



JANUARY 2025

# FAMILY VOICES

IMPROVING ENGAGEMENT AND INPUT IN  
LOCAL CONTROL ACCOUNTABILITY PLANS



## Acknowledgements of Organizations and Staff



**Alliance for a Better Community** is a non-profit organization advancing social, economic, racial equity and justice for the Latina/o community and the Los Angeles region through power building and policy advocacy.

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**Californians Together** is a statewide advocacy coalition of powerful organizations from all segments of the education community including teachers, administrators, board members, parents and civil rights non-profit groups. Our member organizations come together around the goal of better educating 1.1 million English learners by improving California's schools and promoting equitable educational policy.

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For nearly 25 years, **Families In Schools** (FIS) has been dedicated to elevating parent and family voices, creating space for real conversations that address unconscious bias, race, and poverty in how schools and systems engage families. FIS goes beyond theoretical family engagement, fostering strong partnerships between families, educators, and communities to support student success.

Sandy Mendoza, Director of Advocacy



**Parent Institute for Quality Education** (PIQE) is a social justice non-profit that engages, empowers and transforms families by providing the knowledge and skills to partner with schools and communities to ensure their students achieve their full potential.

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**Parent Organization Network** (PON) unites the power of underserved parents\* to break through barriers in public education, so parents and educators can effectively partner to ensure equity and excellence for all students.

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Daisy J. Amezcua, PON Director of Community Organizing

## For Collaboration and Support

The **California County Superintendents** provides the organizational mechanism for the 58 County Superintendents of Schools to design and implement statewide programs to identify and promote quality cost-effective educational practices and services, and provide support to school districts in the areas of student services, curriculum and instructional services, fiscal accountability and business services, personnel services, and technology and telecommunications.

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# INTRODUCTION

“The Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) is a tool for local educational agencies (LEA) to set goals, plan actions, and leverage resources to meet those goals to improve student outcomes” (California Department of Education). Introduced in California as a feature of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) in 2013, the LCAP was designed to enhance the role of local school districts by providing them with increased authority and flexibility in the allocation of state funding. The LCAP requires school districts to set goals, outline actions to achieve them, and measure progress through annual updates, with an emphasis on increasing and improving services to students identified as priority populations.

“Engaging educational partners is an essential part of the LCAP development and annual update process” (Community Engagement Initiative Report 1.0). LEAs must be able to demonstrate and document in the LCAP that they have “genuinely thought about the feedback received from partners and [are] acting on this feedback in a manner that best serves all students” (California Department of Education). In addition, superintendents are required to respond in writing to the suggestions of the advisory committees. By incorporating the voices of families, teachers, and community members, the LCAP fosters a collaborative environment where decisions are informed by diverse perspectives and local expertise.

In Spring 2024, staff from the California County Superintendents met with Californians Together to discuss the prevailing idea that many families do not feel engaged with their local LCAP process. That initial conversation

led to the development of our inquiry project. The project was designed to explore barriers to family engagement in the LCAP process from the perspectives of parents of English learners. Understanding these barriers is crucial for ensuring that all families are meaningfully involved in shaping education outcomes. The project sought to assess parents' awareness of LCAPs, their participation experiences, and their perceptions of the LCAP's impact on their child's academic outcomes, contributing to the ongoing effort to continuously improve authentic family engagement in the LCAP process.

This inquiry project marked the start of more in-depth conversations that need to be explored throughout the state. Californians Together and the California County Superintendents plan to continue holding frequent collaborative conversations on meaningful family engagement throughout the LCAP process and to continue reaching out to more families across the state.



# METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

Californians Together, in collaboration with The Alliance for a Better Community (ABC), Families In Schools (FIS), Parent Organization Network (PON), and Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE), developed a protocol with questions in English and Spanish to conduct focus groups, which were held in Spring 2024 (see Appendix A for the protocols). These four non-profit organizations were selected because they are deeply rooted in family engagement and empowerment. ABC, FIS, PON, and PIQE convened six focus groups made up of parents with a range of experience in their local LCAP development process (See Appendix B for the demographic data of the focus group participants).

The questions covered topics including equity and access for English learners and engagement and impact of the LCAPs. Specifically, the questions focused on learning about what families of English learners' experience has been in engaging with their LEA's LCAP process. We decided the best way to find out would be to solicit direct feedback from families regarding the process and the information contained in their district's LCAPs.

Some overarching themes that cut across all groups highlight a shared desire among parents and caregivers for more meaningful participation and tangible outcomes from the LCAP, including:

- Families were most interested in understanding how their

recommendations and comments in meetings were reflected in the final language in the LCAP

- Parents wanted to see the line between their participation and to its impact not only on the entire district or school, but also on their individual children
- One of the primary motivations for participation is ensuring relevance for their children.

The following section summarizes the key findings from the six focus groups of thirty Spanish and English-speaking family members. Each theme concludes with a summary of the data and provides considerations for continuously improving the family engagement in the LCAP process.



# EQUITY AND ACCESS FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

Parents and caregivers expressed a need for improved communication to better understand how schools support their students. They noted that the typical parent-teacher conference model tends to be one-sided and does not facilitate sharing of their experiences at home. Alongside a desire for more reciprocal communication, parents indicated they would appreciate more detailed information on how to support their students effectively.

Parents and caregivers also voiced frustration with a system that they feel does not fully address issues related to disparities in achievement and opportunities between English learners and other student groups. They noted that blame is often placed on factors such as the idea the lower grades did not prepare the students, insufficient funds, or administrative barriers, rather than addressing the root causes.

Additionally, families seek more information on learning gaps and how their students' progress compares to other groups. They want to ensure that their children are on track for success in environments where educators respect and affirm their home language and culture.

## **Considerations for Promoting Continuous Improvement**

- Facilitate deeper communication and ensure schools are properly staffed with bilingual and culturally competent educators to address the diverse needs of English learners.



- Leverage the new LCAP template. The revised template encourages parent committees to engage in analyzing data, outlining barriers, identifying root causes, and co-creating solutions to address outcome and opportunity disparities for English learners.
- All members of the district and school site should share responsibility for addressing current challenges and disparities. Educators and administrators should actively engage in the process, providing updates on the next steps and the outcomes.



# ENGAGEMENT IN THE LCAP PROCESS

Awareness of the LCAP varied among members of the parent focus groups. Those who had not seen the LCAP often noted lacking context for engaging with it meaningfully. Even parents and caregivers who served on their District English Learner Advisory Committee (DELAC) were surprised to learn they were expected to provide input and make recommendations. They reported that valuable information they received was often from non-profit and parent education organizations, rather than from the district LCAP committee itself.

Many parent and caregivers participants viewed the LCAP as a static, compliance-oriented document, and they indicated a clear need for a more transparent process to build trust. During times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, families expressed increased concern and a desire for relevant information. They noted a disconnect between LCAP documents and the challenges they knew their students faced during the pandemic.

Additionally, the focus groups said that district-conducted parent training faced difficulties when staff needed more support and likely encountered conflicts of interest in sharing comprehensive information. Informed parents and caregivers expect greater accountability from teachers and principals.


Parents and caregivers shared examples where their requests for specific information, including information on tutoring and intervention for

struggling students, were not reflected in the final plans. They observed that less urgent issues were included, while their input related to student learning goals was overlooked.

Additionally, parents and caregivers noted a lack of specific attention to English learners in LCAPs. They reported that meetings, often scheduled at inconvenient times, sometimes lacked language interpretation or were presented in complex jargon. This inconsistency and technical language did not effectively meet the needs of families.

### **Considerations to Promote Continuous Improvement**

- Families expressed the need for additional tools, like infographics and videos hosted on school websites, to enhance their understanding of the context and development of the LCAP. These tools should highlight the important content and initiatives that parents should expect to see within the next three years.
- Families expressed interest in more opportunities for training from county offices of education and non-profits so that they can better understand and act on the information they receive from schools and districts.
- Rather than holding a single session for input on the entire LCAP, consider organizing ongoing sessions that focus on specific sections of the LCAP. This approach would give attendees more time to process the information and ask questions.
- Language interpretation should be available both orally and in print, and should be delivered by interpreters with the knowledge and skills to deliver high quality translations.
- In addition to the compliance-based information, parents suggested that translated vignettes could help parents better understand what to expect when the LCAP is fully implemented.
- It would be beneficial to ensure that the superintendent of a school district or COE responds in writing to recommendations from the relevant committees, including the parent advisory committee and the English learner parent advisory committee.



# IMPACT OF LCAPS ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Education leaders need to be able to answer questions about the tangible impact of plans on students and their families. Parents and caregivers who attend meetings reported feeling like they were going just for the sake of documenting that the meetings took place. Officials are not making explicit connections between what is in the LCAP and student outcomes. Families reiterated the need for data to better understand how policies lead to the programs and services that will improve student learning. They want to build capacity to better engage with schools to take a more active role in their students' education journeys.

Families want to know that their concerns are being taken seriously. They want answers to questions about whether their students are showing proficiency growth on the annual English Language Progress Indicator, and, if not, what the district is going to do to accelerate progress. Parents of long-term English learners need the LCAP to address what schools are doing to facilitate language proficiency growth. They want to understand the options in front of them and the actions they can take to support their students.

## **Considerations for Promoting Continuous Improvement**

- Parents and caregivers desire direct communication about the use of data to monitor student learning in real-time and seek to play an active role in their students' progress.

- When English learners are performing at the lowest performance level, parents want to be engaged in determining the goals, actions, and services for English learners to be included in the LCAP.
- To establish expectations for English learners over the years, parents and caregivers want to be involved in determining the metrics and expected growth to be included in the LCAP for indicators that will demonstrate the intent to reduce disparities and provide opportunities for English learners and other student groups.

## **Conclusion**

Family voices are critical for understanding and supporting the goals, actions and services included in district LCAPs. It is through their questions and recommendations that the content of the LCAP can better represent their hopes and dreams for the future of their students, and the schools and districts in California.

The four parent empowerment organizations, Alliance for a Better Community, Families in Schools, Parent Organization Network and Parent Institute for Quality Education, each offer high quality professional development opportunities that are available to support this important work.

Finally, we offer the process and the protocol used to hear the voices of our families for improvement of engagement in the LCAP process and the education of their children as a resource. Districts are welcome to use the tool and process in the Appendix for focus groups in their district to listen to the voices in their community prior to the development of the annual updates and new LCAPs.





# APPENDIX A

## Focus Group Demographics

The following data represents the number of parent and caregiver participants and the demographics of the participants in each of the four focus groups. The focus groups were conducted in Los Angeles county and the Central Valley. The range of experience with LCAPs represented those with minimal interaction to those who were very experienced and served on the LCAP and DELAC committees.

- Total family partner participants - 30 with majority being female
- Spanish speaking - 15
- English speaking - 4
- Bilingual - 11
- Latino - 28
- African American - 1
- White - 1

Future research with larger and more diverse samples is recommended to validate and expand upon these findings and can be informed by these studies.

(Smith, J. A., & Doe, R. L. (2022). Exploring Parental Engagement in Education: A Case Study. *Journal of Educational Research*, 115(3), 245-259. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jedu.2022.03.001>).



## **Protocols for English Learner Parent LCAP Focus Groups**

Developed by Californians Together, The Alliance for a Better Community (ABC), Families In Schools (FIS), Parent Organization Network (PON), and Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE)

### **Introduction**

*Good (morning/afternoon/evening) and thank you all for joining us today. My name is (your name) and I am with (your organization's name). I will be facilitating our discussion. This focus group is a crucial part of our efforts to engage parents in the continuous improvement of our education system, especially in how it serves our English learner/multilingual learner students.*

*Before we begin, I want to acknowledge and thank each of you for taking the time to be here. Your insights are invaluable, and your experiences are the driving force that can help shape a more effective and responsive educational environment for your children.*

### **Background**

*Today, we are here to talk about the Local Control and Accountability Plan or LCAP, which plays a significant role in how our schools are funded and how*

*those funds are aimed at improving student outcomes. The LCAP is designed to ensure that the unique needs of students, including those who are English learners, are met with equity and accessibility.*

## **Expectations**

*Your voices as parents and caregivers are essential in this process. We want to hear about your perspectives, your challenges, and your ideas. As we share out, I encourage you to be open and honest. There are no wrong or right answers here. We’re looking for your candid feedback to help us inform the California County Superintendents so they can do better at training educators and staff responsible for implementing the LCAP and engaging with families.*

*Before we dive into the questions, let’s take care of a few housekeeping items. (Customize to your situation). We have a total of nine questions, and we’ll go through each one by one. So let’s get started.*

Category	Questions
Equity and Access for English Learners	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Describe the ideal education for your English learner child (children) in terms of learning environment, instruction, and support services to meet your child’s needs and language development.</li> <li>2. Ideally, how could the school support, prepare, or engage you in your child’s education?</li> <li>3. What are the elements of this ideal education do you <b>not</b> see currently?</li> </ol>
LCFF	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Have you reviewed an LCAP document before? If so, in what format? Full document (over 100 pages)? Summary (2-6 pages)? A PowerPoint? Other?</li> <li>5. Can you see a relationship or connection between the LCAP process, parent recommendations and the LCAP document? If so, how?</li> </ol>

Category	Questions
LCFF	<p>6. Can you see a relationship or connection between the LCAP document and EL students in your school? If so, how?</p> <p>7. What did you like about the LCAP process or document?</p> <p>8. Was the LCAP process inclusive or representative of EL students?</p> <p>9. Do you have recommendations for improving the LCAP process or the document for parents/families?</p>

## Spanish Protocol for Parent LCAP Focus Groups

### Introduction

*Buenos (días/tardes/noche) y gracias a todos por acompañarnos hoy. Mi nombre es (your name) y pertenezco a (name of your organization). Facilitaré nuestra discusión. Este grupo de discusión es una parte crucial de nuestros esfuerzos para involucrar a los padres en la mejora continua de nuestro sistema educativo, especialmente en la forma en que sirve a nuestros estudiantes de inglés / multilingües.*

*Antes de empezar, quiero reconocer y agradecer a cada uno de ustedes el tiempo que han dedicado a estar aquí. Sus puntos de vista son inestimables, y sus experiencias son la fuerza que puede ayudar a dar forma a un entorno educativo más eficaz y sensible para sus hijos.*

### Background

*Hoy, estamos aquí para hablar sobre el Plan de Control Local y Rendición de Cuentas o LCAP, que desempeña un papel importante en la forma en que*

*nuestras escuelas se financian y cómo esos fondos están destinados a mejorar los resultados de los estudiantes. El LCAP está diseñado para asegurar que las necesidades de los estudiantes, incluyendo aquellos que están aprendiendo inglés, sean cumplidas con equidad y accesibilidad.*

## **Expectations**

*Sus voces como padres y cuidadores son esenciales en este proceso. Queremos conocer sus puntos de vista, sus dificultades y sus ideas. Les animo a que sean abiertos y sinceros. No hay respuestas correctas o incorrectas. Estamos buscando sus comentarios sinceros para ayudarnos a informar a los Superintendentes del Condado de California para que puedan hacer mejor en la formación de los educadores y el personal responsable de la aplicación de la LCAP y la participación con las familias.*

*Antes de empezar con las preguntas, vamos a ocuparnos de algunos asuntos administrativos. (Adapt to your situation). Tenemos un total de nueve preguntas, y vamos a repasar una por una. Empecemos...*

Category	Questions
Equity and Access for English Learners	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Describa la educación ideal para su(s) hijo(s) estudiante(s) de inglés en términos de entorno de aprendizaje, instrucción y servicios de apoyo para satisfacer las necesidades y el desarrollo del lenguaje de su(s) hijo(s).</li> <li>2. Idealmente, ¿Cómo podría la escuela apoyarlo, prepararlo o involucrarse en la educación de su(s) hijo(s)?</li> <li>3. ¿Cuáles son los elementos de esta educación ideal que no ve actualmente?</li> </ol>



Category	Questions
LCFF	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. ¿Ha revisado el Plan de Control Local y Rendición de Cuentas o LCAP anteriormente? Si es así, ¿En que formato? ¿Fue el documento completo (mas de 100 páginas)? ¿Resumen (2-6 páginas)? ¿Una presentación de PowerPoint? ¿Otro?</li> <li>2. ¿Puede ver una relación o conexión entre el proceso LCAP, las recomendaciones de los padres y el documento LCAP? ¿Si es así, cómo?</li> <li>3. ¿Que le gusto el processo o documento LCAP?</li> <li>4. ¿El proceso del LCAP fue inclusivo o representativo de los estudiantes EL?</li> <li>5. ¿Tiene recomendaciones para mejorar el proceso de LCAP o el documento para padres/familias?</li> </ol>



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