

SAN FRANCISCO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

DIVERSE URBAN DISTRICT
CREATIVELY ENGAGES PARENTS
AND COMMUNITY GROUPS,
BUILDS UPON LEGACY OF
EQUITABLE SCHOOL FUNDING

San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) was an early supporter of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), the new California law that radically transformed public school funding to provide more resources for the state’s low-income, foster youth, and English learner students.

“This is unabashedly about equity,” said San Francisco Unified Superintendent Richard Carranza, speaking at a conference in early May 2013. The following month, the district school board gave its official support to Governor Jerry Brown’s LCFF bill, a month after which state lawmakers passed the landmark legislation.¹

California’s seventh-largest school district is a fusion of diverse cultures and languages. Of the more than 53,000 students enrolled in the district’s 104 K–12 schools, 29 percent are English learners (with a whopping 44 languages spoken in the district), and 85 percent are children of color.



Photo courtesy of Parents for Public Schools.

“A well-educated populace that is diverse ... that’s our strength, that’s what makes us innovative,” said Carranza that afternoon in May. “This goes to the heart of the American dream.”

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Despite San Francisco’s expanding wealth from vibrant business and technology sectors, a majority of children in the city’s school district come from low-income families, with 61 percent qualifying for free or reduced-priced meals.

Many of the district’s English learners are low-income. In all, 67 percent of students are generating nearly \$64 million in supplemental funding for San Francisco Unified in 2014–15 under LCFF.

DISTRICT AHEAD OF THE GAME IN THE LCFF PROCESS

San Francisco Unified had a relatively smooth transition to LCFF, not only due to endorsements from top

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Sources that informed this case study include: district board meeting documents; district webpages; LCAP and related documents; and interviews with Myong Leigh and

Aditi Shrivastava (San Francisco Unified School District), Vicki Symonds, Miranda Martin, and Masharika Maddison (Parents for Public Schools of San Francisco), and Christina Cañaverl (Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth).

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Photo courtesy of Parents for Public Schools.

administrators, but also because of the district's weighted student funding model already in place for several years. Since 2003, SFUSD has allocated funds to schools for site-based budgeting that provides additional funding to schools with the greatest needs.

In the latest iteration of the district's centralized school funding system known as the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), SFUSD groups schools into five different levels depending on need. These groupings are based on several factors, including academic performance and trends, segregation, human capital, student demographics, and other qualitative data. A school's category determines the level of support it receives from the district for new full-time positions. The district then consults with each school site to decide what type of personnel to hire (e.g., nurses, social workers, literacy coaches, etc.) based on school needs and priorities.

When adapting its planning and budgeting to LCFF, the district applied the practices it had already instituted through this system to the LCFF spending requirements for high-need students.

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PARENTS TAKE THE LEAD IN ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

One new aspect of LCFF for San Francisco Unified was the district-wide community engagement process. Although SFUSD has a history of working with its community, the requirements for developing the Local Control and Accountability Plan, or LCAP, stretched the district to engage parents more deeply and in new ways.

The district drew on San Francisco's active and engaged community organizing presence to reach out to the community. At a meeting in February 2014, SFUSD staff met with representatives of the District English Learner Advisory Committee (DELAC), the Parent Advisory Council (PAC), and community-based organizations to develop a plan to engage the community and solicit feedback from diverse groups on how to spend its LCFF funds.

The community groups involved in this process make up the Ed Collective, which works in coalition toward common education-related goals. This coalition includes Chinese for Affirmative Action, Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth, Mission Graduates, Parents for Public Schools of San Francisco, Second District PTA, and Support for Families of Children with Disabilities.

As part of the outreach strategy that the PAC and the Ed Collective developed, the PAC, DELAC, and each community group hosted a number of "community conversations" that targeted the more marginalized members of the SFUSD community and parents not typically able to be active participants at district meetings. The PAC, DELAC, and community groups did the outreach to get stakeholders to attend the community conversations. They also organized and facilitated these meetings. As Christina Cañaverol of Coleman Advocates explains, "SFUSD did provide facilities, translation, and supplies, but a lot of leg work went into this process that stretched community groups' capacity."²

During these small gatherings, community members discussed what was working in the district, what could be increased or improved, and what success would look like.

The district and community partners also held three larger forums open to the wider district community. In all, the district held 29 public meetings in collaboration with the committees and community groups and heard

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from more than 400 people, representing parents and guardians, teachers, community members, district staff, and high school students. The overwhelming majority – about 70 percent – were parents and guardians; 14 percent were community members, 11 percent were educators and district staff, and 6 percent were high school students, according to participant surveys.

SOME GAPS IN THE FEEDBACK LOOP

Coming out of this first-year process, the parent committees' overarching critique was that the LCAP failed to meaningfully reflect community input. Although community members provided extensive ideas, some partners felt they couldn't identify their input in the LCAP.

The timeline of activities suggests these groups may be right. The district drafted its LCAP during the community engagement period rather than after and presented an early draft of the LCAP at the same meeting that the PAC presented a compilation of community feedback to the district.

The short period of time between the draft and final versions of the LCAP left about a month for the PAC and DELAC to weigh in, and for the district to provide written responses and craft a final plan for presentation to its board.

"Some issues that came up at nearly every meeting, especially better communication with parents, didn't make it into the LCAP," said Vicki Symonds, Finance and Operations Director of Parents for Public Schools of San Francisco, which helped organize more than a dozen of the community meetings.³

"It was disappointing to some families involved in the process not to see the lines between the feedback and what showed up in the final LCAP," added Symonds.

To address this issue, the PAC and community groups recommended establishing an LCAP Task Force,

including members from stakeholder groups, to evaluate the first year of LCAP implementation and to incorporate effective practices into next year's LCAP process. The district acted on this recommendation, and the group has already begun to meet.

STRONG FOCUS ON EQUITY, BUT NOT A CLEAR PICTURE OF WHOLE PROGRAM

Despite the challenges, San Francisco Unified delivered a coherent LCAP that aligns well with the six strategies for success from the district's strategic plan (which it calls *Impact Learning, Impact Lives*). In particular, the LCAP promises to invest in additional academic and socio-emotional supports aimed at improving outcomes for the district's most vulnerable and high-need students.

Of the district's \$64 million in supplemental and concentration funds, SFUSD set aside \$25 million for site-based budgeting, distributed based on student need. Local schoolsite councils can use these funds for such things as hiring general education teachers, librarians, and counselors, buying computers, employing site-based language translation services, and providing professional development.

The district also set aside nearly \$10 million for its Multi-Tiered System of Supports. The district's largest expenditure of supplemental and concentration funds in MTSS is \$4 million for "instructional reform facilitators" (who lead school-based efforts to improve instruction), literacy coaches, and interventions for academically high-risk students.

Through its MTSS framework, SFUSD also allocated \$2.4 million for extra social workers, "elementary advisors," and other socio-emotional supports. The district also committed \$800,000 to expand its engagement efforts to historically marginalized families.

San Francisco Unified provides an appendix to its LCAP



Photo courtesy of Parents for Public Schools.

that itemizes all of its supplemental and concentration fund expenditures in an organized format. The list does not, however, describe how these expenditures increase or improve services for low-income, English learner, and foster youth students. Also, community advocates were disappointed this document was missing from the draft reviewed and commented on by parents during the community engagement process.

Nor does the district include all its LCFF-related expenditures in the LCAP. Some services are funded both by LCFF and non-LCFF dollars, but the LCAP sometimes excludes the non-LCFF portions of these services. For example, community members were

concerned that the LCAP did not cover having a social worker at each school site. The district had to reassure them that each school site had a social worker and that only those social workers funded by LCFF were disclosed in the LCAP.

“There was nothing concrete enough; you couldn’t see the dollars, you couldn’t see the services, and that was frustrating to many who participated,” said Symonds.

San Francisco Unified experienced a few challenges throughout this first LCAP cycle. With the SFUSD LCAP Task Force currently meeting to improve the community engagement process for this year’s LCAP update, both the district and community partners have their sights set on confronting these challenges.

NOTES

¹ Richard Carranza, Superintendent, San Francisco Unified School District, EdSource Symposium, May 4, 2013.

² Interview with Christina Cañaverall, Director of Parent Organizing and Education Policy, Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth, March 27, 2014

³ Interview with Vicki Symonds, Director of Finance and Operations, Parents for Public Schools of San Francisco, July 22, 2014. Other comments from this interviewee are from the same date.



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