

FactSheet

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Local Control and Accountability Plans

A Survey of School Board Member Involvement

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Introduction

Local school boards have long been the American model of school governance, but in recent decades, centralization has steadily increased at the state and federal levels. By 2009, California channeled over \$4.5 billion in school funding through more than 40 separate state categorical programs, limiting the ability of school boards to make decisions about educational programs that aligned with local needs and priorities.

In 2013, the state replaced most categorical programs with the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). The core principles of the current school finance model are local flexibility, accountability, and equity. District Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs) specify how the needs of all numerically significant student groups will be met, including ethnic subgroups, socioeconomically disadvantaged students, English learners, students identified for special education services, foster youth, and homeless youth. They are intended to be developed in consultation with a wide array of stakeholders, and are revisited annually to measure progress. In 2017, the state introduced the California School Dashboard, which helps education leaders and others understand how well districts and schools are performing in terms of student outcomes on multiple measures for the eight state priorities.

The LCFF statute (Education Code 52060) refers explicitly to governing boards in developing and adopting their district LCAPs, but does not specifically define their role. Exploratory case studies about LCFF and LCAPs highlight the need for a closer examination of what board members perceive to be their role in the LCAP development process, their reported levels of involvement, and what assistance they might need in order to understand and carry out their role as part of a governance team.

To address some of the questions raised, CSBA conducted a survey of nearly 200 board members serving in the Association's Delegate Assembly (DA). The DA provides a geographically representative sample of districts throughout the state, and the student demographics and enrollment size of those included generally reflect the characteristics of the full range of California school districts. Given their leadership roles within CSBA, it is possible that Delegates' overall engagement differs from their peers. However, the sample size—approximately one fifth of California districts—and array of district characteristics boost our confidence that these survey responses accurately represent board member experience across the state.

Board Member Involvement in the LCAP Process

In contrast to the findings from recent case study research, the majority of board members described contributing to key aspects of the LCAP development and review process. More than three quarters indicated that they were actively involved in establishing the LCAP vision and goals:

- » 78 percent reported being very or somewhat involved in developing the vision and goals associated with the LCAP.

One fundamental role of boards is to align and approve resources, and participating board members fulfilled this role in relation to the LCAP as well:

- » Almost all, 91 percent, reported being either very or somewhat involved in aligning and approving resources to support their district's LCAP goals.

More than two thirds also reported that they recommended changes to their district's LCAP drafts, indicating that they played a more active role in its development than simply approving the recommendations of the district administration:

- » 68 percent reported being very or somewhat involved in recommending modifications to the draft LCAP.

In addition, almost two thirds of these board members played a role in engaging the community with respect to the LCAP:

- » 63 percent reported being very or somewhat involved in engaging with the community around the LCAP.

Both of these findings further indicate that many school boards are engaged beyond mere approval of staff proposals.

To a large extent the involvement in the LCAP process that board members reported in this survey was consistent with the research on the role of effective school boards. This research has found that effective school boards—defined as those in districts that successfully implement policies that lead to improving student outcomes—set the district vision and goals and allocate the resources necessary for achieving those goals. Moreover, effective boards empower the district staff to determine and implement strategies that advance these goals, while monitoring these strategies for appropriateness and effectiveness. In practice, the board might delegate drafting the LCAP to central office staff, in consultation with the school board and broader community, but their role includes two key elements of LCAP development: goal-setting and resource allocation (see link to the school board research report at the end of this document).

Board Members Would Like More Guidance about Their Role in LCAP Development

The advent of the LCFF shifted responsibility for determining how education funds are used away from a centralized, top-down approach from state policy makers to one that is more locally focused. Approximately three quarters of board members surveyed indicated an interest in information and guidance with respect to clarifying their role in the LCAP process that could support their work on behalf of the students in their communities:

- » 73 percent reported that a clear definition of the board role in the LCAP process would help them be more involved in the LCAP.

In the absence of clearly defined roles, superintendents and central office administrators appear to hold a wide range of interpretations about how board members should engage in each step of the process.

In fact, survey responses indicated that not all board members have been encouraged by their superintendents to be involved in the LCAP process, despite language within the LCFF statute that refers specifically to governing boards:

- » Only 39 percent said they were strongly encouraged by their superintendent to participate in the LCAP process, while 20 percent said they were not encouraged at all.

This underscores that both superintendents and boards are continuing to negotiate their roles in collaborating on the implementation of the LCFF approach and need guidance in this area.

Nonetheless, for the roles that board members currently play, they described district staff as helpful:

- » 77 percent reported that they were receiving enough information from local staff to fulfill their current roles; 49 percent to a great extent and an additional 28 percent to some extent.

This finding speaks well of the staff-board relationship in the majority of these districts and is in keeping with the traditional delegation of administrative tasks to staff rather than board members.

In order to help them engage more effectively, board members indicated that it would be useful to learn how districts similar to their own successfully engage in the LCAP process:

- » 78 percent reported that more resources on best practices for districts like theirs would help them fulfill their LCAP roles.

With greater guidance about their roles, more encouragement from superintendents, and examples of other districts' approaches, our findings suggest that boards and staff could readily improve the collaborative development of effective LCAPs.

California School Dashboard: A New Area of Need

The California School Dashboard is designed to help districts and schools track data on the effectiveness of their LCAP plans on a number of measures. The still-evolving Dashboard provides data intended to inform decisions that will lead to improved student outcomes for each of the eight state priorities. Although it was piloted in 2017, additional changes will be implemented over the next several years.

Reflecting these factors, many participants indicated that they need help understanding and using the Dashboard:

- » 49 percent reported needing some or much more help in understanding the Dashboard data to fulfill their LCAP roles.

In particular, their responses indicated that they are not sure how to communicate the Dashboard to their communities and would welcome tools to help them do this:

- » 65 percent reported needing some or many more tools from CSBA for communicating with their community about the Dashboard and how it informs the LCAP.

Given that this survey was administered less than two months after Dashboard data became available to districts, our findings likely reflect the newness of the instrument. It is reasonable to believe that board members have developed greater familiarity with the Dashboard but still need assistance. Furthermore, given that additional changes will be introduced in the 2017–18 school year, board members will need ongoing updates.

Conclusion

These responses add important information about board members' engagement in the implementation of LCFF and LCAPs. The vast majority of board members surveyed described being engaged in key stages of the LCAP development process. At the same time, board members clearly indicated that they would welcome information and guidance that could help them better understand and carry out this role more effectively. CSBA will continue to offer professional learning opportunities for board members, and guidance related to the LCAP development process to

support decisions that lead to the statute's ultimate goal: ensuring that all California students have the opportunities and supports they need to succeed.

CSBA Resources

- » [California School Dashboard](#) (coming Fall 2017)
- » [The School Board Role in Creating the Conditions for Student Achievement: A Review of the Research](#) (May 2017)
- » [Promising Practices for Developing and Implementing LCAPs](#) (November 2016)
- » [Strengthening the LCAP: Recommendations for Improving the Template, Process and State Supports](#) (June 2016)
- » [Increasing LCAP Transparency and Reaffirming California's Commitment to Local Control: Experiences of District and County Leaders](#) (June 2016)

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The survey was conducted during the May 2017 CSBA Delegate Assembly meeting, attended by 235 board members (possible respondents). Responses ranged from 185 to 197, depending on the question. While possible respondents included 20 county office of education board members, we can assume that the overwhelming majority of respondents were district board members and therefore refer to them as such throughout the fact sheet.