Local Control Funding Formulas: Opportunity to Integrate Family Engagement Strategy for School Districts

(SACRAMENTO) - The Local Control Funding Formula in California, first implemented in 2014, is changing not only how schools are funded, but even more notably, how they are being held accountable for the funding. LCFF is designed to provide flexible funds so that school districts may provide education that meets the needs of their respective schools, with the participation of and accountability to their community. The LCFF allows for the community to offer input on spending priorities and to evaluate in an annual review.

As school districts plan with the LCFF, their success may hinge on how well they utilize existing or new family engagement programs in the process. First of all, research shows that districts that include families in a meaningful way have strong correlations with successful schools and student achievement. Because of this, California state law requires family engagement programs in all districts. Furthermore, the State of California has highlighted parent involvement in its priorities for the LCFF process itself. So the LCFF is a timely opportunity for districts to beef up their relationship with families, with implications not only for LCFF implementation, but for all of the long term benefits that the research shows family engagement brings to schools, educators, communities, and students.

Let’s be clear: we are not advocating for the business-as-usual parent involvement, where the state standard is met by perfunctory attendance of a one-way presentation, or input is asked for even as budgets have already been allocated. This sells parents, and school districts, short when both sides could benefit from higher expectations for the process.

As it stands, when advisory groups of parents and community advocates give input on the district plan, the LCFF has no provisions that require or assist districts to operate in a transparent and accountable manner. In our experience, it takes more than simply giving input to ensure transparency and accountability. It takes an ongoing relationship, one that is built over time with a mutually beneficial exchange.
Luckily, there is a proven model for building high quality relationships between districts, families and communities that fulfills both LCFF objectives and parent engagement mandates: relational and voluntary home visits. If done with integrity, this model of doing home visits will help the state implement the Local Control Funding Formula effectively, transparently, with accountability, and in compliance with all 8 state priorities below.

The State of California has set the following 8 priorities for the implementation of LCFF plans:

1. Providing all students access to fully credentialed teachers, instructional materials that align with state standards and safe facilities.
2. Implementation of California’s academic standards, including the Common Core State Standards in English language arts and math, Next Generation Science Standards, English language development, history social science, visual and performing arts, health education and physical education standards.
3. Parent involvement and participation, so the local community is engaged in the decision-making process and the educational programs of students.
4. Improving student achievement and outcomes along multiple measures, including test scores, English proficiency and college and career preparedness.
5. Supporting student engagement, including whether students attend school or are chronically absent.
6. Highlighting school climate and connectedness through suspension and expulsion rates, local surveys, and other locally identified means.
7. Ensuring all students have access to classes that prepare them for college and careers, regardless of what school they attend or where they live.
8. Measuring other important student outcomes related to required areas of study, including physical education and the arts.

Q & A

Q: What are relational home visits?
A: Two trained school staff, including the child’s teacher, visit the child’s family, and share something of their lives with each other. Most importantly, they discuss their mutual hopes and dreams for the child, and their expectations of each other as partners in the child’s education. After the visit, the educators reflect upon what they learned from the family and how they can best support the child’s success. One the relationship is formed, the educators and the families are mutually supportive and accountable as they work together for the child’s success.

Q: What are the PTHVP model’s non-negotiable principles for building trust between educators and families?
A: Visits are always 1) voluntary for both families and teachers; 2) set up in advance; 3) never targeted to “problems” but done across the board; 4) always compensated; and 5) always done in pairs.
Q: How does the PTHVP model of Home Visits meet the State of California’s 8 Priorities for the LCFF?

A: The state priorities involve student attendance, school climate and behavior, academic success, family engagement and teacher credentials. Hundreds of schools with PTHVP projects are reporting positive benefits in these areas. Independent evaluations of schools across the US that have implemented home visits have found:

- Increased attendance
- Decreased behavior problems
- Increased academic success on standardized tests
- Increased engagement of parents and grandparents in schools
- Increased capacity for teachers and school staff, including cultural competence

Q: How can we explore whether home visits are right for our community?

A: Call Carrie Rose, Executive Director, (916) 448-5290, and take a look at our website www.pthvp.org.

Q: Will LCFF cover the cost of training our teachers?

A: Yes. Your district’s plan must include a long-term strategy of home visits and family engagement training. We can help you budget this, and identify appropriate funding.

Q: Won’t teachers be turned off by one more program to add?

A: “Teachers love our program because it works,” says Rose. “It gives them skills and rewards that relate directly to why they were attracted to teaching in the first place: making a difference to children,” she says, pointing out that with new programs and standards to implement, such as the Common Core, teachers are looking for effective tools like home visits.