

Richmond Community Informs and Transforms the Role of Family and Community Voice in the WCCUSD LCAP

Diana Casanova, GSE | PLUS Fellow 2019

ISSUE

The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) represents a significant shift in how California funds its schools. Established in 2013, the State of California founded LCFF on a principle of equity. Under this new law, the state uses a weighted pupil formula and allocates more money to school districts for high-need student subgroups as defined by the state: English learners (EL), foster youth (FY), and low income (LI) students. State funds take the form of base, supplemental, or concentration dollars. Every district receives the same amount of base dollars per student, determined by enrollment and grade span. Districts receive additional supplemental dollars based on their enrollment of the unduplicated count of the three student subgroups of EL, FY, and LI. If a district has a student enrollment of over 55% across all three high-need student subgroups (EL, FY, LI), they receive concentration dollars.

Baked into the funding formula are a new planning and implementation process. As part of LCFF, school districts are required to produce a Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), which documents how supplemental and concentration funds are allocated to improve student services, and academic and social emotional outcomes for the three high-need student subgroups. A key component of this process is that districts must engage parents, students, and the community as they develop their LCAP. As districts move forward in developing and implementing LCAPS, in some cases, community-based organizations play substantive roles to ensure that parents and students—especially those that represent the high-needs subgroups— are active participants in this new era of shared decision making and school governance.

The project examines the West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD) LCAP development and engagement process, focusing on the role that community based-organizations play in building capacity and supporting parents and students to work in partnership with the district. Specifically, the study focuses on The California Endowment's (TCE) Building Healthy Communities initiative and Healthy Richmond to investigate their influence in engaging stakeholders in the oversight and accountability of district-wide funding decisions.

METHODS

This qualitative case study documents the relationships between multiple stakeholders—district staff, nonprofit professionals, parents and students—as they navigate a landscape of nascent education finance reform and implement a process for stakeholder engagement and shared decision making. This in-depth descriptive analysis includes:

- A literature review that draws on the concepts of *civic capacity* and *field theory* to investigate the relationships of community stakeholders in WCCUSD and degree of collaboration to support educational reform agendas
- Document analysis of advocacy letters, meeting minutes, policy recommendations, and WCCUSD LCAP from SY 2014-2015 through SY 2018-19
- Direct observation from 2018-2019 WCCUSD LCAP general meetings
- Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders (e.g. families, community partners, district staff)

FINDINGS

1. Healthy Richmond plays a key role in building the capacity of parents and students to meaningfully engage in the LCAP process. Through leadership development, coaching and technical trainings, parents and students describe feeling empowered to participate.

“We actually were sitting at tables where we necessarily wouldn't sit. People really started listening to us. The work that we did at Healthy Richmond around the LCAP really helped to push a lot of the work that we are also doing independently outside in different areas because our voices were really strong, I think, at these tables.” *WCCUSD Parent Leader*

2. Healthy Richmond convenes a diverse coalition—direct service providers, organizing groups, legal advocates—with a regional equity focus and willingness to provide pro bono technical assistance to WCCUSD.
3. Shifting from conventional community organizing strategies to a more relational approach to engagement has fostered an emergent, yet tenuous, partnership between Healthy Richmond and WCCUSD.

“I think the value is just understanding the energy that's really out there. I mean, they (Healthy Richmond) were really involved last year around the positive school climate policy that we moved forward. So, I do see it as just a deeper understanding of what's important to the community.”

Matt Duffy, Superintendent, WCCUSD

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Continue to build trust and foster relationship between Healthy Richmond and WCCUSD, which would require:
 - a. Healthy Richmond to continue fostering a partnership approach with WCCUSD.
 - b. District to transition from internal to external facing decision-making processes.
2. WCCUSD commits to provide timely and meaningful data, along with aligning the LCAP feedback cycle so that it can inform district budget.
3. Adopt a student equity needs index to incorporate into budgeting and strategic planning.
4. In partnership with community, codify a process for authentic stakeholder engagement in district-wide school governance and integrate into school site council decision-making practice.
5. Advocate for statewide policy to provide school districts with more discrete guidance on LCAP family and community engagement.