Governance Brief

The Coherence Framework in Action
Promising Practices for Developing and Implementing LCAPs

by Michael Fullan and Susan Lovenburg with David DeLuz and Kathy Armstrong

Introduction

The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) was signed into law in California in July 2013 to give school districts and county offices of education (local educational agencies or LEAs)[1] greater discretion in how they allocate funds and to more effectively direct resources to the state's most vulnerable student populations. The LCFF also changed how LEAs are held accountable for improvement. All LEAs are now required to create a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), in consultation with their communities, which details how they will use funds to improve outcomes for students and indicates progress made toward existing goals.

The governance implications of these changes are significant, reflecting an understanding that public agencies need to work differently to deliver better results, and the recognition that excellence has not been achieved through compliance-oriented structures and systems. The LCFF presents a renewed opportunity to focus on improving student outcomes, to increase the level of communication between schools and communities, and to close achievement gaps. To achieve this potential, governance teams and educators must transform the way they make decisions and learn from each other, and must interact more collaboratively with the state.

The State of Reform

Among the findings described by Michael Fullan and his team in a recent 'taking stock' assessment of the state of LCFF/LCAP reform,[2] two stand out:

1. Policies are becoming better aligned and people at all levels of the California education system appreciate this approach (or recognize its potential).

2. The LCFF and LCAP were based on the assumption that most districts would have the capacity to proceed with implementation when given local autonomy and resources. However, the model underestimated how much additional capacity would be needed to make the reform successful at the local level, evident in the fact that many districts are struggling with the question of how to effectively implement LCFF and LCAPs.

Background of CSBA's LCFF Collaborative Working Group

Understanding this need to build local capacity, CSBA[3] launched the LCFF Collaborative Working Group (CWG) in 2014, in partnership with California Forward,[4] to provide the collaborative space and technical support needed by governance teams to successfully navigate the LCFF/LCAP transformation. During the three-year project, board members and superintendents from 20 school districts and four county offices of education convened quarterly for facilitated sessions focused on improving LCFF implementation, informing LCAP development, and sharing peer practices.

The CWG identified some early challenges such as the complexity of the LCAP template provided by the state and the need for tools to better communicate an LEA's vision for student success to stakeholders.[5] CWG members thought about how to reorient the work of teaching and learning,

and how to use data to inform a culture of continuous improvement. This governance brief describes a model the group constructed utilizing Michael Fullan's "Coherence Framework" to drive a district's effort to improve student outcomes.

The Coherence Framework

Fullan first met with the CWG in June 2015 to present the Coherence Framework,[6] a model for developing skills and competencies within a group with the long-term goal of building internal capacity and responsibility to improve student achievement (Figure 1).

The elements of the Framework include four strategies, with leadership essential to each component:

» **Focusing Direction:** LEAs set a small number of ambitious goals directly related to student achievement and mobilize the whole organization to support a central moral purpose: improving society through improving educational systems.

» **Cultivating Collaborative Cultures:** LEAs foster interconnected and supportive cultures focused on instructional improvement within and across schools, as well as between schools and the larger LEA.

» **Deepening Learning:** LEAs improve teaching at all levels of the system through a deeper understanding of the learning process and how to influence it.

» **Securing Accountability:** LEAs develop conditions that maximize internal accountability and promote understanding of the value of external accountability measures.

While the Framework calls for the development of leadership at all levels, its foundation requires building a commonly owned approach for improving student success. Governing boards play a vital leadership role in focusing direction based upon the shared values and beliefs of the LEA and community. Specifically, governing boards create the conditions to build and support a collaborative approach to continuous improvement as well as maximize conditions for effective internal accountability.

Achieving coherence within a system is not easily accomplished. Fullan and his colleagues stress that coherence is not simply "alignment." Rather, "coherence consists of the shared depth of understanding about the purpose and nature of the work" LEAs are undertaking to transform their districts in ways that will lead to improved student success.[7] Thus, coherence can only be achieved through focused and purposeful interaction among LEA members,

and it must be continuously attended to because people come and go and environments change.

Figure 1: The Coherence Framework

Model Practice: The Coherence Framework in Action

Understanding this capacity challenge, members of the CWG embraced the Coherence Framework as an effective, promising model for guiding the development and implementation of plans to achieve their goals for student success. Consistent with the state's philosophy in implementing the LCFF, the Framework was also seen as an effective communication tool for creating a user-friendly version of the LCAP. For these reasons, the CWG collaborated with Fullan to further develop the Framework as a guide to design and implement LCAP and related plans.

Following a work session with Fullan, the CWG tasked a working group of school board members and superintendents with developing a model for:

» Using the Coherence Framework to guide efforts within an LEA to improve student success, and

» Clearly communicating to the public an LEA's goals and strategies for student success, the resources aligned in support of those goals, and the metrics established to gauge progress.

The "Coherence Framework in Action" described in the following pages is the product of the CWG, developed in collaboration with Fullan. It is one example of how LEAs can use the Framework to guide their school improvement

efforts; allocate resources consistent with their goals; and clearly communicate vision, strategies, and progress to their communities.

The format and examples provided are illustrations only, intended to convey how the model may be applied. In this case, the focus is on English Learners, but the model could be applied with reference to goals for all student groups included in the LCAP. LEAs should adapt this model in ways that best support local efforts and meet the communications needs of their own communities.

The Coherence Framework in Action

In this section, we provide a model of how an LEA might use the Coherence Framework. This example is intended to be used in conjunction with Fullan's book *Coherence: The Right Drivers in Action for Schools, Districts, and Systems* and its companion *Taking Action Guide.*

Short and long protocols are offered in Fullan's publications to assist LEAs in implementing the model. The short version (Appendix A) is designed to give individuals a faster immersion into the Framework and may be suitable for districts that have already done considerable work on their LCAP and its related coherence. The long version (Appendix B) contains the processes for a full immersion into developing a solid Coherence Framework. Since achieving coherence requires a highly and continuously interactive process, Fullan recommends the longer version, though it may be appropriate to skip some of the steps depending on what aspects of the Framework require an LEA's attention.

In the example below, the model district's goal of increasing the number of English Learners reaching proficiency is considered through each of the four lenses of the Coherence Framework: focusing direction, cultivating collaborative cultures, deepening learning, and securing accountability. While the goal remains the same, the approach in each section is slightly different.

Example of Our District's Vision

This section outlines an example of how all four elements of the Coherence Framework can be applied to achieving a single goal.

Our district's goal: We will annually increase the number of English Learners reaching proficiency, including those currently identified as Long-Term English Learners.

Focusing Direction

Our district will set a small number of ambitious goals directly related to student achievement, mobilizing the whole organization to support our central moral purpose: improving society through improving educational systems.

Key strategies to achieve our goal of improving outcomes for English Learners and Long-Term English Learners:

» Implement curriculum for Long-Term English Learners.

» Extend learning opportunities for English Learners, including high school tutoring services and Bridge Program support at elementary and junior high schools.

» Improve student connectedness and well-being through the provision of elementary and secondary counseling services, increased nursing and mental health services, and home-to-school liaisons.

How we will measure success:

» 100% of Long-Term English Learners will access new curriculum supported with adequate technology, instructional materials, and assessments.

» 5% annual increase in English Learner language proficiency.

» 3% annual increase in English Learner A-G completion.

» 50% increase in Long-Term English Learner students reporting they feel positively connected to the school environment and experience success.

Progress in 2015–16:

» Long-Term English Learner curriculum purchased. Seventy-eight students identified for services. Staff teams assembled and outreach to families underway.

» Established baseline: 50% of Long-Term English Learner students made progress in English proficiency.

» Established baseline: 30% of Long-Term English Learner students met A-G completion requirements.

» Established baseline: 25% of Long-Term English Learner students report they feel positively connected to the school environment and experience success.

Resources allocated in 2016–17:

» $1,000,000 of $10,000,000 LCAP funds (10%)

Cultivating Collaborative Cultures

Our district will foster interconnected and supportive cultures focused on instructional improvement within and across schools, as well as between schools and the district.

Key strategies to achieve our goal of improving outcomes for English Learners and Long-Term English Learners:

» Create and maintain a culture of collaborative professionalism, informed by data, in which staff systematically cooperate to improve the learning experiences and achievement of all students. Educator teams will research, create, pilot, and evaluate effective classroom strategies and share successful practices with peers across the district.

» Increase parent engagement through effective two-way communication with families about school programs and student progress, foster family involvement at school, support academic learning at home, and include families as knowledgeable participants in school decisions.

How we will measure success:

» 50% increase in teachers reporting that collaboration improved their classroom practice.

» 10% increase in parent participation in school/district activities that support student success.

» 50% increase in parents reporting they have the information and skills needed to support their student's success.

Progress in 2015–16:

» Established baseline: 60% of teachers report that collaboration improved their classroom practice.

» Established baseline: 326 parents participated in school/district activities.

» Established baseline: 30% of parents report they have the information and skills needed to support their student's success.

Resources allocated in 2016–17:

» $2,000,000 of $10,000,000 LCAP funds (20%)

Deepening Learning

Our district will improve teaching and learning at all levels of the system through a deeper understanding of the learning process and how we influence it.

Key strategies to achieve our goal of improving outcomes for English Learners and Long-Term English Learners:

» Integrate English Language Development teaching strategies in all classrooms to provide deeper, richer, and more relevant instruction for students.

» Through districtwide collaboration, develop and implement assessments that allow educators to effectively analyze student performance at frequent intervals to inform improved instruction.

How we will measure success:

75% increase in principals and teachers reporting they have the information and skills needed to increase the success of Long-Term English Learners.

Progress in 2015–16:

» Established baseline: 50% of teachers report they have the information and skills needed to support the success of Long-Term English Learners.

Resources allocated in 2016–17:

» $5,000,000 of $10,000,000 LCAP funds (50%)

Securing Accountability

Our district will develop conditions that maximize internal accountability and promote understanding of the value of external accountability measures.

Key strategies to achieve our goal of improving outcomes for English Learners and Long-Term English Learners:

» Assess student success at regular intervals throughout the school year, and adapt instructional practices accordingly.

» Assess student performance annually with California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) assessments and report results for student groups.

How we will measure success:

» 10% increase in the academic performance of all students and 15% increase in the academic performance of Long-Term English Learners on the CAASPP.

» 20% decrease in the number of students with a semester grade of D or F.

Progress in 2015–16:

» Student success teams established for each Long-Term English Learner collaborate to develop common formative assessments and review protocol.

» Baseline CAASPP scores established at each grade level tested: 3-8, and 11.

» Baseline established: 60 Long-Term English Learners have a semester grade of D or F.

Resources allocated in 2016–17:

» $2,000,000 of $10,000,000 LCAP funds (20%)

Supporting a Process of Continuous Improvement

When using the Coherence Framework, an LEA continually evaluates the teaching and learning that is needed to meet each of their goals, determines what resources will be allocated in support, and establishes how success will be measured—activities consistent with the development of the LCAP.

In annually reassessing direction and goals, LEAs can use the Coherence Framework model to evaluate whether they are successfully implementing the right strategies to cultivate collaboration and deepen learning, and have allocated resources effectively. For example, are parents, students, and community members integrated as partners? Is student achievement improving and, if so, are external accountability structures reflecting that success? If not, what more must be done? The resulting work may then serve as an "executive summary" of the annual LCAP.

Conclusion

The LCFF advances public interest by allowing education leadership teams to focus their decision-making on local community needs. This promotes student gains at the local—and by extension, the state—level. Civic involvement and public support are both critical to improvement efforts and best incorporated at the community level. The Coherence Framework is one tool that governance teams can use to help integrate these interests and improve the success of California's students and schools.

Resources

Fullan, M., Quinn, J. & Adam, E. *(2016) The Taking Action Guide to Building Coherence in Schools, Districts, and Systems*. Thousand Oaks, California, Corwin.

Fullan, M. and California Forward (2015). *A Golden Opportunity: The California Collaborative for Educational Excellence as a Force for Positive Change*. http://bit.ly/2h8nVvR

Krausen, K. (2016). *Promising Practices for Developing and Implementing LCAPs.* California School Boards Association http://bit.ly/2x8rv2g

For additional resources, please see endnotes.

Appendix A
Coherence Framework Plan: Short Protocol

Preliminary: Assemble the Group

Group membership is dependent upon the needs of the organization. Two possible approaches to developing the group are Role-Alike, e.g., all district administrators, all principals, etc., and Vertical Coherence, i.e., a cross-role group representing all levels of the LEA. A Lead Learner is designated to facilitate the group's interactions.

The role of group members is to:

» Represent a range of perspectives

» Communicate with stakeholders

» Share expertise

» Be transparent

» Participate fully

» Develop a plan for coherence

Step 1: Ground the Group in Common Understanding of the Work Ahead

Group members assess and discuss *Coherence* and the *Taking Action Guide* and/or other approaches to systems reform that are appropriate for their district.

Step 2: Assess the Current Environment

Group members assess the degree to which coherence already exists within the district, identifying evidence for how well the system currently focuses direction, cultivates collaborative cultures, deepens learning, and secures accountability. As one example, the *Taking Action Guide* offers a *Coherence Framework Assessment Guide* to walk members through this process.

Step 3: Master the Framework

Group members develop a plan for coherence and use the model plan in the *Coherence Framework in Action* section as an example for tracking goals, strategies, resources, and progress. The *Taking Action Guide* offers additional strategies and activities to support the group's work to improve teaching and learning.

Appendix B
Coherence Framework Plan: Long Protocol (Four-Day Workshop Format)

Preliminary: Assemble the Group

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The role of group members is to:

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(For guidance, see *Taking Action Guide*, pp. xiii–x.)

Workshop Format

Day 1: Introduction and Steps 1 and 2

Day 2: Step 3

Day 3: Steps 4 and 5

Day 4: Steps 6 and 7

Step 1: Coherence Making

Group members build understanding of key concepts of coherence and assess the degree to which coherence already exists within the district, identifying evidence for how well the system currently focuses direction, cultivates collaborative cultures, deepens learning, and secures accountability. (For guidance, see *Taking Action Guide,* pp.1–9.)

Step 2: Focus Direction

Group members develop shared purpose and assess change strategies. (For guidance, see *Taking Action Guide*, pp.10–25.)

Step 3: Cultivate Collaborative Cultures

Group members deepen their understanding of the growth mindset and assess their own learning leadership. (For guidance, see *Taking Action Guide,* pp. 26–37.)

Step 4: Deepen Learning

Group members clarify their goals and develop common language and understanding of the deep learning competencies: communication, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, citizenship, and character. (For guidance, see *Taking Action Guide,* pp. 38–48.)

Step 5: Secure Accountability

Group members develop understanding of the power of internal and external accountability to improve student success. (For guidance, see *Taking Action Guide,* pp. 49–53.)

Step 6: Lead for Coherence

Group members improve their understanding of how to develop leadership at all levels. (For guidance, see *Taking Action Guide,* pp. 54–59.)

Step 7: Master the Framework

Group members develop a plan for coherence and use the model plan in the Coherence Framework in Action section as an example for tracking goals, strategies, resources, and progress. (For guidance, see *Taking Action Guide,* pp. 60–74.)

For resources associated with both the short and long protocols, please see Resources 2–5 on this page.

Endnotes

1. The California Department of Education also classifies direct-funded charter schools as LEAs.

2. Fullan, M., et al. *California's Golden Opportunity: Taking Stock: Leadership from the Middle.* https://michaelfullan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/17_Californias-Golden-Opportunity-Taking-Stock-FinalAug31.pdf

3. CSBA (www.CSBA.org) is the nonprofit education association representing the elected officials who govern public school districts and county offices of education. With a membership of nearly 1,000 educational agencies statewide, CSBA brings together school governing boards and administrators from districts and county offices of education to advocate for effective policies that advance the education and well-being of the state's more than six million school-age children.

4. California Forward (www.CAFwd.org) is a bipartisan, nonprofit organization that advocates for moving government closer to the people, and encourages integration of efforts and data-informed decision-making to improve results. CA Fwd supports the enactment and implementation of significant efforts to create cost-effective public services at the state and regional levels.

5. Krausen, K. (2016). *Increasing LCAP Transparency and Reaffirming California's Commitment to Local Control.* California School Boards Association. http://bit.ly/2dhCOI5

6. Fullan, M. and Quinn, J. (2016) *Coherence: The Right Drivers in Action for Schools, Districts, and Systems* Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin.

7. See endnote 5.

Michael Fullan is a Professor Emeritus, OISE/University of Toronto, and Special Advisor in Education to the Premier of Ontario. Fullan and his team work on system change and deep learning in several jurisdictions around the world including California. His latest books are *Coherence* (with Joanne Quinn), and *Deep Learning Engage the World Change the World* (with Quinn & McEachen).

Susan Lovenburg is the director of economic prosperity at California Forward, and served as a staff lead on the CSBA/CA Fwd LCFF Collaborative Working Group. Susan also served as a school board member in the Davis Joint Unified School District from 2007-16 and a member of CSBA's Delegate Assembly from 2010-16.

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