Under the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), California school districts are required to demonstrate progress against ten state priority areas, the third of which is Parent Engagement. Districts use the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) to describe how they are spending resources and planning services aligned with these priorities, and the state uses the California School Dashboard (https://www.caschooldashboard.org) to report how districts are performing across the priority areas.

Under Priority 3, districts are expected to demonstrate 1) efforts to seek parent input in decision making, and 2) efforts to promote parent participation in programs for unduplicated pupils and special need subgroups. This is measured using a “local indicator”—which means that districts must choose their own metrics and self-report their performance.

Parent Engagement is just one of several local indicators. The Dashboard also includes “state indicators,” which are measures that are standardized statewide—such as test scores, graduation rates, and chronic absence rates.

During the first two Dashboard years, districts were required to use either a survey or other local measures when gauging and reporting their progress in engaging parents. In March 2019, the State Board of Education adopted changes to the Parent Engagement self-reflection tool (https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/documents/priority3tool.pdf) that had been requested by the California Department of Education’s Ad Hoc Family Engagement Workgroup. With these changes, districts will no longer be asked to report on local surveys or other data and will be asked instead to reflect upon their current stage of implementation of practices spanning three domains: 1) building relationships, 2) building partnership for student outcomes, and 3) seeking input for decision-making.

Despite this significant policy change, the first two years of Parent Engagement Dashboard data offer insights that should guide future improvements to the Dashboard and ongoing efforts to improve measurement of parent engagement. For this reason, Families In Schools set out to examine what California school districts had self-reported in the Dashboard in 2017 and 2018. In this brief, we present our findings from that analysis, reflect on lessons learned, and offer recommendations for what districts and the state should do next.

**METHODOLOGY**

We analyzed the 2017 and 2018 Dashboard for all California school districts in order to determine the percentage of schools reporting they had “Met Standard” on Parent Engagement and to see what percentage chose to use a survey (option 1) versus other local measures (option 2).

We also looked more closely at the 2017 Dashboard for 30 school districts, selected for geographic and size diversity. We studied these districts’ responses to the Parent Engagement indicator on the 2017 Dashboard, looking at whether they had “Met Standard” or not, whether they had chosen to use a survey or other local measures, and how they responded to the required “summary of progress.”

1 The others are a Local Climate Survey and Basic Services including Teachers, Instructional Materials, and Facilities
While we were not able to ascertain how well districts were seeking parent input or promoting parent participation, we learned a great deal about how they were measuring parent engagement. Below, we share five key findings.

1. FINDING #1
Nearly all districts “Met Standard”—which means they collected data and reported on progress. Among all Local Education Agencies in California, 95 percent reported that they “Met Standard” for Parent Engagement in 2017, and in 2018 this figure rose to 97 percent. (See Figure 1.)

2. FINDING #2
When given the option to use surveys or “other local measures,” most districts used surveys. A small handful of surveys were commonly used. Statewide in 2018, 73 percent of districts chose to report on the results of surveys. (See Figure 2.) Even so, most districts actually drew upon multiple measures when writing their self-reflections. Among our sample of 30 districts, 9 drew upon exclusively parent surveys, 13 used a combination of surveys and local measures, and 6 relied exclusively on local measures.

Most districts did not specify the exact survey they used, but when they did name the instrument, a few stood out as frequently used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SURVEY</th>
<th>APPROXIMATE # OF DISTRICTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Panorama</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California Healthy Kids Survey</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California School Parent Survey</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other less commonly mentioned surveys were: California School Climate, Health, and Learning Survey (CalSCHLS), PTA Power of Partnerships Family Survey, School Experiences Survey, and WE SUPPORT Survey.

FIGURE 1: Statewide, nearly all school districts reported that they “Met Standard” for Parent Engagement in both 2017 and 2018.

FIGURE 2: Statewide in 2018, nearly three-quarters of districts chose to report survey results as opposed to “other local measures” for Parent Engagement.
FINDING #3
Many districts demonstrated a commitment to gathering and using survey data effectively. Many districts described efforts to make surveys accessible to parents, including providing hard copies, translations into multiple languages, and multiple communication methods. Many districts reported efforts to boost response rates and described efforts to share results back with their communities.

FINDING #4
Districts often struggled to report the results clearly or accurately, and some used flawed survey designs. Among our sample of 30 districts, 46 percent did not report a response rate, making it difficult to interpret the reliability or generalizability of the results. When using Likert scales, many districts reported the total percent of parents who agreed or strongly agreed with an item without making the full underlying data visible. Most troublingly, many districts reported on student rather than parent experiences, or on parent satisfaction instead of parent engagement. Of the 30 districts we studied most closely, 23 percent reported on student experiences using questions such as “My child is safe at school”—questions that have little bearing on parent engagement.

FINDING #5
Local measures of parent input were highly variable. Of the school districts that drew upon local measures of parent input, the most common responses included descriptive information without much evidence to support claims. However, many districts did provide quantitative data as well, particularly participation numbers or rates. Common responses included:

- Descriptions of ways in which districts seek parental input through school site councils; parent advisory committees; LCAP committees, meetings and forums; parent resource centers; family and school liaisons; and parent programming.
- Descriptions of ways in which districts promote parent engagement through school events, volunteerism, and district and parent advisory committees including English Learner Advisory Committees.
- Descriptions of ways in which the district and schools communicate with parents.
- Number of offerings and participation rates for workshops, trainings, courses, parent conferences, events, and other activities.
- Broad and general statements to describe ways in which parent input informs local decision making.

RESOURCES

New Self-Reflection Tool for Priority 3: Parent Engagement

Webinar conducted by CDE on Priority 3, March 26, 2019

CDE Family Engagement Toolkit

California School Dashboard
https://www.caschooldashboard.org
LESSEON LEARNED

The current performance standard is weak.
Nearly all districts reported that they “Met Standard” for Parent Engagement simply because they completed the self-reflection process. The standard is clearly weak and reveals little to nothing about the quality of parent engagement in California districts.

Stakeholders need better quantitative data. The data demonstrates the need for consistent and comparable quantitative data that allow stakeholders to compare results between districts and within districts over time. This quantitative data should augment deeper reflections on the implementation of parent engagement practices—which may emerge as a result of the revamped self-reflection tool.

Districts are hungry to use surveys to measure parent engagement. The data from the first two Dashboard years makes clear that districts are interested in using surveys to measure and track parent engagement. However, many districts could use support in selecting high-quality instruments, accurately interpreting the results, and clearly presenting the data to the public.

WHAT THE STATE SHOULD DO NEXT

1. Make the performance standard meaningful. Require that districts meet a qualitative, performance-based standard for engaging parents rather than simply completing the process of measuring parent engagement. This would be easiest to do if the state also adopted a state indicator for Priority 3.

2. Add a state indicator for Priority 3. Stakeholders need better quantitative data on parent engagement, and districts have already demonstrated an interest in and commitment to using surveys. Further, we have found that many districts need support in choosing high-quality instruments and interpreting survey results. This creates an excellent opportunity to adopt a standardized survey or standardized set of survey items as a state indicator. There is precedent for this since other priorities, such as Priority 6 on School Climate, are already measured using a combination of state and local indicators. What would this take?
   a. Adopt a standard survey, survey item, or small set of survey items, translated into multiple languages. For example, all districts might be expected to report responses to an item like “This school allows input and welcomes parents’ contributions.”
   b. Adopt a standardized way of reporting so that results are comparable across districts and over time.
   c. Provide trainings and tools to help districts disseminate the results and make use of the findings.

3. Support school districts in using data on parent engagement to inform the LCAP and continuous improvement. Districts should use the results of their self-reflection process and other parent engagement indicators to inform changes to the LCAP, when developing school improvement plans required under ESSA, and when going through the “differentiated assistance” process required for about 1 in 4 districts under LCFF. Since this is a new process for many districts, most will benefit from guidance, tools, and ongoing support from the California Department of Education, County Offices of Education, the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence, and independent technical assistance providers. This webinar (https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/documents/priority3li2019.pdf) conducted by CDE in March 2019 is a good starting point for guidance and resources.

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