

# Root Cause Analysis of Student & Family Engagement

## Table of Contents

- I. [Defining Meaningful Student & Family Engagement](#)
- II. [Summary of Root Cause Analysis](#)
- III. [Problem Statement](#)
- IV. 6 Core Root Causes
  1. [Lack of belief that the system's success is critically dependent on its relationships with students & families](#)
  2. [Lack of belief in students & families as experts](#)
  3. [Lack of understanding and expertise around highly effective student & family engagement](#)
  4. [Lack of committed and consistent district & school leaders](#)
  5. [Lack of inclusivity based on race & culture](#)
  6. [Systems/tools are not made to be community-friendly](#)
- V. [Acknowledgements](#)

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## Defining Meaningful Student & Family Engagement (draft)

*“Engaging stakeholders in the decision-making process is a central principle of LCFF”*

<p><b>Equitable Stakeholder Engagement</b></p> <p>Districts actively outreach to high need and traditionally underrepresented parents, guardians, and students. Engagement activities and events are conducted through a variety of methods (i.e. surveys, town halls, focus groups, etc.) with translation and childcare services provided.</p>	<p><b>Leadership Development</b></p> <p>Training, resources, and support are provided for community engagement specialist(s), LCAP specialist(s), parents, guardians, and student leaders to conduct and participate meaningfully in engagement events and shared decision-making spaces.</p>
<p><b>Shared Decision-Making</b></p> <p>Districts create a parent, guardian, and student group that provides meaningful direction to shape the district's funding priorities and LCAP.</p>	<p><b>Accountability and Transparency</b></p> <p>Parents, guardians, and students are clear on the decision makers, timeline, and engagement opportunities to shape the LCAP. District provides clear and concise outcomes of collected community input.</p>

Source: Californians for Justice & Families in Schools LCAP Engagement Framework

# Root Cause Analysis of Student & Family Engagement

## Summary of Root Cause Analysis

*The following was developed by a coalition of 19 community organizations, anchored by Californians for Justice, that work to engage and organize students and families--particularly low-income people of color, immigrants, LGBTQ and foster youth--in support of the successful implementation of LCFF, particularly through the development of LCAPs across the State of California. To develop this analysis of root causes, we used the protocol from the CCESSA Differentiated Assistance Facilitation Guide which included tools from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching Fishbone Diagram and a process adapted from the High Tech High GSE Center for Research on Equity and Innovation.*

### Problem Statement

When Local Control Funding Formula is not inclusive of students and families it will not address the needs of low-performing and underserved students.

### 6 Core Root Causes

1. Lack of belief that the system's success is critically dependent on its relationships with students & families
2. Lack of belief in students & families as experts
3. Lack of committed and consistent district & school leaders
4. Lack of understanding what constitutes highly effective student & family engagement
5. Lack of inclusivity based on race & culture
6. Systems/tools are not made to be community-friendly

# Root Cause Analysis of Student & Family Engagement

For more information about this analysis and future work of the coalition please contact Norma Rodriguez ([norma@caljustice.org](mailto:norma@caljustice.org)) with Californians for Justice.

**Problem Statement:** When Local Control Funding Formula is not inclusive of students and families it will not address the needs of low-performing and underserved students.

*“This is about our state’s equity issue. We need more conversations in education about the needs of high need students and parents. And unfortunately the students and parents with the most needs are the ones left out of the discussions. It’s still unbalanced and it needs more attention.” -- Parent advocate, Los Angeles*

*“So why the inclusivity? Student and parent expertise is not being counted. Teaching and learning and the intersection of school climate and culture requires that inclusivity is at the core of improving our schools.” -- Community organizer, Oakland*

## 1. Lack of belief that the system’s success is critically dependent on its relationships with students & families

Sub-causes:

- Lack of district prioritization of time/resources
- Don’t see connection to student outcomes & achievement
- Don’t see importance of accountability to community
- Success is measured by effort, not results (“we tried”)
- Lack of understanding theory and research behind engagement
- Reactive vs. preventive mindset and practices

*“If we see engagement as part of the core, underlying conditions to make real change fundamentally at schools, this belief has to be shared across teachers and principals. One of the limited resources is time. What is the absolutely most important thing to be doing. They have to make choices.” -- Community organizer, Oakland*

## 2. Lack of belief in students & families as experts

Sub-causes:

## Root Cause Analysis of Student & Family Engagement

- Educators are taught/expected to be the experts
- Fear of bad decisions
- Fear of too many student/family interest groups
- Lack of investment in student/family training & leadership development
- Resistance to shared decision-making

*“I know what is wrong with my schools and that I want to change it for my peers. People say that youth never want to be involved. The truth is, that youth like me do want to be involved. But often times, adults aren’t listening. We’ve been advocating for a culture of equal partnership between youth and adults knowing that is the only way we can be successful. We want to inspire more people about this impossible idea, that students working together with adults actually unites people more in accomplishing our goals.” -- Youth leader, Oakland*

### 3. Lack of understanding and expertise around highly effective student & family engagement

Sub-causes:

- No shared definition and measurements of what is meaningful, effective engagement beyond the statutory baseline
- Lack of guidance/best practices for districts and schools on how to go about about making engagement effective and inclusive
- District/school staff hired for other skills besides engagement
- Lack of training for key skills necessary to engagement like relationship building, facilitation, empathy/deep listening, understanding privilege, power & hierarchy
- LCAP staff lack deep understanding of school sites & services (which is where a lot of students & parents want to engage around)
- Lack of knowing strategies and best practices to reach marginalized students/families

*“Day to day-in LAUSD, between district and state there is a requirement to do listening sessions, but no criteria or guiding framework how to do them or make them meaningful. It ranges from pretty good engagement, but we also see very superficial meetings. There’s a lack of defining what engagement looks like, what meaningful engagement looks like.” -- Youth Organizer, East Los Angeles*

*“Only 2 parents are coming to the meetings at the district level for the LCAP, a lot of work needs to happen. It is not clear specifically what districts need to bring to the table*

# Root Cause Analysis of Student & Family Engagement

*in terms of information on the money, executive summary, all the revenues.” -- Parent leader, San Jose*

## 4. Lack of committed and consistent district and school leaders

Sub-causes:

- Not enough leaders who are bought in on prioritizing engagement
- Pockets of effectiveness by some leaders but not spread across district
- Genuine commitment to sharing power
- Commitment to engagement in the good times and the bad
- Willingness to address the hard conversation of power, privilege, race, class, etc.

*“District leadership is required to make the changes in structures and beliefs. This is the core where expertise has to start with. There’s a precondition from leadership.” -- Community advocate, Sacramento*

*“Leadership has to be supportive with asking for evidence of how staff are communicating with parents, professional development for parent leaders, helping to support their leadership on budget, advisory committees, etc.” -- Parent advocate, Los Angeles*

## 5. Lack of inclusivity based on race & culture

Sub-causes:

- Unconscious/Conscious Bias
- Lack of understanding of historic and systemic racism and inequities, white supremacy & privilege
- Not a given to accommodate language translation needs
- Families and students who have cultural differences around challenging authority
- Families and students with differences in sense of agency, empowerment
- Fear of too much focus on minority groups, not all students (fear of backlash from privileged)

*“The system teaches new teachers [and other staff] how to teach children, but they teach them as if all students are the same (socioeconomic, rich, white, etc). Need to*

# Root Cause Analysis of Student & Family Engagement

*place more attention to what parents and students think.” -- Parent Organizer, Santa Ana*

## 6. Systems/tools are not made to be community-friendly

Sub-causes:

- Jargon/“Education speak”
- Budget documents are complex
- Lack of quality language translation
- Documents made for range of audiences
- Lack of understanding of what community-friendly is
- Lack of effective communication, outreach practices

*“Terminology that the district uses, like LCFF and LCAP, these terms mean nothing to the parents, so simplifying language would help. Offer trainings for the parents because often times parents are not engaged or properly trained, not engaged on what the terms mean. Also, the district has information on the website but doesn’t share out the resource, let people know about it; they should go beyond displaying it on their website but truly explaining it in a meaningful way.” -- Parent leader, San Jose*

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# **Root Cause Analysis of Student & Family Engagement**

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