

# LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

## DISTRICT PRIORITIZES FOSTER YOUTH IN FUNDING AS ADVOCATES CLAMOR FOR RESOURCES

Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is an overwhelming mix of differing interests, all vying for a portion of the budget. This is no surprise, since it's the second-largest district in the country, enrolling more than 650,000 students at over 900 schools – bigger than the entire student population of 20 states and the District of Columbia.<sup>1</sup>

It is also one of the most segregated districts in the country. About 85 percent of students are Latino, African American, or Filipino, all of whom are nearly twice as likely as white students to be in schools with a majority of students of color.<sup>2</sup> The same percentage of students are low-income, English learners, or foster youth. Although most of LAUSD's English learners speak Spanish, more than 55 languages are spoken in the district.<sup>3</sup>

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Sources that informed this case study include: district board meeting documents; district 2014-15 budget documents; district webpages; news articles; LCAP



Photo courtesy of the Weingart Foundation.

While achievement has risen slightly in recent years, only 40 percent of third-graders and 45 percent of ninth-graders perform at grade level in English language arts, and just 67 percent of high school students graduate — 13 percentage points below the state average.<sup>4</sup>

In tackling these challenges, LAUSD has the difficult task of balancing the sometimes conflicting interests of its many stakeholders, including scores of advocacy groups representing the diverse populations of students, parents, educators, and the broader community. Nowhere were these challenges more evident than during the Local Control Funding Formula stakeholder engagement process.

## GROUPS DEMAND TO SEE THEIR PRIORITIES ADDRESSED BY LCFF FUNDS, WITH VARYING SUCCESS

When California's new Local Control Funding Formula provided Los Angeles Unified with a fresh infusion of \$324 million in state funding and more flexible spending rules, the district's many constituents began to vie for resources and influence. Among the many groups seeking influence over the spending of these new funds were labor groups representing teachers and a host of community groups advocating on behalf of students, parents, foster youth, and others. While LAUSD satisfied the demands of some stakeholders, the district ultimately disappointed others.

and related documents; and interviews with Sandy Mendoza (Families in Schools) and Miguel Dominguez (Community Coalition).

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Photo courtesy of Families In Schools.

Even before Governor Jerry Brown signed the new law, LAUSD board members adopted a resolution in June 2013 to the benefit of district employees, calling on the superintendent to extend the school year, reduce class sizes, restore staff positions lost during the recession, and increase pay.

To advocate for low-income students and students of color, a number of Los Angeles-based coalitions, focused primarily on other efforts, started to engage in the LCFF process. These alliances included the Brother, Sons, Selves Coalition; the Dignity in Schools Campaign - Los Angeles; and an early childhood education advocacy partnership spearheaded by the Advancement Project. Another coalition of community groups formed under the banner of Communities for Los Angeles Student Success. Made up of 50 organizations, CLASS mobilized thousands of community leaders, parents, teachers, and students. They demanded that 80 percent of the \$837 million in supplemental and concentration funds in the district's budget be spent on services for students in the LCFF priority groups – low-income students, foster youth, and English learners.

A **Student Need Index** was developed to prioritize school-site funding based on measures of academic achievement, such as test scores, dropout rates, and expulsion and suspension rates, and on neighborhood conditions that can affect students' performance in school.

“Because these students are the reason LAUSD is receiving this extra funding, we want that to be the priority for the district,” Elmer Roldan, education program officer at the United Way of Greater Los Angeles, told the *LA School Report* in April 2014.<sup>5</sup>

The Community Coalition (CoCo) and Inner City Struggle, two founding members of CLASS and participants in a number of LA-based coalitions, along with the Advancement Project, a national civil rights organization, developed a Student Need Index to prioritize school-site funding based on measures of academic achievement, such as test scores, dropout rates, and expulsion and suspension rates, and on neighborhood conditions that can affect students' performance in school (including gun violence, hospitalizations for asthma, and access to early childhood education and youth programs).

The index identified 36 high schools, 32 middle schools, and 174 elementary schools with the highest needs, and CLASS successfully lobbied school board members to adopt the index and allocate \$154 million based on its findings.

While this was a far cry from the 80 percent that CLASS asked for, coalition members were pleased with the LAUSD board adopting the Student Need Index. “We considered this a win,” said Miguel Dominguez of CoCo.

Separately, the Coalition for Educational Equity for Foster Youth wanted LAUSD and other districts to invest in foster youth counselors who would track the academic progress of foster youth and connect each student with the supports they need to be successful in school. They also recommended hiring a foster youth liaison who would supervise the foster youth counselors, train district staff about foster youth services, and maintain relationships with outside agencies providing services for foster youth.

The group's advocacy paid off, with LAUSD setting aside \$10 million in supplemental funding for services targeting foster youth. The district's new foster youth services will include hiring new psychiatric social workers, increasing tutoring services, and establishing a partnership with the city of Los Angeles to expand the family resource center to serve foster families.

Although CLASS, foster youth advocates, and other groups saw some of their demands included in the Local Control and Accountability Plan, some labor groups were less satisfied. Having made their position known early on through the June 2013 board resolution, the United Teachers of Los Angeles continued to press

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the district to increase salaries. UTLA also lobbied to restore positions eliminated during the recession when the district was forced to lay off thousands of teachers, resulting in increased class sizes and fewer services for students. Similarly, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 99, representing LAUSD cafeteria workers, teaching assistants, custodians, bus drivers, and other service workers, lobbied the district to increase wages and restore cut positions.

While LAUSD made a commitment to hire 1,210 new employees (including teacher and service worker positions) in 2014-15, with an additional 3,417 new hires over the next three years, the district's LCAP made no specific commitment to raise salaries for either classified or certificated staff, who had gone seven years without pay increases.

President of UTLA, Alex Caputo-Pearl, who was running for office at the time, told the *LA School Report* that this omission was "a dramatic blow to retaining excellent educators and stabilizing schools, and to the idea of fairness and equity."<sup>6</sup>

On the heels of the school board approving the LCAP, SEIU secured a deal with the district to raise all minimum wage positions to at least \$15 per hour over the next three years. "Because nearly half of the school workers represented by SEIU Local 99 are parents of children attending LAUSD schools, this agreement provides greater stability and increased opportunity for thousands of District students," SEIU Local 99 former Executive Director Courtni Pugh said, satisfied with this deal.<sup>7</sup>

## EARLY AND STRONG COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS DON'T PREVENT FRUSTRATIONS

Early on in the LCAP process, LAUSD knew that with so many stakeholders, there would be more demands on supplemental and concentration funds than they could meet. The district and its school board moved quickly to establish a community engagement strategy.

A month after LCFF went into effect, the school board adopted a resolution outlining some of the parameters of this strategy. The board decided that the district's pre-LCFF public engagement committees would coordinate hearings in each of LAUSD's five regional education service centers (ESCs). District employees and bargaining units would receive separate budget briefings, and members of the Superintendent's Student Advisory Council would be asked to share their priorities.

To ensure geographic and demographic diversity on its Parent Advisory Committee, or PAC, each of the five ESCs elected PAC representatives, with the district requiring that each ESC's representatives include two parents of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, two parents of English learners, two parents/guardians of foster youth, and two parents at-large. Each school board member also selected an additional parent member, for a total of 47 PAC members.

The already established District English Learner Advisory Committee (DELAC) had 10 parent members and two alternates from each of the ESCs.

The district supported Families in Schools, a CLASS member organization, in providing training for the committee members and gave FIS full control over the training content and format. The sessions covered the requirements of the LCAP, the history and details of LCFF, and information on high-need student populations.

While committee members who attended the trainings felt better prepared to take part in the process, PAC and DELAC members didn't feel adequately engaged by the district later on in the process. In June 2014, PAC and DELAC members sent a joint letter to the district expressing their dissatisfaction with their role in drafting the LCAP. A key complaint was that the structure of their involvement was too narrow and controlled to allow for any meaningful input. This involvement consisted of the district presenting the committees with a list of potential LCAP actions or services for members to rank in order of importance.



Photo courtesy of Community Coalition.



Photo courtesy of Families In Schools.



Photo courtesy of the Weingart Foundation.

In addition, the district didn't respond to committee members' requests for data and budget information.

Other stakeholders had more freedom to bypass the formal district forums and drive their own agenda. CoCo successfully won support for the Student Need Index by holding several rallies, distributing a survey to track student and community support, and meeting one-on-one with each LAUSD school board member.

### DISTRICT SPENDING ON SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES RAISES QUESTIONS

No amount of engagement and advocacy could solve what the district found to be insurmountable budget challenges. Not everyone agreed with what the district decided was an appropriate use of a large portion of its supplemental and concentration funding.

Although LAUSD set aside \$10 million of its supplemental funding for foster youth and \$154 million

for school sites, these amounts are dwarfed by the \$468 million the district proposed to spend on special education students. That accounts for more than half of LAUSD's supplemental and concentration expenditures, even though the district claims these funds will only be spent on special education services for students who are low-income, English learners, or foster youth.

Civil rights advocates, including attorneys from Public Advocates and the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, argued that this special education expenditure is an inappropriate use of supplemental and concentration funds because every child, regardless of background, is entitled to special education supports if she or he needs them.

It is possible that lawyers will continue to challenge LAUSD's use of supplemental and concentration funds for special education services. If that happens, it could impact the dozens of other districts that have also proposed to use these funds in a similar manner.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, available at: [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13\\_203.20.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_203.20.asp).

<sup>2</sup> Gary Orfield and Jongyeon Ee, "Segregating California's Future: Inequality and Its Alternative 60 Years After Brown v. Board of Education" (Los Angeles: Civil Rights Project, UCLA, May 2014), <http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/segregating-california2019s-future-inequality-and-its-alternative-60-years-after-brown-v.-board-of-education/orfield-ee-segregating-california-future-brown-at.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Ed-Data Partnership, available at: [http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/App\\_Resx/EdDataClassic/fsTwoPanel.aspx?#lbottom=\\_layouts/EdDataClassic/profile](http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/App_Resx/EdDataClassic/fsTwoPanel.aspx?#lbottom=_layouts/EdDataClassic/profile).

<sup>4</sup> "State Schools Chief Tom Torlakson Announces High School Graduation Rate Tops 80 Percent," California Dept. of Education, April 28, 2014, <http://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr14/yr14rel42.asp>.

<sup>5</sup> "Battle lines forming in LA Unified for 'Local Control' spending," LA School Report, April 3, 2014, <http://laschoolreport.com/battle-lines-forming-in-la-unified-for-local-control-spending/>.

<sup>6</sup> "Unions have lukewarm response to Deasy's new budget proposal," LA School Report, April 7, 2014, <http://laschoolreport.com/unions-have-lukewarm-response-to-deasys-2014-15-budget-proposal/>.

<sup>7</sup> "JUST IN: SEIU Local 99 and LAUSD reach tentative deal," LA School Report, June 30, 2014, <http://laschoolreport.com/seiu-local-99-laUSD-reach-contract-deal/>.



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