

Addressing the best ways to empower the youth commission to influence decision making policies.

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ISSUE

West Contra Costa School District (WCCSD) is a diverse and varied community. The district itself consists of 5 cities and several unincorporated areas that are widely varied in need, socioeconomic status and achievement. This can pose challenges in identifying key areas for development and equitably distributing resources. As a district-wide coalition of students which functions within the school district, the West Contra Costa Youth Commission is a preexisting organization poised with the potential to close this disconnect by breaching the divide between students and decisions made by administrators. Further opportunity is presented through the WCCSD DLCAP, or the District Local Control Accountability Plan, a parent and community advisory committee that in 2017-2018 had over fifty-one-million-dollar budget. Yet the commission, due to diffuse leadership and an unclear vision has had trouble finding its place to help advise these funds both in receiving input from the student body and connecting to the larger administration of the school district. In this project I looked both at how to create a better youth commission as well as how to connect this commission to decisions and decision makers in the district.



WCCSD DLCAP 2017-2018
Funding Priorities

METHODS

Using a mixed methods approach, I conducted interviews with key stakeholders, reviewed materials on the background of WCCSD and the DLCAP process, did a literature reviews on youth engagement and surveyed current Youth Commission members. I found the Institute for Governance’s framework a particularly useful guide for analyzing the current state of the Youth Commission and understanding key areas for growth and used a best practice guide on the DLCAP from the Policy Analysis for Education as references for successful community outreach and engagement with the LCAP process.



WALTER & ELISE HAAS FUND



FINDINGS

Students in the Youth Commission are not representative of the school district as a whole, and not all schools are present at commission meetings and involved in decision making.

Students, school board members, DLCAP staff, teachers and administration see the value in a youth commission and have cross-cutting desire use the commission as a way to improve the school district as a whole.

Students are not always given effective or transparent pathways to decision makers have their voices make a difference in important decisions.

The role of the Youth Commission in the district is not understood within different administrative departments, the school board, leadership teachers or the larger student body.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Create targeted committees for students to represent within the commission that broadens the demographics of the current Youth Commission. These cross-cutting representatives can serve as experts in their community for the commission and may additionally already have strong networks that the commission can draw upon, such as invested staff and faculty.



Compensate students for their time. Compensating students for their time could help legitimize the youth commission as a serious endeavor and empower the students to do well in meetings, and encourage attendance. Giving students compensation also helps to diversify recruitment to youth who may not be able to afford taking time otherwise out of their schedules



Create more information transparency through a mentorship Program. Create a mentorship system, for each youth commissioner or set of commissioners, with existing faculty, administration, school board, and key community groups important to or involved in decision making within the district.



Set a concrete (yet adaptable) vision of the commission for the community at large. Work with youth to come up with a set vision and goals for the youth commission every year to help make the role of the youth commission apparent to students, staff and administration as a place to voice their concerns about the school district.