Our Schools, Our Voices
Mapping the Way to Success

Report of Findings from
Community Conversations about
San Francisco Unified School District’s
Local Control Accountability Plan

May 27, 2014
State regulations under the new funding model, the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), require the Parent Advisory Council (PAC) and District English Learner Advisory Committee (DELAC) to provide feedback to the district’s Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP).

As one of the official parent advisory bodies to provide input on the LCAP, the PAC invited our community partners to join outreach efforts in gathering input from a broad spectrum of parents to help shape the LCAP. Our community partners in this work include:

Chinese for Affirmative Action  
Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth  
Mission Graduates  
Parents for Public Schools  
Second District Parent Teacher Association  
Support for Families of Children with Disabilities

Together we worked with SFUSD staff from the DELAC and the Office of Family and Community Engagement to develop the framework, materials and timeline for families to provide input on the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP). We strategically mapped our outreach efforts to hear from families across the district, especially those of English Language Learners, low-income students, foster youth and students with special needs, and then conducted 29 community conversations, focus groups and public forums to hear directly from families about what they think students need to be successful in SFUSD schools.

From March 18th through May 15th, we collectively heard from over 400 participants about what is working, and what could be increase or improved in our schools to share with district staff and the Board of Education to help inform SFUSD’s Local Control Accountability Plan.

This report presents our findings from these community conversations, and our preliminary recommendations for the district to strengthen the community engagement process; the content of the LCAP; and considerations for increasing and/or improving services, programs and strategies being implemented to support student success.
Our Approach

Our team worked with SFUSD staff collectively to:

- Strategically map a larger community engagement plan
- Coordinate outreach efforts to invite different school sites, community groups and service providers to host community conversation
- Develop materials, conduct conversations, review transcripts and compile the findings

We heard community questions, concerns and suggestions through:

- **Community conversations** in schools and community centers, with focused outreach to specific sites & family populations (seven conducted in Spanish and two in Cantonese, and others with interpretation, including Arabic, Amharic, Cantonese, Eritrean, Japanese, Spanish and Vietnamese)
- **Focus groups** with community organizations working with families and serving students (including the Families and Youth In Transition Council, Foster Youth Services Providers Council, the Foster Parents Association, SFUSD’s Family Engagement Network, members of the African American Parent Advisory Council, the Indian Education Parent Advisory Committee and the Student Advisory Council’s Youth Leadership Summit)
- **Three forums open to the general public**, co-hosted by SFUSD with Parents for Public Schools, the Second District PTA, and the Coalition to Close the Gap.

The objectives of each conversation were to:

- **Share information** about how new state funding for public schools will support our students in San Francisco
- **Provide examples** of SFUSD’s goals and strategies to support students to succeed
- **Hear from 200-250 participants** about what is working, what more could be increased or improved, to help SFUSD’s students be successful – especially our low-income students, English Learners and youth in foster care.

We organized the eight state priorities the district is required to address in the Local Control Accountability Plan into three central themes: Student Access and Achievement, Student Engagement and School Climate, and Family Engagement. In each conversation, participants were asked to share their ideas about what’s working, what more could be done to improve or increase services, and what success would look like for each of these primary areas. In nearly half of the conversations participants were given the opportunity to prioritize services they would like to see increased or improved by indicating what they cared about the most with three “dots.”
Who We Heard From

Between March 18 and May 15, 2014 we conducted 29 conversations about the district’s Local Plan and heard from over 400 participants. Based on surveys of participants:

✓ 70% were parents/guardians
✓ 6% were high-school students
✓ 11% were educators/district staff
✓ 14% were community members

They represented 68 different SFUSD schools:

- 36 Early Education and K-5 schools
- 5 K-8 schools
- 12 Middle schools
- 15 High schools
- 5 non-SFUSD schools (private and charter schools)
- Several community-based or public agencies working with students and families

Of the participants:

- 55% speak a language other than English in their home (SFUSD = 25% English Learners)
- 59% of their children qualify for free or reduced-price meals (SFUSD = 61% qualify)
- 16% of their children receive Special Education services (SFUSD = 11% with an IEP)
- 18% were either foster parents or providers who work with foster youth

Participants spoke many home languages:

✓ 45% speak English
✓ 28% speak Spanish
✓ 19% speak Chinese
✓ 8% other languages, including Arabic, Amharic, Eritrean, Japanese and Vietnamese
Demographics of Participant’s Children compared to SFUSD Student Enrollment
Summary of Findings: What We Heard in the Conversations

These findings share some overall themes we heard across many different conversations, the “Top 10 Questions” we identified, participants’ ideas related to Student Access and Achievement, Student Engagement and School Climate, and Family Engagement; and finally, concerns about school funding and accountability.

Connecting Common Themes Across the Many Different LCAP Conversations

- Participants recognize that many things are working well in schools – but they’re inconsistent across the district and connected to deeper inequities.
  - Access to programs, resources & classes
  - Cultural competence & teacher skills
  - Restorative Practices happening
  - Student Success Team (SST) and Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process going well
  - Knowing about/accessing community resources & services

- Across all conversations participants expressed their desire for more & improved communication. It’s working in some places but also inconsistent, not systemic.
  - Families want to know when students are struggling, before their report card comes home
  - Better communication between teachers, schools & families
  - Among/between schools
  - Among/between schools & Community Based Organizations (CBOs)

- Participants stressed the importance of schools creating a welcoming and inclusive environment – and that this isn’t true in schools across the district.

- Conversations with families of under-served students highlighted concerns about schools having low expectations for their children, not liking or understanding them, and not supporting them to achieve.

- Some participants expressed concern that LCAP doesn’t address supporting African American (and other) students who are not English Learners, low income or in foster care – but who need additional services.

- Conversations with families of higher-performing students highlighted the desire for more challenging & differentiated teaching, again based on knowing each child’s needs & supporting them to go farther.
Top 10 Questions from LCAP Community Conversations

These are questions we heard during many conversations, or paraphrase similar questions or concerns written on notes and shared through “parking lot” charts.

1. Will my voice really be taken into consideration as part of this planning process or will the district not listen to us and do what it wants to anyway? In light of previous planning processes where this was the perception of what happened, how will this planning process be different?

2. How is the district going to ensure transparency with families regarding what is in the LCAP once it’s adopted? How will be parents involved in the ongoing accountability measures for the District regarding the LCAP?

3. How will LCFF funds be divided among the schools? Is it different than before? Will any of the funds follow students? If so, which funds?

4. How will the LCAP address ongoing issues of equity between schools, and between students within schools? *(For example, previously documented disparities within Dual Immersion language programs, and disparities between schools’ parent & community fundraising.)*

5. How does the district propose to address greater alignment with the Common Core? Is there a plan to increase the access to technology and education in advance of the Smarter Balanced Assessments? How will families be kept informed as to the District’s decision-making about this?

6. How are teachers and principals trained and held accountable within the LCAP? How can the school district communicate better to parents about the types of trainings teachers and school administrators participate in, and the ongoing accountability practices for teachers and administrators?

7. How will the district expand and improve the way schools implement Restorative Practices, especially in light of the district’s commitment to reduce suspensions?

8. What is an English Learner? What are the current services the District provides to English Learners? How will the LCAP seek to increase or improve on these services?

9. What does LCAP mean for the district’s commitment to a community school strategy? As this strategy addresses multiple areas of district focus, how can additional resources be allocated to full service community schools or provide community school components in more schools?

10. How does the LCAP address the particular needs of African American students? Are they only included as a subset of the low-income students
For Student Access and Achievement, people want to see an increase/improvement of ...

- **Teacher & Principal quality and leadership**
  - Skills / process for evaluation / accountability
  - Cultural competence
  - Training, professional development, and support – so we retain great teachers.
  - Qualified and reliable substitute teachers (including bilingual)
  - More high quality bilingual teachers

- **Support for students – in general**
  - Counseling and tutoring, including bilingual counselors
  - Mentoring
  - Credit recovery opportunities

- **Support for students with special needs/in Special Education**
  - More individualized support & staff to provide that during the regular school day
  - Increased access to and services in afterschool programs
  - IEPs done on time, implemented as written

- **Information about English proficiency reclassification**
  - Families want to understand reclassification requirements, procedures and important timelines
  - Help families support students in the reclassification process
  - Increased English Language Development support for EL students (during after school, in 1-on-1 or small groups, etc.)

- **Curriculum / academic programs**
  - Increased access to afterschool and other Out of School Time programs
  - Increased access to Summer programs for all
  - More arts & music, project-based learning, and increased language pathways programs
  - Technology within curriculum (not just using computers for testing)

- **More staff in classrooms, to know each student & their needs**
  - Differentiate instruction – to challenge and support all students
  - Smaller class size as a way to support this
  - Additional support staff (including bilingual skills) in classrooms for more individual support

- **Collaboration**
  - Between teachers within schools
  - Between school-day & afterschool staff
  - Across different schools: share best practices, what’s working
  - School staff being more aware of community services & resources
For Student Engagement & School Climate, people want to see an increase/improvement of...

- **Engaging & relevant practices**
  - Engaging & relevant curriculum that’s connected to “real world” experiences
  - Engaging and interactive teaching practices
  - Seeing our students / demographics in curriculum
  - Sports, arts and activities – especially after school
  - Connecting students to internships; exposing students to career opportunities

- **Promote and support safety and wellness**
  - Increase staff to support safety and student wellness (Social Workers & nurses, counselors, etc.)
  - More adult supervision in yard, at recess & lunch

- **Improve systems to get, share & use data:**
  - More positive responses to resolve truancy
  - Monitor and reduce out of class referrals & in-school suspensions
  - Electronic cum. files so easier to access student data

- **More consistent use of Restorative Practices**
  - Reduce bullying and discrimination toward newcomers and other students

- **Promote and Support Collaboration**
  - Among teachers, other staff & service providers (both SFUSD and CBOs)
  - Across schools
For Family Engagement, people want to see an increase / improvement of...

- **Improve communication between school and families**
  - We don’t hear from teacher early enough when child is struggling academically – not until report card or parent-teacher conference
  - We only get the phone call when there’s a behavior problem
  - More immediate access to student data – like the CLA and other performance tests
  - School Loop – not all teachers use it, and not all families have access to it

- **Have someone at each school with clear responsibility to focus on family engagement**
  - Clarify role of Family Liaison
  - Shouldn’t just be a half-time position

- **Acknowledge and address conflicts and build community**
  - Across differences in families’ ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and home language
  - Need specific goals, action plans and accountability for school staff’s cultural competence

- **Make it possible for families of all students and cultures to participate**
  - Ensure translation of written materials, and interpretation for events and meetings
  - Have events, meetings, appointments (e.g. SSTs, IEPs) at more flexible times/off hours so working families can participate
  - Make schools, events and activities more welcoming to families of all students & cultures

- **Expand opportunities for adult learning and leadership development**
  - Classes to learn English, literacy, computers, etc.
  - Workshops and training on how to support students
  - Support parents to participate in school and district governance & decision-making
Concerns about Accountability, Funding and Equity

- **Accountability**
  - How will schools and the district be accountable for how funds are allocated and whether they serve students they’re meant to?
  - Do our voices really count in this process?

- **Inequities of parent-based fundraising**
  - Wealthier school communities raise funds for programs that other schools don’t have access to
  - Within schools, some programs offered only to students whose families can pay
  - How does the district look at this / how will this inequity be addressed?

**Sharing our Findings**

On April 24th our team shared with district staff and the community at large our preliminary findings from the first 23 conversations. The goal of this public forum was to inform the actual development of SFUSD’s draft LCAP. Our specific objectives were to provide an opportunity for district staff to reflect on how parents’ ideas might inform their work, highlight efforts in place to support student success, plans to improve and increase programs and services, and finally, foster two-way communication and encourage a mutual exchange of information, ideas and perspectives.

Seventeen SFUSD staff, who lead key district initiatives to support student success, participated in this public forum, along with families from our organizations and the other community members. The number of district leaders in attendance speaks volumes about the willingness and interest in hearing what families have to say. At the same time, we see there is a disconnect between the work that is happening at the district level and with what families experience on the ground, at their children’s schools. Through this process we recognize there are some fundamental questions: How would families know these priorities are being addressed at schools? How would families feel or experience the change, and what would these changes look like in a school? How is this work being communicated across SFUSD?

Most recently, on May 22nd Deputy Superintendent Myong Leigh and Assistant Superintendent Kevin Truitt presented an overview, big picture of SFUSD’s draft LCAP to the DELAC and PAC as official advisory bodies. At this public forum, there was an equal number of district leaders—some the same and others different from April 24th— who attended. They actively participated by sharing how their work aligns with specific goals, measures, and strategies identified in various sections of the LCAP draft and answered questions from participants. Again, we realize the number of district staff attending this event is another indication of the level of commitment district leadership has to supporting the success of all students.
After conducting the community conversations and reviewing the first draft of the SFUSD’s Local Plan (LCAP), we are concerned that stakeholder engagement did not meaningfully inform the content of the LCAP. This draft relies on existing internally created documents, rather than having the community engagement process actually inform development of the LCAP.

Based on what we learned through this process, we have identified the following preliminary recommendations to strengthen community engagement in revising the LCAP in coming years, the content of the LCAP, and finally, the implementation of SFUSD’s programs, services and strategies to support student success.

Ensure a community engagement process that is more transparent, intentional and timely for the LCAP process as well as the overall SFUSD budgetary process, in general.

Demonstrate the ways in which stakeholder engagement helped shape the LCAP: District relied on existing, internally created documents to create the LCAP rather than engage stakeholders in development of the LCAP.

- In order to build authentic participation of school community stakeholders, the community engagement process needs to be intentional, transparent and timely.
- Begin the community engagement process for the LCAP in the fall with the start of each new school year.
- Give serious consideration to changing the budgetary timeline process to introduced the budget (in May) when schools are in session and parents are still available to give input.


Resources required: Staff time to plan, project and realign the budgetary timeline, including introducing SFUSD’s annual budget to the Board of Education for its first reading at the second board meeting in May when schools are still in session and parents are more readily available to voice their questions, concerns and suggestions.

Share an implementation plan for the services, programs and strategies outlined in the LCAP, to help families understand what the LCAP means for their children.
Recommended Content to be included in the LCAP

**Commit resources to finish the Family Engagement Plan.** Communications was a major theme in our findings yet the LCAP does not identify actions or services to support this area. Allocate resources and identify specific strategies in the LCAP to implement the Family Engagement Plan, including communication strategies so that families feel more connected to their schools community.

**Include** the actions the district is taking to **implement Restorative Practices** and reflect the resources allocated to support this program. This is a strategy many families support to increase instructional time, decrease suspensions/expulsions, and improve school climate and student engagement.

**Include** specific strategies **to support community building** and **positive school climate**, including designated resources for family liaisons, and/or a point person at each school site to support family engagement.

**Resources required:** Fund- point person to take on role of supporting family engagement and compensate with a stipend similarly how a stipend is given to a health advocate.

**Describe** specific actions being taken **to expand cultural competency among teachers and district staff** as well as steps **to deliver engaging and culturally responsive curriculum, academic programs and services** that support the learning of all students. Include resources allocated to support these programs.

**Identify** specific strategies that are being implemented **to support African American students** and resources earmarked to support these strategies.

**Provide details** in the LCAP outlining how teachers will be supported to **deliver differentiated instruction** for all students.
Conclusion

In order to build authentic participation of school community stakeholders, the community engagement process has to be intentional, transparent and timely. We were able to gather a broad range of parent voices and perspectives through collective efforts between community and district partners in a short period of time. We are happy we had this opportunity and are pleased with the number of families and district staff who participated in the overall process. We recognize this is a new process for everyone and acknowledge there is room to improve the process moving forward. We look forward to this being the beginning of ongoing process to engage families to help shape the district’s priorities to support student success.
For more information about the Local Control Funding Formula and Local Control Accountability Plans...

**SFUSD:** www.sfusd.edu
or email budget@sfusd.edu

San Francisco Board of Education’s Parent Advisory Council: www.pacsf.org

Chinese for Affirmative Action: www.caasf.org

Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth: www.colemandadvocates.org

Mission Graduates: www.missiongraduates.org

Parents for Public Schools-SF: www.ppssf.org

San Francisco’s Parent Teacher Association/2nd District PTA: www.sfpta.org

California State PTA: www.capta.org