board—was noticeably absent in the study districts. Without a structured process pushing participants to consider the needs of all stakeholders and how to allocate resources in ways that promote the "common good" of the district, board members could have played an important role in weighing needs of interest groups and acting as the "moral constituents" for those less vocal or not present (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996). Although a majority of

districts indicated on their LCAP that they kept their boards informed of the LCAP through standard monthly board agenda items, we found that board members were not active in this process as a mediator or as a community representative. One superintendent commented, "there was a member that showed up [to LCFF meetings] several times, but our board was nowhere to be found, essentially, for the vast majority [of these meetings]."

Summing up the challenges and choices. As noted at the outset, state policy documents and leaders conveyed a strong orientation toward shallow engagement but provided districts with considerable discretion over how to structure the engagement process. Perhaps not surprisingly, in practice, we observed relatively shallow engagement across the case districts, with stakeholders either receiving information or providing consultation. Across the sample, districts faced a tension of including stakeholders in deliberations over problems and goals versus proposed strategies and budget allocations. Even though the law requires it, we found only one district chose to include budget decisions within the scope of LCAP deliberations, suggesting that most districts were either unaware of the ability or unwilling to expand the scope or, as some of our evidence suggests, believed stakeholders were not interested in engaging in this way (as we discuss further below, this defense may reflect a more ingrained belief system skeptical of community engagement). Second, when faced with challenges of ensuring that all, and not simply more vocal, participants engaged substantively in the process, a few invested in strategies to assist quieter voices. Combined with the previous findings regarding limited participation, the pervasive lack of strategies attending to quieter voices and the efforts to narrow the scope of deliberations once again illustrate the ways in which power shaped engagement and challenged the realization of LCFF's democratic goals.

Cross-Cutting Conditions Shaping the Quantity and Quality of Engagement

Our analysis further surfaced four conditions that help us understand the ways in which democratic engagement played out across districts—conditions associated with "outlier" cases that achieved broader and/or deeper forms of engagement and that may have assisted in overcoming the challenges surfaced above. Importantly, in our cross-case analysis, we found no systematic patterns among several of the "supporting conditions" highlighted in the literature as predictive of broader and/or deeper forms of engagement. For example, we found leadership verbally committed to community engagement in most districts, and while perhaps necessary, this was not sufficient to predict broader/deeper forms of engagement.

Institutional-political forces resisting change. LCFF called upon districts, parents, and community organizations to serve in new roles, and at times,

these expectations conflicted with deeply held beliefs and taken-for-granted ways of operating.[15] At times, these expectations also challenged the traditional power base and interests of stakeholder groups. These institutional-political tensions surfaced repeatedly across the study districts and help explain the observed patterns in the quantity and quality of engagement. While all districts faced these pressures, outlier cases demonstrated slightly different profiles regarding these broader forces.

First, several interviewees commented on the compliance mindset pervasive within central offices that colored district responses to the local control mandate. "There's [sic] a lot of habits that exist around thinking through a compliance frame," said one intermediary organization leader. This respondent and others noted that district administrators are unfamiliar with collaborating with the community around district policy and budget and have spent their careers addressing federal and state compliance requirements. Moreover, for decades, federal and state policies have framed community participation as one of discrete advisement on single issue or student groups (e.g., EL advisory) or school-level governance, rather than the broader, "meaningful" engagement called for under LCFF. Many believed these "habits of mind" will take time to change.

Yet some believed change was imminent and noted shifts occurring—particularly around administrators' willingness to be less district-directed. This shift was most evident in districts exhibiting deeper levels of engagement (Tyler, Harrison). A Tyler leader explained their approach as "a broken record," emphasizing that "you have to begin the conversation on 'what are the needs, what are the needs, what are the needs, what are the needs?' before anybody can talk about 'you can or can't do that because of the costs.'" The Harrison superintendent described a similar tact and explicit mindset shift: "I think there was a real flip in us telling the community what was going to happen versus the community telling us what was going to happen." As a first-year superintendent in the district (the only one in our sample), Harrison's leader appeared to view LCFF's engagement mandate as an opportunity to build relationships and political capital, which may have emboldened this inclusive mindset. Other more typical districts acknowledged changes were imminent. A Grant administrator described the first year as "a learning year," in which "each additional meeting became more focused and … just a little tighter in terms of let's make sure we're not talking, where we're listening." Some infused this shift into their LCAP, as one case did, stating "these sessions served an additional function of providing a venue for community voice and signaled the n*ew way that the district will be working with the community* to develop the LCAP" (emphasis added).

Nevertheless, outside observers at times maintained that district leaders, administrators, and board members were entrenched in and protective of their traditional roles and ways of behaving. As noted earlier, some districts defended their choice to limit discussion to problems and goals because

parents were reportedly not interested in discussing solutions or budgets. These district leaders often embraced traditional views of parent roles. One superintendent noted:

> The reality is, these are moms and dads. … They weren't into "let's talk about the budget" and "how many dollars did you spend here versus … how many dollars did you get from the state?" They just want it fixed. They really don't care about the mechanism that's behind it.

Yet not everyone agreed with this assessment and questioned the "paternalistic assumptions" about what parents are interested in and "capable of absorbing." These respondents tended to portray the decision to limit the scope of conversations as one of protecting district interests—as noted earlier, a political strategy of "agenda setting" and illustration of power preventing issues from surfacing. One intermediary observer believed the district intentionally avoided LCFF funding discussions because leaders wanted to avoid "a resource grab" and maintain control over the budget. This interviewee believed the district "made decisions about funds before they even engaged the community. They weren't the only ones [districts in the state] who did that. … They were trying to protect some of their fact-selling needs." Even an administrator within this district concurred: "Never in my experience, and I went to a couple of them [meetings], [did I hear] any discussion of resource allocation. … They were, I think, pretty purposeful in that because they didn't want to get into any kind of potential discussion around resources with 200, 300 parents at some different sessions."

The perception of entrenched ways of operating also pertained to school boards in virtually all districts. A few interviewees commented that board members were unaccustomed to interfacing so directly with community and mediating the engagement process. One district leader explained:

> They should be facilitators of the community conversation, but I think traditionally, they've been middle-managers, overseers of a statewide process, making sure … we weren't fraudulent, didn't spend our money in the wrong way … as opposed to how do we facilitate a good conversation within our community and respond to that conversation.

This same leader, along with at least one other, noted that board members were also generally unfamiliar with collaborative processes and were more of an obstacle than substantive participant:

> We just went past the board at a high rate of speed because I think they kept looking for "Well, when do we get to tell you what to do?" The reality is they have a role in that, but the "tell you what to do part" has really been usurped, if done appropriately, by the local community that has said, "Here are our priorities."

In other districts, board members appeared to be tied to their traditional ways of operating. One Washington school board member explained, "From the board's perspective, the only change happened was [that] the LCAP was done. The budget was developed similarly" and "We just had to change the name. So we had concentration money, now we have to assign it to a program. But not that the program was all that different."

Collectively, the compliance mindset, protective posturing, and political strategizing may help explain the pattern of narrowed scope and one-way communication observed across most districts. These institutional-political pressures may also account for the difficulties districts faced with recruiting new players and ensuring inclusion of quieter voices. There were signs, however, that in outlier cases, shifts were beginning to occur in this institutional-political environment where leaders were trying on new ways of thinking and interacting with community members.

Capacity and partnerships. Another cross-cutting challenge districts faced was reconciling the ambitious intent of LCFF with the often limited district and community capacity. These difficulties affected both who participated and how they engaged in the process.

First, although most districts intended to involve a broad range of stakeholders, they were often limited in the staff, time, and knowledge of how to bring these individuals to the table. Given the rushed timeline of LCFF in the first year, many complained that they lacked time to conduct broad outreach, invest in strategies to expand participation, and hire staff or partner with others to support this work. One district leader explained, "One of our biggest challenges was how do we communicate when [the] airplane is being built while it's in the air."

District capacity limitations also greatly affected the *quality* of engagement. Once again, limited expertise and manpower often constrained the scope and nature of deliberations. All of the districts realized that surveys were important to ensuring "all voices" were heard, but some had little survey experience. One reported borrowing questions from a county survey and later realized that the questions limited the scope of input solicited. In several cases, community members complained about districts' overuse of "educationese" and inability to clearly communicate with stakeholders. According to one observer, parents had a prior understanding of "school safety and student engagement," but "there was a missed [district] opportunity to educate parents about those priorities for which they were less familiar." Further, districts demonstrated limited understanding of the various forms of engagement. One district leader clearly stated an intent to involve community members as "partners," implying a conception of two-way communication, but then went on to describe activities as "we're informing them," conveying a one-way orientation.

As referenced earlier, district leaders also debated parents' capacity to engage in LCFF discussions. In one district, the majority of the community lacked legal citizenship status or "experience with democracy." In others, administrators questioned the skills of parents who were legal citizens: "Lots of people [were] in a room [for community meetings] and we're trying to have really complex conversations around budgets and fiscal issues that lots of folks don't understand." In another case, a district official believed a lack of "system savvy" explained why some parents were drowned out by more seasoned parent activists pushing for their particular interests.

Interestingly, traditional measures of district capacity (per-pupil administrator ratios, fiscal health) and community capacity (income level) were not systematically associated with the outlier cases. It seemed that nearly all of the districts and/or communities suffered from limited capacity in some way, with a few exceptions. However, partnering with external organizations to build capacity emerged as a key condition among cases demonstrating broader and deeper engagement. In fact, the three case districts with the broadest level of engagement (Harrison, Cleveland, Vanburan) involved intermediary organization(s) belonging to state or national networks to improve community outreach, education, and grassroots organizing. In all three, CBOs assisted with broadening and increasing nontraditional member engagement compared to districts without external resources.

In some districts, intermediary organizations also contributed to slightly deeper levels of engagement. Several worked with nonprofit organizations to provide training in and support for LCAP development. Other local administrators mentioned building capacity through assistance from professional organizations. In Cleveland, external groups trained meeting facilitators and sent observers to district meetings to ensure facilitators remained neutral. They also helped district administrators structure and frame meetings. In Harrison and Vanburan, CBOs trained parents and advisory committee members on LCFF and provided background information on school quality and the role they might play in LCAP development.

Other organizations helped district leaders analyze the community input data and provided feedback on improving the process. Harrison hired an outside organization experienced in community engagement to attend district- and non-district-sponsored meetings. District leaders believed this partnership would help them "get past all the normal barriers to make sure that we're really communicating." Early on, the organization provided feedback on the community meetings, such as "people aren't getting it because … you haven't created clear pathways for them to communicate with you, or you're not hearing what they're saying." Based on this feedback, the district reevaluated its strategy and made changes such as conducting meetings and publishing documents in stakeholders' primary languages and then translating into English instead of vice versa.

Climates of trust and mistrust. In several districts, limited social capital and strained district–community and district–union relations complicated engagement efforts. In Taft, a district with notably shallow engagement, both district leaders and teachers described a "culture of distrust" among the community in that even with the LCFF mandates for engagement, "there was never really full disclosure, and there was no intent to involve people." In Vanburan, a district with similar preexisting community conditions, one community observer explained, "Public perceptions of LCFF: Most don't know anything about it. Lots [are] jaded about [Vanburan], [and] so suspicious." These districts started LCFF implementation with a very weak foundation of trust.

In contrast, other districts entered the first year of LCFF with a strong foundation or, in some cases, a recent strategic planning effort that had already brought many of the same stakeholders to the table. These climates appeared to facilitate deeper forms of engagement. In Tyler, a district demonstrating the deepest level of engagement relative to the other cases, the community benefited from a history of trust in the district and strong social capital prior to LCFF. In fact, it was the only case to demonstrate a strong climate of district–community *and* district–union trust. "We have that ability to reach out to parents and continue the conversation we had all along," one district official boasted. "I think that felt seamless that they had the right to give this input." Tyler's preexisting, inclusive decision-making processes also may have bolstered stakeholders' buy-in for and capacity to engage in LCFF. Rather than the skepticism observed in other cases, in Tyler several external stakeholders attested to the genuine intentions of district officials. When describing the LCAP process, a teachers' union leader explained, "[They are] trying to see if you have available funds to address those needs. It's a major mind shift. I think this district took it very, very seriously."

Harrison had a culture of mistrust prior to the current superintendent and LCFF. To change this culture, the new administration used the LCFF engagement mandate as an opportunity to reach out through multiple means and build trust. A community member explained the district shift this way: "In one year's time because of this approach they're taking—and the things that they've started to change—they have done more to change the nature of their relationship around trust than has been accomplished in years in their community. I think that's pretty remarkable." Although Harrison leaders reported strong relations with the community, there were signs of mistrust among teachers. The union president explained, "There is room for us to get more involved—and I would welcome it." Even though Harrison was successful in garnering broader participation than did Tyler (largely due to the array of CBOs helping to recruit), the depth of participation may not have achieved that found in Tyler due to the mixed climates of trust.

Homogeneity. Finally, the nature of the population served by each district may have contributed to relative differences observed across the cases.

Contrary to some predictions in the literature, smaller size did not guarantee broader or deeper forms of engagement. The districts achieving the broadest levels of engagement were large (Harrison) and small (Cleveland), and some used technology (e.g., online surveys) to overcome obstacles of scale and reach broader audiences.

What appeared to matter more was the level of diversity in these districts. In fact, the two districts demonstrating the broadest relative engagement, Harrison and Cleveland, were the most homogenous in the sample.[16] This homogeneity may have contributed to an ease with which community members engaged and simplified the coordination of engagement for district leadership because members spoke a common language and there were few competing voices. For example, the community in Harrison advocated for expanding academic English classes for parents. Hearing this feedback through multiple outreach venues, the district shifted funding from elsewhere in the budget to support the requested classes. While homogeneity in Harrison may have promoted harmony in community requests, at least one district leader recognized a potential downside: "When you have diverse groups, people learn from each other, and they learn what's good and maybe what doesn't work for them. We don't have that here." Although the potential for learning may have been greater, the potential *for conflict* is what we observed in heterogeneous cases—conflict that may have challenged efforts to organize deeper forms of engagement. Interest groups in one diverse district expressed vastly different goals for the new funds: Some wanted to invest in school climate and social justice programs while others advocated for EL instructional programs. This conflict appeared to contribute to district leaders' decision to develop the budget with limited community input.

In summary, intuitional-political forces, capacity, trust, and population characteristics contributed to the quality and quantity of engagement across districts. Lacking personnel, time, social capital, and common interests, many districts struggled to engage in broad and deep ways. Districts demonstrating broader and/or deeper engagement benefited from changing institutional mindsets, homogeneity, a history of trust, and often the assistance of intermediary organizations.

Conclusion and Implications

This implementation study provided an early analysis of local district and community efforts to develop budgets and plans to improve student achievement. It offered a unique opportunity to examine whether the statewide mandate for local democratic participation resulted in broad or deep engagement and what factors supported or inhibited these processes. Consistent with past studies, we find that even when district leaders embrace the notion of broad and/or deep community engagement, achieving this

vision may be challenging, if not elusive (Fung, 2004; Malen & Ogawa, 1988; Marsh, 2007; Marsh et al., 2015). Below, we reflect on our findings regarding the who, what, how, and facilitators of engagement and conclude with implications for policy, practice, and future research.

Summarizing and Reflecting

Who participates. Similar to prior research, we find that citizen participation was low (Gyurko & Henig, 2010; Levin, Daschbach, & Perry, 2010; Marsh et al., 2015; Menefee-Libey, 2010). This is perhaps not surprising given the anemic rates of democratic participation in California education more generally. A 2015 statewide poll revealed that 22.5% of parents and 24.1% of registered voters reported participating in school board elections and 28.6% of parents and 11.4% of registered voters attended school board meetings (*PACE/USC Rossier Poll*, 2015). Accordingly, increasing political engagement in traditional education governance has been challenging.

Beyond quantity, our study also found limitations in the representative makeup of participants. In both small and large districts, those who turned out often represented a limited sector of the community, often the more "well-heeled" citizens rather LCFF targeted groups. This finding is consistent with prior studies of democratic engagement in education (Fung & Wright, 2001; Lerner, 2011; Marsh et al., 2015; Wampler, 2012).

Finally, our analysis uncovered the considerable challenges districts faced in their attempts to comply with LCFF policy and to include a range of stakeholders in LCAP development. Notably, variation in breadth of participation related to district efforts to reconcile tensions regarding how to define "community"—including the decision to involve internal versus external stakeholders and usual versus new players. The limited involvement and representation raises questions about the democratic nature of these efforts and are particularly troubling given the intent of LCFF and its explicit focus on supporting the very groups underrepresented in case study engagement efforts.

How and for what purpose. In the end, the majority of districts engaged in relatively shallow engagement, providing information and soliciting one-way input or consultation on district goals and priorities, which administrators took under advisement when creating the LCAP. Consistent with prior research at the school and district levels (Davies, 1981; Hill & Bonan, 1991; Malen & Ogawa, 1988; Malen et al., 1990; Murphy & Beck, 1995; Rollow & Bennett, 1996; Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992), it was far less common to find stakeholders engaged in topics more central to the core technology of districts, in this case decisions around strategies and budget. Combined with the pervasive challenge of ensuring all, not just the loudest, voices are heard further raises questions about LCFF's ability to achieve its democratic goals—a topic we return to below.

Conditions associated with broader and deeper engagement. Several key conditions help explain the few examples of broader and/or more collaborative engagement. These districts trusted stakeholders to broach topics of services and funding and invested in ways to assist quieter voices. They also benefited from less entrenched institutional habits and political pressures, greater capacity derived in part from intermediary assistance, stronger climates of trust, and homogeneous populations. While these findings are consistent with extant literature (see review above), they also push in new directions. Notably, our understanding of trust extends beyond relationships between community members and districts (the focus of past studies; e.g., Bryk et al., 1998; Marsh, 2007) and indicates that district relations with teachers' associations contribute to the climate shaping democratic engagement. We also add to the debate over scale and affirm that size alone may be less important than the makeup of the population and other contributing factors (Bryk et al., 1998).

Implications

These observed patterns of engagement challenge the democratic vision of LCFF policy. If in fact the state seeks "meaningful engagement" in LCFF, as is stated in the regulations, what more can be done to enhance this democratic process? The following implications for policy, practice, and future research seek to answer this question. We offer these suggestions with a caveat: Given that the first year of any reform likely has challenges, we recognize that implementers are apt to amend processes in subsequent years based on implementation learning and that some changes may be occurring.

Implications for state policy. Our research indicates that state policymakers have an opportunity to strengthen the democratic mechanisms of LCFF, and to do so, they may need to draw on a broader array of policy tools. Policymakers should invest in (1) building district and community capacity to engage individuals, particularly from underserved groups; (2) identifying strategies, tools, and practices of districts engaging in deeper and broader forms of engagement; and (3) sharing resources with district and community leaders. Such tools might include protocols for discussions that ensure two-way dialogue and bring in quieter voices. Sharing these strategies might weaken ingrained beliefs and practices resisting change, building new understandings of what constitutes legitimate forms of district–community interactions. These efforts could come from the state, county offices of education, and the new California Collaborative for Educator Excellence.

Our research also surfaces several questions worth considering as the state moves forward in implementing LCFF. While this is the first year of data, it raises questions about sustainability. Notably, how will repetition of the process affect the quality and quantity of engagement over time? On the one hand, repetition may contribute to democratic fatigue (an

outcome recognized in studies of participatory budgeting; e.g., Souza, 2001). Will district leaders and participants have the commitment and interest to invest in this process annually? How will the state and counties hold districts accountable for *what* they are engaging their community in (e.g., decisions on budgets vs. goals), not just *who* they are engaging? The outcomes of the process may also influence stakeholder motivation to participate in the future. If participants do not recognize their input in the final LCAP, they may feel less willing to invest in the future—an outcome observed in past studies of democratic education reforms (e.g., Marsh, 2007; Musso et al., 2007). Also, as new families enter districts each year and old ones graduate or move, there will always be a set of stakeholders for which this process will be new. Further, the recurrence of this process may enhance the quality of engagement. As scholars have noted (e.g., Fung, 2003), repeated participation may improve democratic skills and disposition (e.g., how to cooperate with others who may have different viewpoints).

The conceptual framework used in this study raises another important question for policymakers to consider. As noted, state policymakers embraced a relatively shallow democratic model for LCFF, requiring opportunities for information sharing and input and explicitly directing stakeholders to advocate for their particular interests with discretion for districts to engage in deeper forms should they chose. As our data indicate, in many cases, this led to advocacy by louder groups who may not have fully represented the needs of those less vocal or not present. This pattern raises questions as to whether or not the state (and districts) should consider promoting a more deliberative model that pushes stakeholders to consider allocating resources in ways that promote the "common good" of the district and its community. In theory, such a process would promote investments that go beyond funding programs to satisfy needs of particular groups, to investments that holistically address the needs of the district, and to ensure equity across schools and students—with an understanding that equity does not always mean treating everyone equally. Such a model clearly aligns with the equity-oriented goals of LCFF. In this alternative process, the needs of less vocal and unorganized groups (or those not present) should be considered through explicit expectations that participants consider all needs. Such a process, in theory, would also help stakeholders learn the values and needs of others in ways that more shallow models may preclude.

Of course, implementing such a model is not straightforward. While some argue that enacting deliberative democracy is impractical (Farrelly, 2003; Posner, 2009; Walzer, 1999), others have shown that it is in fact feasible but requires investments in educating participants and providing proper facilitation, language support, and other resources that enhance the ability of underrepresented individuals to attend and participate as equals (Bryk et al., 1998; Fung, 2001; Marsh, 2007; Marsh et al., 2015; McDonnell & Weatherford, 2000b) (see "Implications for local practice" for additional

ideas). The consideration of using a more deliberative practice may also raise questions about the importance of breadth versus depth. It would behoove policymakers to consider whether the potential benefits of deeper engagement of a representative group that considers the needs of the entire community outweigh those of a broader process that engages more participants in one-way communication. There also may be risks with representative democratic groups (e.g., ensuring the representatives retain value alignment with constituency), although these issues may be minimized through increased transparency and community relationship building. Involving only a representative group could shift costs away from recruiting large numbers of participants to preparing fewer to engage more deeply. And if such investments are not feasible or desirable, the notion of promoting the common good could be used in messaging around LCFF as a hortatory tool (Schneider & Ingram, 1990) to encourage a broader purpose for LCAP development and a more consistent focus on promoting equity as well as excellence.

Another important question relates to the nature of engagement over time. Some scholars note that democratic models are not static (Bryk et al., 1998: Mansbridge, 1983). Certain models may be needed at different points in time even within the same district. Our research suggests that perhaps deeper–broader models are possible when there are stronger climates of trust, but that in a context of conflict districts may need to rely on more representative, less collaborative models.

This research also points to questions about the proper level at which to engage stakeholders: district versus school. Some respondents suggested that the community and parents would have been more engaged if the process had been organized at the school level. Echoing Fung's (2003) description of "hot deliberation," these individuals suggest that "participants have greater motivations to correctly align their ideas and views with their interests and values" (p. 348) and participate in greater numbers if decision-making shifts to the school in which they have greater stakes in the decision outcomes. Stakeholders also might arrive with more relevant knowledge, as they are likely to be more familiar with a school's students and issues than those of a district. There may also be stronger foundations of trust between educators and parents. Yet shifting to the school level might threaten democratic goals, as it leaves individuals looking out for their interests and not those of the district. As research on participatory budgeting in Brazil found, these microlevel deliberations may not assist government officials with making tradeoffs that inevitably must occur when faced with limited resources (Fung, 2003) and may further blur the focus on equity.

Implications for local practice. Our findings suggest several potential action steps that could improve the quality and quantity of engagement. First, district and community stakeholders should consider investing in

strategies to broaden representation and involvement of traditionally under-represented individuals, such as targeted outreach, training, skilled facilitation, and tool development. Districts should also consider anchoring LCAP engagement around community *needs* rather than individual *wants* by using data and maintaining interaction over time to build trust in ways that broaden participant diversity. As illustrated by several cases, intermediary organizations are well-placed to provide this support, promoting outreach, mobilizing underrepresented community members, distributing LCFF information, and educating stakeholders.

Whereas the early implementation of LCFF found school board members continuing in their traditional role of approving district budgets, LCFF's mandate for community engagement increases the opportunity for members to promote their constituencies' voice and mediate power imbalances. They can attend to the needs of quieter voices and those not represented to create a collective vision that serves all students. It behooves local boards and their state association to train members to better realize this key role and consider incentives that might motivate shifts in their current orientations (e.g., awards and recognition for notable involvement).

Implications for research. Building on prior research (Fung, 2003; Marsh, 2007; Marsh et al., 2015), our analysis demonstrates the value of employing democratic theory to examine mandates for community engagement, while adjusting ideal types to capture the realities of democracy in practice. It provides conceptual clarity on the *who, what,* and *how* of engagement and creates a sound theoretical spectrum from which to build a deeper understanding of policy interpretation and implementation. Future studies could examine the outcomes associated with different enacted models, including outcomes related to LCAP implementation (e.g., fidelity to plan, quality of activities, budget allocations) and to intermediate and long-terms results (e.g., progress toward meeting LCAP goals for target groups). To understand ultimately how the LCFF effort plays out, researchers should examine these processes over time and any adaptations made after the first year. They might also probe deeper into the different contexts in which these democratic experiments unfold and the influence of factors such as civic capacity (Stone, 2001) and governance arrangements (e.g., at-large versus regional school boards).

Finally, scholars should consider applying a more critical lens to the implementation of LCFF and similar policies. Feminist and other critical scholars have long critiqued various forms of democratic engagement for silencing underrepresented groups (see Gambetta, 1998; Sanders, 1997; Young, 1997 for critiques of deliberative democracy). Such perspectives may shed further light on the patterns of participation we started to uncover in our study and the ways in which social categories such as class, ethnicity, race, gender, and sexuality shape the process and outcomes of engagement.

Only the future will determine whether LCFF realizes its democratic goals or symbolizes another fleeting instance of "policy talk" to decentralize decision-making (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Notes

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[1]This section of our paper draws heavily on Marsh, 2007.

[2]According to Mansbridge (1983), modern interest-based theorists believe that there is no common good or public interest. As a result, "voters pursue their individual interests by making demands on the political system in proportion to the intensity of their feelings. Politicians, also pursuing their own interests, adopt policies that buy them votes, thus ensuring accountability. … From the interchange between self-interested voters and self-interested brokers emerge decisions that come as close as possible to a balanced aggregation of individual interests" (p. 17).

[3]Fung (2006) notes that most public decisions are determined by officials' technical expertise without citizen input and places this option at the end of the continuum. We have omitted this option as it is not relevant to LCFF.

[4]Our initial analysis used a figure more akin to Marsh (2007) with the horizontal spectrum defined by participatory at one end and representative at the other. Upon completing our analysis, we realized that in practice, LCFF engagement and other forms of civic engagement do not always achieve these democratic ideals and that many cases would fall "off the map." As such, we adjusted the figure used in our final analysis to capture nonrepresentative options.

[5]The authors use different terms to describe these forms of engagement—such as deliberative, participatory, unitary, strong—but generally coalesce around understandings aligned with the deeper and broader forms of engagement as illustrated in Figure 1. We choose to focus on these deeper and broader types because (1) state policy leaned toward broader forms of engagement with the option to push on depth and (2) our analysis revealed very few cases at these ends of the spectra, making it particularly interesting to understand what explains these outliers.

[6]Policymakers report targeting the LI, EL, and FY groups because they believed that to be equitable, these students needed additional resources. Policymakers chose not to fund students based on racial/ethnic lines because they were attempting to shift the finance system away from the old categorical funding model. State leaders agreed that while not ideal the targeted groups would encompass all LI, FY, and EL students from any racial/ethnic group (Hall, 2016).

[7]One of the authors of this study, Dr. Michael Kirst, served as a long-time education advisor to Governor Jerry Brown, helped author the Governor's platform when he ran for office in 2011, and was appointed president of the state school board once Brown was elected. Together they actively guided the passage of LCFF into law (Hall, 2016).

[8]The eight priorities are as follows: student achievement, school climate, basic services, implementation of Common Core standards, student engagement, parental involvement, course access, and other student outcomes.

[9]A few interviews with parents were conducted in Spanish with the assistance of a bilingual interpreter, and audio recordings were translated from Spanish to English prior to coding and analysis.

[10]Dewey (1927) argued citizens may be more adept at identifying problems than solutions: "The man who wears the shoe knows best that it pinches and where it pinches, even if the expert shoemaker is the best judge of how the trouble is to be remedied" (p. 207).

[11]Teacher salaries are subject to collective bargaining. LCFF is not explicit what portion of funds is available for bargaining.

[12]To maintain anonymity of districts, we are not including the name of the report or institute.

[13]According to the Department of Education, RJ practices include a set of both formal and informal practices designed to create a sense of community and prevent and respond to student wrongdoing (California Department of Education, 2017).

[14]To maintain anonymity of districts, we are not including the name of the report or institute.

[15]Our framing draws on neo-institutional theory, which asserts that individuals within organizations often follow similar "scripts," routines, and conceptions of roles—not because they necessarily lead to more efficient work, but because they are perceived to be required, expected, or morally right (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1995).

[16]Both scored less than 14 on the racial/ethnic diversity index. The Index reflects how evenly distributed these students are among the race/ethnicity categories reported to the California Department of Education. The more evenly distributed the student body, the higher the number. Currently the highest index for a school is 76 (California Department of Education, 2017).

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