



PODCAST SERIES
Episode 6



HOW CHIEF BUSINESS OFFICERS CAN TAKE LCFF RESOURCE EQUITY FROM THE DISTRICT TO THE SCHOOL LEVEL

In episodes 6 and 7, the *Budgeting for Educational Equity Podcast* took a deep dive into California's landmark school funding legislation, the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF).

Over a series of interviews with experts Mike Kirst and Chris Edley, along with practitioners such as Rich De Nava and Xilonin Cruz-Gonzalez, the Budgeting for Educational Equity team closely examined the design, early implementation, and impact of the LCFF. These podcast episodes also explored the concept of local control and how the autonomy provided by the LCFF has impacted school districts in their efforts to provide equitable resources to California's students. As part of this line of inquiry, we have also explored how Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs) have served to uphold and fortify the spirit of the LCFF, as they provide structure for the strategy, fiscal, and continuous improvement planning efforts of districts.

Throughout the discussions in episodes 6 and 7, a common theme emerged: Despite the strengths and opportunities offered by the (mostly) unrestricted nature of LCFF funds, district and school leaders must be diligent in how they organize and configure those flexible resources to support students if they hope to truly advance equity within their school systems. Moreover, as chief business officers (CBOs) and district leadership teams work to use the LCAPs to set goals, plan actions, and leverage LCFF resources to meet those goals and improve student outcomes, there is ample opportunity to also involve community

stakeholders and engage student voices in a meaningful way. With these themes in mind, this brief highlights emerging research literature about the impact of the LCFF, reviews best practices for implementation, and features some of the unique approaches that CBOs across the state are taking to serve students through the LCFF and their LCAPs. Through these perspectives, we offer four strategies that CBOs can apply to their contexts as they continue to enact new ways to create more equitable systems and learning environments within their schools.



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STRATEGY 1: ENGAGE IN CYCLES OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The term *continuous improvement* is often used to describe cycles of action and reflection performed with the purpose of refining and increasing the efficacy of a given system or model. In practice, continuous improvement cycles hold several key elements, organized in a repeating cycle:

- setting goals (using data),
- creating an action plan or intervention,
- implementing or acting on the plan,
- assessing the results (using data), and
- reflecting and adjusting plans.¹

For the CBO working to ensure resource equity among schools with continuous improvement in mind, three key conditions for implementation need to be in place before continuous improvement can be implemented with fidelity:

Change in culture. To honestly reflect on outcomes and try new approaches, staff in districts and schools must trust one another enough to be honest about areas of opportunity for improvement. Changing organizational culture requires supporting the development of positive relationships, garnering buy-in, creating alignment between the work of central office departments and school sites, and empowering stakeholders at all levels to take responsibility for improvement. Changing organizational cultures also requires having structured and collaborative

conversations at the central office and school level about how to achieve a more equitable allocation of resources to schools in response to the needs of students in those settings.

Capacity-building at all levels of the system. Building capacity at the district level, then in school administrative offices, and, finally, in the classroom is about working with one another in a structured, purposeful, and rigorous manner. One approach is targeting external supports, through networks or through coaching, that focus explicitly on evolving professionals' mindsets to inform system alterations that result in a more equitable distribution of resources among and within school settings.

Availability and use of data. Real-time data is required to monitor progress and change course when needed. In addition, people at all levels of the system need to know how to make good use of data. For instance, they need to know how to analyze relevant data to understand variations in performance and evaluate whether new investments have changed outcomes.² For more information on how to leverage data for improvement, see [Episode 2 of Budgeting for Educational Equity](#) and its companion brief, [Using Data to Advance Equity](#).

STRATEGY 2: BUILD THE CASE WITH STAKEHOLDERS FOR LONG-TERM PROGRAM AND FISCAL INVESTMENTS

As myriad supplemental funding support funds (i.e., Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief

Funds [ESSER I & II as well as the American Rescue Plan], California Community Schools Partnership Program [CCSPP] funds, and universal transitional kindergarten expansion funds) flow into school systems over the next year and begin to take effect, it is critical that administrators plan now for how these funds can be meaningfully integrated into existing systemwide strategies that are already being implemented. Moreover, as these funds are being expended, it is also pivotal that district leadership be in communication with the public about the long-term strategic vision and sustained programming that will occur after these one-time funds are no longer available. Beyond the multi-year projections that are standard in a district's Standardized Account Code Structure (SACS) reports, it is critical to be in communication with stakeholders about how district leadership is

- proactively managing large investments and
- explicitly framing choices that district leadership and stakeholders must make that value and prioritize what will work more effectively to advance desired outcomes for that community's students.

To assist in communicating these points, updates to the public regarding long-term fiscal plans can be incorporated into regular public board meetings where discussions of district milestones, strategic plan updates, annual district and school budgeting, and board elections already occur regularly.³



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STRATEGY 3: REVISIT HOW SUPPLEMENTAL AND CONCENTRATION GRANTS ARE USED TO SUPPORT HIGH-NEED STUDENT GROUPS

In the 2021 policy brief *Targeted K–12 Funding and Student Outcomes*, researcher Julien Lafortune reveals that since its inception, the LCFF has increased spending for high-need students across all school districts in the state. However, no formal mechanism exists for tracking whether districts spend this extra funding on their high-need students. Currently, about 55 cents of every dollar of additional funding for high-need students is spent at the school that generates the funding, signaling that LCFF funding for high-need students does target those schools that generate it, but not entirely.^{4,5} With this in mind, it is important for district leaders to consider the extent to which their actual allocation of resources to schools reflects the demographics of their unduplicated pupil count.

Along with assessing allocation amounts across populations, leaders should also examine how resource choices can impact the performance of schools or student subpopulations. In 2019, [LPI published a series of reports](#)⁶ that identified school systems in California that were performing better than peers with nearly identical

available sets of resources in their systems. Many of the highlights for those positive outliers found that it was the **resource choices** these school systems were making, not necessarily that they had exorbitant amounts of additional funding compared to peers, that resulted in higher achievement for their students. Two of these outlier school systems, Sanger and Gridley Unified School Districts, have been highlighted in our podcast episodes, Episode 1: Getting Our Resource Equity Bearings and Episode 7: The Locus of Local Control: Revisiting the LCFF, Part Two (those episodes can be accessed on the [podcast series landing page](#)).

Finally, district leaders can also consider those resource gaps that have persisted over time such that even LCFF Supplemental and Concentration grant dollars have not been able to meet the level of need.

STRATEGY 4: TEND AND DEVELOP OUR MOST PRECIOUS ASSET – PEOPLE

Given how much school districts in California spend on people, our ability as a sector to “move the needle” on gaps between targeted student populations and their better off peers rests on having not only sufficient financial resources but also the right people doing the right combination of activities for students.

However clear this may be to practitioners and researchers alike, the onset of COVID-19 has created new and unprecedented challenges for staffing, both in retaining existing talent as well as in recruiting a new generation of educators and leaders into school systems, adding a level of difficulty to an already challenging task. As such, the state of California has earmarked new dollars to invest in educator workforce development (more than \$1B over 5 years)⁷ in an effort to counteract the substantial impact of the pandemic and to reinforce the work of districts across the state to strengthen their certificated workforce. However, even with this investment, the question remains: How will school systems ensure high-quality people are incorporated into the system’s culture to advance toward its vision?

The answer to this question depends on the context of each district, though it should sit at the epicenter of every school system’s planning for future success. Accordingly, school leaders should be thinking proactively about how to support and leverage both existing and new pathways for recruitment and retention, including relationships with local universities, teacher residency programs, professional development opportunities for staff, and district incentives for teachers.

- 1 Grunow, A., Hough, H. J., Park, S., Willis, J., & Krausen, K. (2018). *Getting down to facts II: Towards a common vision of continuous improvement for California* [Report]. Policy Analysis for California Education. <https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/towards-common-vision-continuous-improvement-california>
- 2 Grunow et al., 2018.
- 3 Black, R., Travers, J. (2019). *The strategic CFO: A guide for school districts. 3 mindsets and 5 core functions to help CFOs align resources to strategy*. Education Resource Strategies. <https://www.erstrategies.org/cms/files/4417-strategic-cfo-final-paper.pdf>
- 4 It is important to note that the 55 cents figure does not speak in detail about the deployment of centrally coded spending and whether that is directed, or not, to high-need student populations.
- 5 Lafortune, J., Mehlotra, R. (2021). *Targeted K-12 funding and student outcomes: Evaluating the Local Control Funding Formula*. Public Policy Institute of California. <https://www.ppic.org/publication/targeted-k-12-funding-and-student-outcomes/>
- 6 Podolsky, A., Darling-Hammond, L., Doss, C., reardon, s. (2019). *California's positive outliers: Districts beating the odds [Positive outliers series]*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/positive-outliers-districts-beating-odds-report>
- 7 Early Edge California. (2021). *Early Edge Summary: TK/ECE workforce recruitment, professional development, and retention programs included in 2021-22 state budget*. <https://earlyedgecalifornia.org/tk-ece-workforce-recruitment-professional-development-and-retention-programs-included-in-2021-22-state-budget/>