

First-Year LCAP Implementation: A Summary of Five Reports

Compiled by the staff of the California Collaborative on District Reform

This document provides a very brief overview of findings, reflections, and recommendations from five studies of districts' experiences creating Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs) using the (since-revised) 2014 template. The five reports reviewed for this summary document were produced by representatives of the following organizations:

- Californians Together
- Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO)
- Public Advocates
- Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC)
- The Education Trust—West (EdTrust—West)

This overview outlines the cross-cutting findings and recommendations in these reports. For more information on each of the five pieces included in this synthesis, see the appendix beginning on page 3.

Findings

Transparency: All of the reports identify similar ways in which districts' first-year LCAPs lacked clarity. Four of the five reports found that most districts were not transparent about their funding sources and amounts. For example, the LAO reported that districts varied in terms of which funding allocations they chose to include in their LCAPs, and EdTrust—West found that one LCAP did not include numeric expenditure data at all. Compounding this issue, the reports noted insufficient links between funding and goals, actions, and services. Public Advocates, Californians Together, and EdTrust—West argued that many of the LCAPs they reviewed did not adequately link district supplemental and concentration funds to improved services, particularly for underserved student populations.

State Priorities: The reports also included findings on how districts addressed the eight state priorities and their required metrics. Public Advocates, the LAO, PPIC, and EdTrust—West reported that most districts did not adequately describe how they would make and measure progress towards all eight priorities and metrics. EdTrust—West noted that goals aligned to the priority areas were vague, and the LAO reported that most metrics did not differentiate or tier targets for different student groups. Californians Together reported similar findings specific to English learners (ELs); their review of LCAPs suggests that many LCAPs did not identify proficiency benchmarks for ELs that are needed to demonstrate progress.

Coherence: Four of the reports found that many LCAPs failed to articulate a clear connection between goals and actions, services, and programs. EdTrust—West identified some districts that represented exceptions to this pattern and PPIC highlighted sample language from actual LCAP documents they reviewed to distinguish strong goals and actions from weaker ones. Nevertheless, the authors of these four reports generally agreed that most LCAPs required improvement in order for readers to fully understand the coherence of various elements in districts' proposed plans.

Targeted Subgroups: Three reports addressed how districts planned to improve services for ELs, low income, and foster youth. The LAO reported that it was difficult to ascertain if and how districts are going to improve services to these subgroups. They also reported that many districts claimed that school- or district-wide services would benefit these subgroups, but did not describe how this would occur.

EdTrust—West and Californians Together conducted a more thorough analysis of districts' planned actions and services for student subgroups. In addition to reporting findings that mirrored the LAO's, these two papers also observed that a majority of LCAPs do not incorporate the English Language Development Standards.

Community Engagement: Four reports addressed the LCAP's community engagement requirements in some way. EdTrust—West, Californians Together, and Public Advocates asserted that most districts insufficiently engaged community stakeholders, although EdTrust—West identified a handful of districts that implemented promising practices. Both Public Advocates and PPIC argued that the community engagement requirements had little to no impact on districts' LCAPs. EdTrust—West reported that the LCAP's excessive detail and inaccessible language inability to understand the contents of the LCAP document.

Recommendations

Communication and Focus: Three reports advocated for changes in how districts report their funds, goals, and actions. For example, EdTrust—West and Public Advocates suggested that the state could consider implementing common accounting codes to be used for the LCAPs in order to more clearly communicate funding sources. The LAO wrote that the state should allow districts to focus on fewer goals or areas of improvement, rather than identify goals and activities that serve all state priorities.

State Guidance and Support: Four reports called on specific state agencies to initiate or lead particular changes in the LCAP process. Two organizations, PPIC and Californians Together, called on the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence to lead improvement efforts—either by sharing best practices for improving EL outcomes (Californians Together) or improving technical assistance and partnerships with districts (PPIC). The LAO recommended that the California Department of Education publicize exemplary LCAPs to serve as models for districts. EdTrust—West and PPIC also called on the state to lend more support to county offices of education so that they better support districts.

Continuous Reflection and Improvement: Three reports also discussed the need for monitoring progress for quality and being flexible to changes as needed, noting that this is especially important to ensure sustainability and student learning improvements. The LAO asked the Legislature to keep a particular eye on monitoring outcomes for ELs and low income students, and EdTrust—West named district leaders as primarily responsible for changing their plans if they are not working. Public Advocates and EdTrust—West also added that the LCAP rubric can play an important role in ensuring equitable outcomes.

Appendix

The five papers reviewed for this synthesis are listed below. Short descriptions of each provide more information about each study.

Affeldt, J. T. (2015). California policy supports for resources accountability. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 23(23). Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v23.2023>

Affeldt offers his reflections on the first year LCAPs that Public Advocates reviewed. (The paper does not describe the sampling method or number of LCAPs reviewed.) Additionally, this paper analyzes the reforms enacted through LCFF more generally through the lens of a strong accountability framework grounded in college and career readiness. Affeldt argues that the inadequacy of California's funding system for its public schools calls for system reorganization anchored in the Common Core State Standards. In his analysis, he details what this reorganization must factor in order to deliver a quality education systemwide and, as a consequence, what districts should make transparent in LCAPs. Affeldt's reflections on first year LCAPs begin on page 10 of his paper.

Hahnel, C. (2014). *Building a more equitable and participatory school system in California: The Local Control Funding Formula's first year*. The Education Trust—West. Retrieved from http://west.edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/02/ETW-Building-a-More-Equitable-and-Participatory-School-System-in-California-Report_0.pdf

This report draws on interviews with more than 60 community and district leaders and an analysis of 40 first year LCAPs to describe California's first-year implementation of LCFF with an emphasis on (1) how districts engaged with community stakeholders in the LCAP development process, specifically in identifying local education needs, and (2) how transparently and effectively districts shared their LCAPs with their communities. The organization's recommendations for improvement appear on pages 24-26 of their report.

Armas, E., Lavadenz, M., & Olsen, L. (2015). *Falling short on the promise to English learners: A report on year one LCAPs*. Californians Together & Loyola Marymount University Center for Equity for English Learners. Retrieved from http://www.ciclt.net/ul/calto/AReportonYearOneLCAPs_2015-04-22.pdf

This report examines 25 LCAPs from 2014 with an explicit focus on how local plans account for EL needs. The authors selected plans to represent districts with the highest numbers of ELs in the state, districts with highest concentrations/percentages of ELs, and districts representative of California's geographic regions. The study team also reviewed LCAPs from six districts known for providing quality EL to help assess how the plans can meet EL needs. The organization's recommendations for improvement appear on pages 12-13 of their report.

Taylor, M. (2015). *Review of school districts' 2014-15 Local Control Accountability Plans*. Legislative Analyst's Office. Retrieved from <http://www.lao.ca.gov/reports/2015/edu/LCAP/2014-15-LCAP-012015.pdf>

For this study, the LAO conducted a review of 50 first-year LCAPs. To select their first 39 districts, researchers drew from large, mid-size, and small districts based on total student enrollment. From these groups, researchers selected districts with a variety of EL and low income enrollment. The state's largest 11 districts were added to round out the sample. The LAO also interviewed county and district staff to contextualize their findings from the LCAP reviews.

A summary of all their findings appears on page 12 of their report, and recommendations for improvement appear on pages 16-18 of their report.

Warren, P. & Carrillo, G. (2015) *Implementing Local Accountability in California's schools: The first year of planning*. Public Policy Institute of California. Retrieved from http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R_315PWR.pdf

PPIC conducted a review of 25 first-year LCAPs from two counties—one urban and one rural—in order to assess the impact of county offices on district LCAPs. The districts selected vary in size and enrollment of EL, low income, and foster youth. PPIC supplemented its LCAP analysis with interviews from four of their 25 districts. The authors' recommendations for improvement appear on pages 6-7 of their report.