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THE EXPERIENCE OF THE LOCAL CONTROL ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN

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THE EXPERIENCE OF THE LOCAL CONTROL ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN

By

Angela C. Pascual

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THE EXPERIENCE OF THE LOCAL CONTROL ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN

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By

Angela C. Pascual

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my husband Jr, and my children Brandon, Brittany and Bryan for their love, support, tolerance and humor this past four and half years. I also dedicate my work to my mother, Clara and grandmothers Daisy and Elizabeth who shared the importance of me completing my educational journey and using it to the benefit of my local community. To my host of aunts and uncles who as educators not only paved the way for me, but set an exemplary standard. To my students, especially those from my tenure as an Alternative Education Teacher I pray that my work is embraced as an effort to have your lived experiences honored in education.

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THE EXPERIENCE OF THE LOCAL CONTROL ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN

Abstract

By Angela C. Pascual

University of the Pacific
2020

In 2013 the California Legislation passed a new K-12 School accountability mandate. The Local Control Accountability Plan was sought to increase the educational equity for targeted student groups in addition to allowing school districts to mine a diverse set of local school data to develop goals in the eight priority areas that speak to the needs of their local students. A requirement of the LCAP was that school districts include a diverse set of stakeholders to work in a collaborative manner to develop, critique and refine local goals. Stakeholder groups are required to consist of district-level administrators, teachers, staff, students, parents and community stakeholders.

This qualitative study focused on the experiences and insights of district and community stakeholders as they participated in the development of LCAPs. To answer the questions and understand the experience of stakeholders interviews, document analysis and observations were used. Results of the study revealed that while the intent of bringing a diverse set of stakeholders is noble there is a need to build trust amongst stakeholders. Findings also show the need to build community stakeholder understanding of the purpose, promises and limits of the LCAP. The

study revealed the need for school districts to examine and dismantle historic practices in order to fully embrace and implement the LCAP mandates.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Efforts to reform school funding have been rooted in achieving educational equity and parity for a diverse student population, which includes English language learners (ELLs), economically disadvantaged students, and students of color. The challenging task to advance the education for all students is hampered by the realities faced by public education (Kober, 2020). This task cannot be accomplished without a system that establishes and implements school funding policies that are both sufficient and fair. Baker et al. (2010) found that historical and recent school funding models have not been sufficient to meet the diverse needs of students. Baker et al. (2010) sought to answer the question of what is fair school funding by sharing, “Fair school funding is defined as a state finance system that ensures equal educational opportunity by providing a sufficient level of funding distributed to districts within the state to account for the additional needs generated by student poverty” (p. 7). Additionally, Ladson-Billings (2006) argued that the continued emphasis on the achievement gap has been misplaced as it fails to address the inequities of school funding policies that have caused and perpetuate gaps in achievement and opportunity.

Historical School Funding in California

Historical school funding policies have not been driven by local student need but based on geography and revenue generated by local property taxes and restricted categorical funds from both the state and national governments (Baker & Corcoran, 2012). Prior to the Local Control Funding Formula Senate Bill 90 (1972) established the California K-12 school funding model (Property Tax Relief Act, Cal. Stat. 1406 (SB90), 1972). Senate Bill 90 sought to address concerns of the *Serrano v. Priest* (1971) court case and the concern of the increasing cost of

property taxes. Serrano was a catalyst for change in school funding in California. The premise of *Serrano v. Priest* (1971) was the reliance on local property taxes caused school funding levels to vary greatly depending on the wealth of the area (Glenn & Picus, 2007). The Serrano Case argued that funding California schools, according to this model, was a violation of equal protection laws under the state constitution (Martin, 2006). After the Serrano challenge, California sought to diminish the funding gaps between wealthier districts and poorer districts by establishing the revenue limit. The revenue limit model of 1973-74 provided schools with funding above funding amounts before 1972 (Canfield, 2013). Poorer school districts received an increase in funding in attempts to make funding equal across California. To remedy this problem, the California Supreme Court took additional measures in 1976 to make sure geography does not dictate the type of education students receive (Canfield, 2013).

Proposition 13 is widely known as the tax initiative that was the first to have a significant impact on California school funding. Proposition 13 mandated limits on property taxes and any new local taxes, which schools previously depended on to be approved by a two-thirds vote (Canfield, 2013). The aim of Proposition 13 was not to make school funding more equitable across the state but to place a limit on how much homeowners in the state would be taxed to pay for public services that included the funding of public schools (Canfield, 2013). Martin (2006) stated that the campaign for the passage of Proposition 13 did not focus on schools but focused on the threat of tax assessments that continued to rise. California schools were just one public sector that would be impacted by the passage of Proposition 13.

Proposition 98 was another funding initiative designed to stabilize K-12 school and community college funding. Proposition 98 set minimum state spending levels for California's schools. The limit set was approximately 40% of California's general fund (Weston, 2011).

Proposition 98, although impacted by the recession of 2008-2009, represented an effort to account for differences in funding and thus opportunity amongst California's school districts (Baker & Corcoran, 2012). Although Proposition 98 established a floor for K-14 funding, the formula to determine the amount of base funding is based on a complex funding formula and the economic conditions of the state (Weston, 2011).

Revenue Sources

Unrestricted Funds

School funding models include both restricted and unrestricted funds. Many school districts were situated in areas where property taxes were more than the imposed revenue limits of Proposition 13. As a result, school districts were allowed to keep the excess funds. These "basic aid" schools were generally found in wealthier areas, areas in which students living in poverty cannot afford to reside (Weston, 2013). The excess funds found in these districts are categorized as unrestricted. School districts are allowed to use unrestricted funds in any manner they choose. Costly programs such as art, music, and other enrichment activities can be supported by unrestricted funds. Local income was a funding source also categorized as unrestricted. Local income included income generated by parcel taxes, building leases, and earned interest (Public Policy Institute of California, 2013). Local income also includes the generosity of individual and corporate donors. The value of local income is that it is unrestricted and can be used in a flexible manner to provide basic education programs and enhance the education of local students.

Restricted Funds

California school funding models also included the use of restricted funds. Restricted funds are those funds that were mandated to be used for specific purposes. The level of

restricted funds available to school districts is often dependent on the demographics and demonstrated needs of students in the school district. Programs funded with restricted funds were usually tied to increasing academic achievement in core subjects such as reading and math (Weston, 2011).

California's efforts to reform funding models in 1972 and 1988 made some gains but failed to answer the critical questions such as: Is California's school funding policy fair and sufficient? Are the state's sources of educational revenue distributed equitably?

Distribution of School Finance Resources

The Center of Education Policy report finds that there were and still are substantial differences that exist within and between school districts in their per-pupil funding (Kober, 2007). Much of the difference is because school funding levels are primarily determined at the state and local levels. Many school districts find the availability of additional resources to be determined by the local citizenry willingness to be taxed at higher levels. Funding models such as this led to funding inequities leaving school districts to ponder how to address and finance the additional educational needs of students living in poverty.

One response to inequitable school funding and learning opportunities was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). Title 1 part of ESEA focused on improving the education of the disadvantaged (Robelen, 2005). Although ESEA Title 1 programs were noble efforts with good intentions, they failed to address the varying local needs of school districts. There was still a need for a funding model that not only provided a base amount for average daily attendance per-pupil but also allowed for consideration of the local needs of students in each school district.

Recognizing a Need for Change

Many of the before mentioned educational reform efforts have often been linear, focusing on one aspect of education, such as funding models. The problem is that the challenges that face education are multi-layered, found in more than one aspect of education. Recognizing the need, the California legislation embarked on an education reform effort that addressed baseline funding, and funding that addressed the additional educational needs of specific student populations under one umbrella. The resulting Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) are legislative mandates that changed how schools are funded and held accountable. The system seeks to address the multiple priorities of education that impact successful student outcomes by establishing eight priority areas that schools are required to address. The eight priority areas are:

1. Basic services
2. Common Core State Standards
3. Parental involvement
4. Student achievement
5. Student engagement
6. School climate
7. Access to a broad curriculum
8. Other student outcomes

The Local Control Funding Formula

The LCAP is based on the argument that there is value in allowing districts discretion on how to allocate funds to meet the needs of their local school districts in the best way possible (Affeldt, 2015). The goal of local discretion is rooted in the belief that the diverse needs of

students cannot be addressed with one service or funding model. Enacted in June of 2013, LCAP, moved towards a system that allows school districts to determine strategies and allocate fiscal resources to address student needs based on the individual contexts of each school district (Fuller & Tobben, 2014). LCFE simplified the funding formula used to allocate money to school districts. A primary and vital change was that LCFE takes into account the higher cost of educating groups such as those from low-income households, ELLs, foster youth and homeless students. School district allocations are based on base grants which are uniformed per student across the California. The base grant does not differ according to location in California but is based on the different grade spans. The LCFE also allows for a district to receive a supplemental grant, which allows districts to receive an additional 20% for each student classified as an ELL, low-income, or foster youth and homeless students (Fuller & Tobben, 2014). Students identified as being part of the supplemental grant cannot be counted for multiple categories; they can only be counted once. The final grant is the concentration grant. The concentration grant aims to assist school districts that have a high proportion of ELLs, low-income students, foster youth and homeless students (LCFE targeted groups). School districts that have over 55% of their student population identified as one of the categories (SLLs, low-income students, and foster youth and homeless students) are eligible to receive 50% of the adjusted base rate per student for each student about the 55% of the district enrollment (Fuller & Tobben, 2014).

The Local Control Accountability Plan

The adoption of the LCFE and LCAP not only brought a shift in how school districts are funded but also how districts are held accountable for student outcomes (California Department of Education [CDE], 2020g). LCAP moved from a single measure for accountability to eight priority areas that districts are held accountable for (CDE, 2020e). School districts must gather

and mine their local data to include the input of local stakeholders, to determine goals, and to align resources to meet locally developed goals in each of the eight priority areas (CDE, 2020g).

The LCAP requires school districts to enter into a process of self-reflection to identify goals that are not based solely on mandates from Sacramento or the federal government but from data gathered at the district, school, and community levels (CDE, 2020e). The discussion, while including educational experts, teachers, and administrators, also requires the use of local community stakeholders to ensure that the diverse needs of all students in a large school district are considered and addressed (CDE, 2020e). The process while new has already presented some challenges to “business as usual,” however, this is a primary goal of both the LCFF and LCAP to disrupt the traditional methods of identifying goals, allocating resources and measuring school accountability and embrace a new policy of school funding and accountability in efforts to address local student needs and raise student achievement (Affeldt, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

The LCAP is based on the argument that there is value in allowing districts discretion in identifying needs and allocating monetary resources to best meet the educational needs of their local school districts (Affeldt, 2015). The goal of affording school districts discretion and autonomy is rooted in the belief that the diverse needs of students in California cannot be addressed with one educational or funding model. The LCAP requires a district to enter into a process of self-reflection to address eight priority areas that have been established by the California State Board of Education. Although school districts are required to use data to identify goals and allot resources to attain those goals in the eight priority areas, the law supports the use of discretion and autonomy as districts develop their LCAPs (Cal. Educ. Code 52060).

There are several unknowns concerning the process school districts undergo to develop their LCAP. As a result, there is a gap in the scholarly knowledge regarding the development and implementation of a school district LCAP. A core tenet of the LCAP is the discretion and autonomy afforded to each school district as they develop district LCAPs. There is a need to understand the experience of knowledgeable informants as they participate in a new system of school finance and accountability that provides them with new levels of discretion and autonomy.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the process of local school districts as they developed LCAPs. The study also sought to understand the experiences of district-level administrators, teachers, principals and community stakeholders as they worked collaboratively to design and implement LCAPs.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this case study:

1. What are school districts' processes as they work to develop LCAPs?
2. How do school districts respond to the mandates of the LCAP?
3. What factors do school districts perceive to be important when developing a district LCAP?
4. What challenges do school districts perceive in the development of district LCAPs?

Description of the Study

A qualitative approach was implemented as I wish to understand the process used by school districts as they work to develop a LCAP. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) found that qualitative research methods help discover the meaning that individuals give to their experience with a phenomenon. Furthermore, qualitative research methods are appropriate when studying a phenomenon in the context that it occurs (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The qualitative, multiple-site case study took place in the context of school districts as they developed, implemented, and refined their LCAPs to address their local needs. The study sought to understand the process and perceptions of school districts as they work to develop LCAPs. The use of a qualitative study design supported understanding the process from the first-hand experience of participants. A qualitative methodology was appropriate as the LCAP process is new and understanding the thought processes behind the development of district LCAPs can inform and benefit all levels of educational leadership.

The qualitative methods used were purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews, document review, and observations of district LCAP meetings. The data were collected and analyzed concurrently to ensure that the voice of the participants remained at the forefront of the study. Chapter 3 shares the methodology and methods employed in the study.

Significance of the Study

The intent of this study was to make a contribution to the scholarly literature regarding best practices in the California K-12 public school system. Research is key to understanding school reform efforts (Kannapel & Clements, 2005). The recent adoption of the LCAP presents an opportunity to understand the process of implementing a new educational reform mandate with very little research conducted on the topic. The value of such a study is that LCAP is in its'

infancy, and there is a gap in the knowledge regarding the LCAP as it is used to guide, develop and implement school district goals, practices, and policies.

Theoretical Framework

Street-Level Bureaucracy

I sought to understand participants' experiences as they navigated the process of developing LCAPs in a school district. The LCAP is a document that originates from local data and the input of major stakeholders such as teachers, students, parents, administrators, and community members, who are referred to as participants in this study. Although the final document is based on input from all local stakeholders, it is ultimately shaped by those that gather, analyze, and interpret the data. The theoretical lens of Lipsky's (2010) street-level bureaucracy was used to understand how participants use the discretion and autonomy afforded to them when developing the LCAP and how discretion and autonomy impacted the final LCAP document (Lipsky, 2010). Street-level bureaucracy is based on the public policy research of Michael Lipsky. The framework shares how street-level bureaucrats impact and shape public policy, often changing the original intent of the policy due to the discretion and autonomy afforded to public servants that are charged with interpreting and implementing policy.

Lipsky (2010) argued that public policy, such as educational policy, is impacted by those who implement the policy. Lipsky found that although street-level bureaucrats are required to follow policies as written and mandated by law, there is a great deal of variation due to street-level bureaucrats being afforded high levels of discretion and autonomy when implementing policies. Street-level bureaucracy was an appropriate framework as each district is required to follow the legislative mandates of LCAP, while also having the discretion and autonomy to develop their LCAPs based on local needs. It is this discretion and autonomy that leads to

variation in the goals and strategic plans of districts that serve students with similar demographics and educational needs. The basic tenets of street-level bureaucracy are the existence of challenging working conditions, conflicting and competing interests, inadequate resources, and a growing demand for services (Lipsky, 2010). Based on these tenets, street-level bureaucracy provided an appropriate lens to explore the research questions and understand the process employed by the cases and participants.

Delimitations and Limitations

A limitation of this study is that the study was limited to a phenomenon that is unique to school districts located in California. Additional limitations are that cases are all nested in Northern California in a single county. The study is also limited in that selected cases all have student enrollments of at least 5,000 students or more and are not charter districts. To increase the generalizability of the study, there is a need to expand the parameters of the study, in terms of location, number of students and the inclusion of charter school districts. The findings are restricted to the school districts studied, but they can inform processes for other school districts that work to develop LCAPs.

Definition of Terms

Adequacy funding: An approach to school funding that begins with the premise that the amount of funding schools receive should be based on some estimate of the cost of achieving California's educational goals. This approach attempts to answer two questions: How much money would be enough to achieve those goals and where would it be best spent (EdSource, 2020)?

Average daily attendance (ADA): The total number of days of student attendance divided by the total number of days in the regular school year. California uses a school district's ADA to determine its funding (EdSource, 2020).

Base grants: The uniform per-student base grant. The rates for different grade spans reflect the recognition of the different costs associated with some levels of education (CDE, 2020f).

Concentration grants: Concentration grant provide districts with a high proportion of ELLs, low-income, and foster youth and homeless students with an additional 50% of the adjusted base rate per student for each student about 55% of districts enrollment (CDE, 2020f).

Educational equity: Fair outcomes, treatments, and opportunities for all students (CDE, 2020b).

English language learners (ELLs): students who do not speak, read, write or understand English well as a result of English not being their home language (CDE, 2020a).

Foster youth: Students that are residing outside of their primary home in the care of someone other than their parent or under the care of a government agency (CDE, 2020c).

Homeless youth: The McKinney-Vento Act defines homeless children and youths as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (CDE, 2020d).

Horizontal equity: Horizontal equity means that all school should receive the same amount of financing regardless of student demographics (Berne & Steifel, 1984).

LCAP: California's funding model designed to give local control to local educational areas to design and fund programs based on the needs of their students instead of using a single state model to fund schools (CDE, 2020e).

LCFF: The paradigm shift in how California school districts builds school budgets (CDE, 2020e, 2020f).

Marginalized population: The marginalization of a student may be due to cultural differences, knowledge gaps, and socioeconomic status which results in the need for supplementary support within learning environments (Akin & Neumann, 2013).

Restricted funds: Funds allocated for a specific group or program (EdSource, 2020).

School Accountability Report Card (SARC): An annual report on specified aspects of a school's operation, which is required as part of Proposition 98 (EdSource, 2020).

Stakeholders: For the purpose of this study, stakeholder include teachers, community members, educational advocates, and district administrators who participate in the development of the LCFF/LCAP.

Students of color: For the purpose of this study the following racial groups are referred to as African American, Latino, Southeast Asian, and Native American Students.

Supplemental grants: The grant authorizes an additional 20% of the adjusted base rate per student. Students who meet the requirements for the supplemental grant can only be counted in one category (ELL, low-income student, foster youth and homeless student) (CDE, 2020f).

Title I: A federal education program that provides restricted funds from the federal government to support the education of students living in poverty (Yu & Taylor, 1999).

Unrestricted funds: General purpose funds that may be spent for any purpose (EdSource, 2020).

Vertical equity: Vertical equity takes into consideration the varying level of needs of students and provides additional inputs to assist schools with actualizing educational outcomes (Ladd, 2008).

Chapter Summary

The challenges facing education are numerous and persistent. In an effort to increase positive student outcomes, several school finance reforms have been implemented at the state and national levels. Chapter 1 briefly discussed recent and historical school finance reform efforts. It also provided an overview of the topic and provided an introduction to the LCFF and the LCAP. Chapter 1 then discussed the gap in the literature (problem) and the purpose of the study. The research questions were introduced in addition to the theoretical framework, street-level bureaucracy, that was used to frame the case study. It also discussed the significance of the study and terms that are essential to the study. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature regarding historical school funding models and educational reform efforts. Chapter 2 also includes a discussion of the purpose and structure of LCFF and LCAP.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter 2 provides a review of literature on historical practices and policies implemented to address the impact of poverty on educational achievement. The chapter opens with a definition of poverty and its impact on education. The chapter then moves to a review of policies adopted to increase the academic achievement of economically disadvantaged students. Chapter 2 concludes with a discussion of the purpose and structure of the LCAP.

Poverty

The United States Census Bureau (2016) stated that there are two factors used to determine poverty. The first factor is the family's or individual's income, and the second is the poverty threshold. According to the UC Davis Center for Poverty Research (2017), the official poverty rate in the United States was 12.3% which equates to 39.7 million Americans living in poverty. The importance of poverty data is not only its definition but importance is found in the occurrence of poverty in the United States. Understanding and recognizing the occurrence of poverty in the United States is vital as it informs the study of the number of students in schools that are living in poverty.

In 2015, nearly 8.9% of all children lived in deep poverty (Census Bureau Data, 2015). Census Bureau data (2015) also finds that poverty occurs at a higher rate in communities of color. For example, individuals that are African American or Latino are more likely to live in deep poverty, with poverty rates of 10.9% and 8%, respectively. These rates are high in comparison to White and Non-Latino or Asian individuals, with poverty rates of 5.1% and 6.2% (Census Bureau Data, 2015).

The Impact of Poverty on Education

Research conducted by Ratcliffe and McKernan in 2012 found that deep poverty tends to be chronic and have generational impacts on families. According to Ratcliffe and McKernan (2012) the estimated costs of child poverty is 500 billion per year. Poverty and educational research indicate that poverty has lasting and far-reaching impacts on children to include lasting consequences on health, developmental, and educational outcomes. Lee (2013) found that children from low-income families often enter school behind their more affluent peers, which results in students of poverty entering school physically, emotionally, socially, and cognitively behind their peers. Also, economically disadvantaged students often reside in unsafe neighborhoods and attend under-resourced schools. Belfiore et al. (2005) found that children living in poverty have a significant risk for academic failure. Educators report that students living in poverty are often less proficient in reading and math (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). In addition to poor academic performance in school students living in poverty often enter kindergarten with negative impacts on the brain (Luby et al., 2013). The Lee (2013) study, shares the negative impacts poverty may have on students' education. Lee (2013) stated that economically disadvantaged students are at a greater risk for poor academic achievement, dropping out of school, often forced to deal with issues of abuse and neglect, in addition to having physical health problems and developmental delays.

Scholars studying the impact of poverty on educational achievement have found that living in persistent poverty negatively impacts students' development in different ways (Howard et al., 2009; Williams & Crocket, 2013). For example, research conducted by Feister and Smith (2010) found that 85% of economically disadvantaged students do not read at grade level by the third grade. Educational leaders have taken on the challenge of increasing academic

achievement for economically disadvantaged students by responding with programs such as Title I, ESEA, and No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002) that were designed to address the persistent problem of low academic achievement of economically disadvantaged students.

School Finance and Equity

School systems combine state aid and local resources to create equitable funding for all schools (Baker & Corcoran, 2012). The goal of equitable funding plans is to increase student achievement regardless of socioeconomic status, race, and place of residence; all students would receive an equal opportunity to achieve academically. Leading scholars in educational funding argue to address historical racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities across the board, there is a need to address disparities in educational funding (Baker & Corcoran, 2012; Baker & Green, 2012).

Equity in school finance has meant that all schools receive the same amount of financing regardless of student demographics and geography. This practice has been referred to as horizontal equity (Berne & Stiefel, 1984). While horizontal equity is often viewed as fair, the remaining question is one of adequacy? What may be adequate in one school district may not be adequate for other school districts. Vertical equity takes into consideration the different needs of students and provides additional inputs to assist school systems with actualizing educational outcomes (Ladd, 2008). An example of vertical equity is when school districts are allotted additional resources to meet the needs of students, such as students living in poverty and ELLs. Acknowledging the additional needs of targeted student populations recognizes the importance of adequacy in terms of equitable school funding (Berne & Stiefel, 1984). This premise of funding schools according to local need and adequacy is a basic tenet of the LCFF.

Opportunity Gap

Ladson-Billings (2006) found that emphasis on the achievement gap has been misplaced. Ladson-Billings (2006) argued that a greater emphasis is needed on the educational debt that supports inequities in marginalized school populations. The goal of moving from the term “achievement gap” to an “opportunity gap” is to broaden the discussion of who and what is responsible for the education of children to include those of marginalized populations. The opportunity gap requires educational systems to acknowledge and begin to offer a remedy for what Ladson-Billings has framed as the educational debt that has grown over time. This educational debt stems from the historical practice of underserving student groups, such as African American and Latino American students (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Inequitable schooling practices can be defined as those that repeatedly deny racial and ethnic minority students equal opportunity to receive a high-quality education (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Leading researchers focusing on the opportunity gap acknowledge that there are factors outside the control of the school that impact student achievement. However, for the purpose of this study, the researcher focused on those in-school factors that continue to contribute to gaps in educational opportunity. Darling-Hammond (2010), in addition to Howard (2010), argued that there is a need to focus on issues such as student engagement in meaningful academic tasks, establishing a culture of high expectations, and looking at the quality of the teacher and curriculum available to racial and ethnic minority students. Although school segregation was addressed during the Civil Rights Era, many school systems have returned to the concept of neighborhood schools. This has resulted in the re-segregation of schools. Mirroring the economic disparities in the community has led to schools being characterized as “rich” or “poor.” Darling-Hammond (2010) referred to some of these schools as “apartheid schools” (p. 2). Apartheid schools are defined as those that

serve students of color in low-income communities. Not only are these schools segregated by race and wealth, but they are also often resource-starved, to include schools that are in dilapidated states, overcrowded and lacking curriculum resources that are relevant to the lives of students.

School Finance Reform and Low-Income Students

A primary challenge to school finance policy has been achieving economic and educational parity for marginalized student populations. *Serrano v. Priest* (1971) was one of the first cases to challenge school finances deemed unfair to students living in impoverished areas. Serrano argued that students living in impoverished areas did not have access to the same education as pupils living in wealthier areas (Glenn & Picus, 2007). The court ruled in favor of Serrano, finding that a student's access to quality and well-funded education should not be dictated by where the student resides (*Serrano v. Priest*, 1971). Although the California Supreme Court disagreed with the ruling of *Serrano v. Priest* (1971) in 1976 and overturned the ruling, the California Supreme Court did find that California's system of school finance was a violation of the 14th Amendment and ruled the school finance system of California in violation of students' constitutional rights (Glenn & Picus, 2007).

Advocates and legal scholars continued to identify and challenge school finance systems that perpetuated inequities in school systems. Cases such as *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) argued that students not only have a right to an education, but the education should be equal in terms of resources such as facilities, curriculum, and qualified teachers. Recent legislation sought to identify and address persistent inequities in California's schools. *Williams v. California* (2003) argued that California was failing to ensure that all school districts offer equal access to qualified teachers, curriculum, and adequate school facilities to California

students (*Williams v. California Settlement Legislation*, 2004). The goal of the Williams case was to ensure that students living in impoverished areas would be provided with the same educational opportunities as their peers in wealthy school districts. Although historical cases such as Serrano and Williams made inroads in addressing inequities, there was still a need to address how school systems design and implement budgets for the benefit of all students, especially students residing and attending schools in impoverished areas.

Historical Responses to Students Living in Poverty

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965

The initial challenge to address parity in school funding and educational opportunity was the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) case. Although Brown sought to bring attention and action to address the disparities between the education of African American students and their White peers, similar issues were also raised when comparing the educational opportunities for students living in poverty and their more affluent peers. Facing the persistence of poverty, school systems sought to adopt policies and implement programs to address the impact of poverty on students' academic achievement. An initial attempt to address poverty was ESEA passed in 1965. Originated by President Kennedy and implemented by President Johnson, ESEA was the most substantial financial investment in public education with the primary goal of addressing the impacts of poverty upon low-income student education. Zamora (2003) reported that ESEA was a cornerstone of the federal government's commitment to increasing equality and opportunity. ESEA authorized comprehensive federal aid for elementary and secondary schools. ESEA dispersed monies of over \$1 billion to provide targeted instruction to disadvantaged public school students (Forte, 2010; Matsudaira et al., 2012; McAndrews, 2009).

Challenges of the ESEA of 1965

The intended goal of Title I was to counter the negative influence of poverty on the educational achievement of students. This goal required schools to recognize their roles in impeding or supporting the educational achievement of economically disadvantaged students (Zamora, 2003). Many legislators disagreed with Title I, arguing that Title I was a federal overreach. The premise of the argument of overreaching was that the needs of low-income students were best served at the local level. As a result of conservative arguments, the allocation of federal dollars for ESEA was diminished to a fraction of the amount that was initially authorized (Martin & McClure, 1969).

An additional challenge of the Title I legislation was the vagueness of the language used in writing Title I. Although the legislation repeatedly refers to the aim of addressing the educational needs of disadvantaged students, there was not concrete language regarding how school systems would be held accountable for allocating and spending federal funds to support the educational achievement of economically disadvantaged students.

The diversity of school populations presented a challenge to identifying economically disadvantaged students and providing services. This is due to the fact that school districts and classrooms are often populated by low SES and their more affluent peers whom were not eligible for services under Title I. Although some school districts responded by trying to identify students living in poverty by school districts, the result often lead to fragmented schedules, ineffective delivery of programs and confusing use of school funds (Borman et al., 2001).

To ensure that ESEA would pass, the original Title I allocations were cut. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) found that the levels of funding did not support the stated commitment by congress to the educational equality and equity of all

students (Martin & McClure, 1969). In addition to limited funding and accountability, research conducted by NAACP found that Title I programs wasted large sums of money with violations of the Title I legislation occurring in many school systems (Martin & McClure, 1969). The report found that Title I funds were not spent in a targeted manner on low-income students, but often dispersed to the general student population, violating the supplement not supplant core requirement of Title I (Martin & McClure, 1969). The public concern of this practice led to reform measures designed to increase the accountability of how schools used Title I funds (Zamora, 2003).

Title I

The impact of Title I programs can be viewed from two perspectives. Are they effective in increasing the educational achievement of economically disadvantaged students? Do they require school districts to have a strong focus on how school systems provide effective programs to meet the needs of disadvantaged students? McDill and Natriello (1998) found that many of the educational assessments used to measure the impact of Title I programs in the late 1960s and 1970s were poorly designed and inadequate in measuring academic progress and achievement. Additional concerns found that although Title I programs did result in some small academic gains, these gains were not found or sustained in the neediest part of the Title I population (McDill & Natriello, 1998).

Jennings (2001) found that Title I program often resulted in pull out programs. These programs were found to focus on the mastery of low-level basic skills. Additional concerns were the need to establish meaningful measures to not only evaluate student progress but program effectiveness. The issue of cohesive and accountable implementation of ESEA was addressed in 1998 by the Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights when it concluded that the failure to take

action to implement and enforce regulations of Title I has slowed down the educational progress of disadvantaged students (Yu & Taylor, 1999). Title I programs would be the cornerstone of how school systems responded to the educational needs of economically disadvantaged students until the adoption and implementation of NCLB under the Bush Administration.

No Child Left Behind

In 2002, George W. Bush signed NCLB into law, which was a reauthorization of the ESEA. NCLB was a federal school reform law designed to require schools to increase student success. ESEA informed the structure of NCLB as it sought to tie the use of federal funds to increase student achievement. However, a key difference was the requirement that all students make progress, not just disadvantaged students. Another key difference was that unlike ESEA, NCLB sought from implementation to hold school districts accountable for student progress (Turnbull, 2005).

NCLB increased accountability throughout the entire educational community. It required state educational plans to include accountability systems and detailed plans on how to implement school improvement plans to support academic achievement (NCLB, 2002). NCLB (2002) also required school districts to return to the drawing board and develop state standards in core subjects that were grade-level appropriate and challenging. There was no distinction between mandated progress across student groups, increased performance was required of all students regardless of language status, location, and socioeconomic status (NCLB, 2002). Per NCLB policy, states were required to not only design standards in all core instructional areas but also build accountability systems to ensure that school districts make adequate progress. Adequate yearly progress became the phrase of the educational landscape with schools being labeled based on how students performed on standardized assessments. Failure to make adequate progress

triggered an additional layer of accountability with schools being required to design and implement a school improvement program (NCLB, 2002; Shannon-Baker, 2012).

The impact of NCLB was not only limited to standards, assessments, and school reform plans; teachers were also subject to new requirements. To ensure that teachers were adequately prepared and possessed the required knowledge to be in classrooms, new measures of teacher accountability were implemented. School districts were required to make sure that teachers passed required teacher licensure examinations and completed all pedagogical coursework to teach in the classroom (NCLB, 2002). Additional mandates of NCLB, as stated by Lee (2013), were the requirement to use scientifically based instructional practices and curriculum in the classroom. This requirement led to school districts embracing curriculum that mandated the use of scripts and pacing guides that often failed to address the diverse instructional needs of students.

A problem of implementing the NCLB mandates was the use of standardized assessments as the primary measure of student achievement. Orlich (2004) voiced concerns about the dangers of using a single high-stakes test to determine the progress of a student over the course of one year. Urrieta (2004) also discussed the challenges of using high-stakes testing as a single measurement. Urrieta (2004) found that the use of high-stakes testing, specifically for minority and economically disadvantaged students was not appropriate. Hursh (2005) stated that it is vital that assessments selected to measure student progress are accurate and valid.

There were challenges to the funding of NCLB. NCLB core tenets required teachers to be highly qualified in core subjects. Mathis (2004) argued that there was a lack of funding by the federal government to fully implement this mandate successfully Darling-Hammond and Youngs (2002) argued that the goal of creating highly qualified teachers to meet the needs of students did

not benefit students. Many educators still entered the field without the needed foundation to meet the needs of students. Paraeducators were also subject to the additional mandates of NCLB. Like teachers, paraeducators were required to be highly qualified. This mandate costs money. Paraeducators are often paid lower wages, and therefore, the cost of becoming highly qualified for some was out of range. As a result, many of these costs were assumed by school districts.

NCLB mandated that students attending low performing schools be allowed to transfer to schools that were performing at a higher level, at the cost of the district. If a school was designated as needing improvement over a two-year time period, parents could elect at district costs to move their children to higher-performing schools. School districts were also mandated to provide supplemental services to students in the form of free tutoring. These services were provided by community-based organizations at a cost to a student's home school district.

The primary purpose of NCLB was to increase the academic achievement of all students. Sternberg (2006) stated that the theory of action underlying NCLB was that increased use of standardized test to inform instructional focus, expenditures, and programs would help to close the achievement gaps between minority and majority subgroups. However, Smythe (2008) found that NCLB did more harm than good. Smythe (2008) opined that NCLB legislation adversely affected students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, minorities, students with special needs, and second language learners.

NCLB forced the narrowing of the curriculum. If it was not tested, it was not taught. Teaching to the test became a driving factor, effectively constricting the curriculum (Farstrup, 2006). Johnson and Hanegan (2006) stated that the mandates of NCLB resulted in schools and teachers abandoning instructional practices that were student-centered and inquiry-based in favor

of repeated drills and test-taking strategies to identify the correct answer on a multiple-choice assessment.

Although NCLB called for the increase in the academic performance of all students, many educator leaders and scholars regard NCLB as a poor attempt to connect student achievement to school funding and accountability. California faced with serving a large population of economically disadvantaged students would use the tenets of both the ESEA and NCLB to change how schools are funded and held accountable for student achievement.

The Local Control Funding Formula

Recognizing the fact that continued disparities were present in school finance systems, The California legislature at the direction of Governor Brown worked to develop a system that was not only equal but addressed the historical inequities present in school finance systems. In 2013, California underwent a sweeping change in how schools are financed. The adoption of the LCFF and LCAP openly acknowledges the additional costs associated with educating student populations such as ELLs, students living in poverty, foster youth and homeless students. Recognizing the challenges faced daily by school districts with large numbers of ELLs, students living in poverty, foster youth and homeless students, the LCFF provides additional financial resources for districts to meet the needs of these populations. The LCFF is based on the concepts of vertical equity and weighted student formula (CDE, 2020f). A weighted student formula takes into consideration the needs of students when developing budgets. Not only are additional funds provided to districts to support the academic achievement of targeted students, but districts were also given considerable flexibility in the use of the additional funds.

In order to support districts using funds in a manner that reflects student needs, specifically the targeted student populations, the California legislation included the mandate that

school districts must develop an LCAP to explicitly state district goals and how monetary resources will be allocated to meet stated goals. The LCAP requires districts to reflect upon student needs in eight priority areas (Affeldt, 2015). Affeldt (2015) stated that the eight priority areas are vital to a well-rounded education. The eight areas are:

1. Basic services
2. Common Core State Standards
3. Parental involvement
4. Student achievement
5. Student engagement
6. School climate
7. Access to a broad curriculum
8. Other student outcomes

Districts are guided in the development of accountability plans by county offices of education.

In addition to the support of county offices of education, school districts are mandated to consult with key stakeholders such as teachers, parents, students, and community members.

School Finance and Low-Income Students

School systems combine state aid and local resources to create equitable funding plans (Baker & Corcoran, 2012). The goal of equitable funding plans is that regardless of socioeconomic status, race, or residence, all students would receive an equal opportunity to achieve academically. Leading scholars in educational funding argue to address historical racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities in education, there is a need to address disparities in educational funding (Baker & Corcoran, 2012; Baker & Green, 2015).

One definition of equity school finance has meant that all schools receive the same amount of financing regardless of student demographics. This practice has been referred to as horizontal equity (Berne & Steifel, 1984). While horizontal equity is often viewed as fair, the remaining question is one of adequacy. What may be adequate in one school system may not be adequate for other school systems. Vertical equity takes into consideration the varying level of needs of students and provides additional inputs to assist school systems with actualizing educational outcomes (Ladd, 2008). Vertical equity supports the need to recognize the importance of adequacy in terms of school funding (Berne & Steifel, 1984). This premise of funding according to local need and needs of students that have historically had academic challenges is the basis of the LCFF.

School Finance Reform and Low-Income Students

Challenges to school finance policy have been rooted in achieving educational equity and parity for marginalized student populations to include ELLs, students of color, and students living in poverty. *Serrano v. Priest* (1971) was one of the first cases to challenge school finances deemed unfair to students living in impoverished areas and did not have access to the same education as pupils living in wealthier areas (Glenn & Picus, 2007). The court ruled in favor of Serrano, finding that a student's access to a quality and well-funded education should not be dictated by where the student resides (*Serrano v. Priest*, 1971). Although the California Supreme Court disagreed with the ruling of *Serrano v. Priest* (1971) in 1976 and overturned the ruling, the California Supreme Court did find that California's system of school finance was a violation of the 14th Amendment and ruled the school finance system of California as a violation of students' constitutional rights (Glenn & Picus, 2007).

Advocates and legal scholars continued to challenge school finance systems that perpetuated inequities present in school systems. Cases such as *Brown v. the Board of Education* (1954) argued that students not only have a right to an education, but the education should be equal in terms of resources such as facilities, curriculum, and qualified teachers. Recent legislation sought to address persistent inequities in California's schools. *Williams v. California* argued that California was failing to ensure that all school districts offered equal access to qualified teachers, curriculum, and adequate school facilities (Williams v. California Settlement Legislation, 2004). The aim of the Williams case was to ensure that students living in impoverished areas would be provided with the same opportunities as their peers in wealthy school districts. Although historical cases such as Serrano and Williams made inroads in addressing funding inequities, there was still a need to address how school system design and implement budgets for the benefit of all students.

California's LCFF and LCAP

The LCFF

Recognizing the fact that continued disparities were present in school finance systems, The California legislature at the direction of Governor Brown worked to develop a system that was not only equal but addressed the historical inequities present in school finance systems. The adoption of the LCFF and LCAP acknowledges the additional costs associated with educating student populations such as ELLs, students living in poverty, and foster youth and homeless students. Recognizing the challenges faced daily by school districts with large numbers of such students, the LCFF provides additional financial resources for districts to meet the needs of these populations. The LCFF is based on the concepts of vertical equity and weighted student formula (CDE, 2020f). A weighted student formula takes into consideration the needs of students when

developing budgets. Not only are additional funds provided to districts to support the academic achievement of targeted students, but districts were also given considerable discretion as to how to use the additional funds.

In order to support districts using funds in a manner that reflects student needs, especially the targeted student populations, the legislation included the mandate that school districts must develop an LCAP to explicitly state how district goals and resource allocations address local student needs. The LCAP requires districts to reflect upon student needs in eight priority areas (Affeldt, 2015). Affeldt (2015) stated that the eight priority areas are vital to a well-rounded education. Districts are provided guidance in the development of accountability plans by county offices of education. In addition to the support of county offices of education, school districts are mandated to consult with key stakeholders such as teachers, parents, students, and community members when developing their LCAP.

The LCFF and the LCAP, while new, represents a radical change in how districts are funded and how they are held accountable. Affeldt (2015) shared that not only is there a need to address historical inequities in school funding, there is also a need for school systems to develop, adopt and implement new systems of accountability. The LCAP represents an attempt by California to hold school systems accountable to how resources are allocated and used to increase outcomes across the eight priority areas. Additionally, the LCAP recognizes that it is not only how much money is received, but how allocated resources are used to develop and implement programs that speak to the needs of local students. With this opportunity, there is the expectation that districts will honestly critique their local efforts and change practices and policies based on multiple sources of local data.

Priority Areas of the Local Control Accountability Plan

A primary objective of the LCFF legislation was to ensure the distribution of resources to targeted student populations. These populations have been identified as low-income, ELL, and foster youth and homeless (Miles & Feinberg, 2014). The adoption of the LCFF and LCAP moved California from the primary use of categorical funds to a needs-based model. In addition to being provided additional funds to meet the needs of targeted populations, school districts were mandated to design and adopt strategic plans known as the LCAP to address the eight priority areas. All district goals and resource allocations must be aligned to address locally adopted goals. This approach to goal setting and resource allocation allows school districts to directly drive their change instead of change being mandated from the federal and state levels. This allows for what many refer to as leadership from the middle (Fullan & Rincon-Gallardo, 2017).

Local Control Accountability Plan Accountability

Under the LCAP, the state began developing a new accountability system comprised of eight state priorities utilizing 23 data elements. The LCAP requires the use of Evaluation Rubrics to measure district growth in their self-determined goals. The LCAP law requires three types of evaluation rubrics. These include a self-assessment rubric, a support rubric, and an intervention rubric. These rubrics are designed to evaluate performance in the eight priority areas (Briggs et al., 2016). Moving from a one-dimensional model of measurement as with NCLB, the use of rubric allows districts to measure progress using multiple measures. The self-assessment rubric was developed and approved by the California State Board of Education (CSBE) in September 2016. The new rubrics are designed to assist districts in determining their strengths and weaknesses to help guide them in setting LCAP goals (Briggs et al., 2016). There

is also a support rubric. The goal of the support rubric is to assist county offices of education with offering needed support to school districts. The LCAP requires county offices of education to assign districts content experts to work on identified areas of weakness when subgroups fail to make progress (Darling-Hammond & Plank, 2015).

The LCAP legislation also provides an intervention rubric to guide district and county office efforts to intervene when LCAPs fail to yield the required growth in priority areas. The intervention rubric (under development) will be used by the state superintendent to determine the type of intervention that will be needed at an underperforming district. According to Howland (2017), the law states the state superintendent of public instruction can only intervene if three conditions are met. The first condition is if the school district does not show improved results in three out of four consecutive years for three or more student subgroups in more than one state or local priority area. The second condition is the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence has provided assistance and determines the district has been unable or unwilling to carry out its recommendations. The third condition is the academic performance of students is so poor that intervention is necessary, and the CSBE approves the State Superintendent's intervention. The task of developing rubrics has been given to WestEd. In keeping with the spirit of the legislation, WestEd is required to consult with stakeholders throughout the state in the development of the rubrics (EdSource, 2016). These rubrics will also align with the new federal ESSA requirements (Briggs et al., 2016). Darling-Hammond and Plank (2015) shared that the LCFF represents a change from state control to local control. With the implementation of LCFF and LCAP, in conjunction with new state standards and a new state assessment system, school districts in California have been given "a unique opportunity to reconfigure themselves as learning organizations" (Darling-Hammond & Plank, 2015, p. 2).

The LCFF and LCAP are in their infancy. There is a need to understand if the intentions of the adopted legislation are being actualized by local school districts and yielding the intended results. Addressing the persistent disparities in the educational performance of economically disadvantaged students, there is a need to understand if adopted policies, programs, and resource allocations as a result of the LCAP are increasing student achievement for economically disadvantaged students.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 discussed the scholarly literature of the historical and recent educational policies designed to support the academic achievement of economically disadvantaged students. The chapter began with a discussion of ESEA adopted in 1965 as part of the War on Poverty. The review discussed the purpose, limits, and impact of ESEA on the education of economically disadvantaged students. Chapter 2 then moved to a discussion of NCLB adopted in 2001 by the Bush Administration. NCLB was an attempt to address the issue of increasing student achievement for all students with an added emphasis on increasing the academic achievement of students that have historically performed at lower levels on standardized assessments to include economically disadvantaged students. While focusing on student achievement, NCLB added a new chapter to accountability by requiring that districts make sure that all teachers are highly qualified in the content that they teach. NCLB was found to have costly mandates while providing limited funding to actualize the goals.

The literature review also discussed historical inequitable funding models and challenges to those models. Chapter 2 shared how vertical equity address the additional needs of students when developing funding model. Chapter 2 also discussed that as a result of not applying vertical equity to develop school funding models monetary gaps in funding occurred. These

gaps were most apparent in communities of color and communities where large numbers of economically disadvantaged students reside. The literature review discussed key court cases to challenge these funding inequities.

The literature review closed with a discussion of California's new school funding and accountability model. The LCFF and LCAP represents California's attempt to allow districts more local control in determining how to best meet the needs of their students. The review discussed the aims of LCFF and the LCAP in its attempt to address historical inequities by providing additional resources to districts to meet the needs of the targeted populations. These populations are economically disadvantaged students, ELLs, and foster youth and homeless students.

Chapter 3 focuses on methodology used to conduct the study. A detailed description of the criteria for site selection, criterion for participant selection participants, data collection, and data analysis is presented.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The qualitative multi-site study sought to understand the processes and experiences of three school districts and their stakeholders in California as they developed and implemented their Local Control Accountability Plans. The case study focused on three traditional school sites nested in Northern California. The sites were selected as they are located in the area that the researcher has an interest in as an educator and resident. The following questions guided this case study:

1. What are school districts' processes as they work to develop LCAPS?
2. How do school districts respond to the mandates of the LCAP?
3. What factors do school districts perceive to be important when developing a district LCAP?
4. What challenges do school districts perceive in the development of district LCAPs?

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology and research design used to complete the study. The chapter includes a discussion of the criterion for site and participant selection. A discussion of data collection and analysis procedures follows. This chapter closes with a discussion of the ethical issues and how trustworthiness was established.

Research Design

The study sought to understand the processes and experiences a school district, and its stakeholders undertake as it responds to a new system of school finance and accountability. In order to understand an experience or gain insights into a phenomenon, it is best to explore the phenomenon in a natural setting (Creswell, 2007). According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research uses a process that focuses on narrative data to understand participant experiences from

their perspectives. The use of qualitative research supports the development of understanding of each case's unique experience as well as identifying common themes across cases. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) explained that qualitative research is an appropriate methodology to use in a natural setting. Since the study was conducted in the community of each case, qualitative methods were appropriate for the study.

There are different case study designs, intrinsic, instrumental, and multiple. This study employed a qualitative, multiple-site case study design. Qualitative research garners insights through the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research uses an inductive process that focuses on narrative data to understand an individual's experiences from their perspective. Hancock and Algozzine (2006) stated that "case studies are descriptive because they are grounded in deep and varied sources of information" (p. 16). Therefore, the study included multiple sources of information to include the use of semi-structured interviews, observations, and document reviews.

Yin (2013) shed light on the main components of a case study. A case study focuses on a single phenomenon that is occurring in a real-life context. Yin (2013) also stated that case studies use multiple sources of evidence to understand the experience of participants. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) explained that a case study is the exploration of a bounded system over a stated period of time. Bounded systems can include programs, schools, or a school district. Additionally, Baxter and Jack (2008) noted that the use of case study research is appropriate for understanding the how and why of practices. The study sought to understand both how school districts accomplished the task of developing and implementing LCAPs in addition to understanding why they adopted and implemented specific processes from the perspective of stakeholders identified in the study as participants. A qualitative design was found to be

appropriate as qualitative researchers make their observations visible and understandable for others (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Understanding the processes and experiences of developing and implementing LCAPs in school districts is appropriate and essential for educational researchers as educational systems work to employ new strategies and approaches to address historic educational challenges and improve educational practices. While observing one case can provide valuable insights, it is valuable to observe a phenomenon in multiple settings. In an effort to understand the phenomenon of developing and implementing an LCAP at deeper levels, a qualitative, multiple-site case study was conducted.

Multiple-Site Case Study

A multiple-site case study was used as I sought to understand the experience of different school districts in proximity to one another. The validity of using a multiple-site case study is that all school districts in California are required to follow the mandates of the LCFF and the LCAP. Stake (1995) stated that multiple case studies provide the opportunity to maximize knowledge by studying the phenomenon in multiple settings. It also allows for the study of one phenomenon across multiple cases (Merriam, 2009). Baxter and Jack (2008) found that the use of a multiple-site case study allows the researcher to discover differences within and between cases. The LCFF and LCAP are new mandates in education with very little scholarly literature regarding them. The driving questions sought to not only identify processes undertaken as school districts worked to develop LCAPs but also answer the why and how of each case experience. The use of the multiple-site case study supported these efforts as it allowed the researcher to develop a deep understanding of the phenomenon as data were collected from multiple sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The use of a multiple-site case study supports the identification of shared experiences and themes across multiple cases (Merriam, 2009).

Research Population and Sampling

Participants selected for the study must have participated in the development of a school district LCAP for at least one year. To ensure that this criterion was met, purposeful (criterion) sampling was used to identify participants for the study. The participants of this qualitative study were district-level decision-makers who were identified as knowledgeable informants in the development of LCAP and community stakeholders that participated in the process of the development of a school district LCAP. Creswell (2003) stated that “the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites (or documents or visual material) that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research questions” (p. 185). Merriam (2002) stated that purposeful sampling is a technique that seeks information-rich cases. The researcher selects sites and participants that can inform the understanding of the phenomenon under study. I also utilized convenience sampling in terms of the selected school districts. The selected cases are in the area that I reside in and have access to. While convenience sampling is not always the best sampling technique, it represents sites or participants that were readily accessible, allowing for the successful collection of data (Hatch, 2002). I also used homogenous sampling. The use of homogenous sampling ensured that all participants shared common characteristics. In the case of the study, the common characteristics included performing as district-level decision-makers, teacher, principal, staff member or community stakeholder while also performing as a participant in the development of the district LCAP for at least one year. Sampling criteria for community stakeholders required participants to either be a teacher, staff member, principal, or a member of the community served by the school district. The goal of using a homogenous sample was to make sure that selected participants participated in the phenomenon under study. To ensure that the data were saturated and included the perspectives of

a diverse set of stakeholders, I interviewed 10 participants. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym.

Research Sites

This qualitative, multiple-site case study focused on three school districts in California. Each selected school district has a student population greater than 5000 students. The selected sites are all traditional school districts and therefore met the requirement of having to follow the mandates of the LCAP. Each school site was given a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. The following names were assigned to cases Davis Unified School District (DUSD), Canyon Unified School District (CUSD), and Peloton Unified School District (PUSD).

Davis Unified School District

DUSD is the first case included in the study. DUSD met the criteria of having an enrollment over 5,000 students and located in California. It is considered an urban district with a large ELL population and a high percentage of students identified as living in poverty. DUSD is frequently described as a district struggling to meet the diverse needs of its students. Community stakeholders' concerns often focused on issues of discipline, low academic achievement, equity, and creating a culture that supports students being college and career ready.

Canyon Unified School District

CUSD, the second case, also has a student population of over 5,000 students. It is characterized as having two experiences for students. One experience for the more affluent students, and another for students living in poverty and students of color. Stakeholders often describe CUSD as the "have and have nots." Many parents speak favorably of CUSD, referring to high levels of parent participation and opportunities for students that include arts, technology, and athletics.

Peloton Unified School District

PUSD is the third case explored in the study. It also has a student population over 5,000. PUSD covers a large geographic area having to serve students that reside in multiple cities in urban and rural areas. It was impacted by high numbers of families seeking affordable housing, thus changing the face of the district in a short time. PUSD is often described as being two districts as it seeks to serve student populations that are very different in terms of ethnicity and socioeconomic factors.

Data Collection Methods

Qualitative researchers collect descriptive data that focuses on a particular phenomenon of interest (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative data collection includes observation, interviewing, the analysis of artifacts and documents, and participating in the setting in which the phenomenon occurs. The data sources used are selected with the intent of gaining the best data to answer the research question (Merriam, 2002). The study included multiple sources of data to include LCAP meeting observations, LCAP document analysis, and semi-structured interviews.

Interviews

Interviews for qualitative studies include interviews that are both structured and semi-structured. The use of semi-structured interviews allows the interview to be open-ended to ensure that the discussion focuses on the goals of the study while honoring the voice of participants. As a qualitative researcher, I understand that hearing the voice of participants is vital to understand their experience. Mason (2002) explained that interviews involving individuals or groups support the researcher gaining rich and personalized information. Having this primary goal, I structured my interview questions to allow the participants to tell their

experience, their story. The use of open-ended questions allows participants to share honestly and not be limited by the structure of questions (Creswell, 2007). To obtain this goal, I used semi-structured questions to support participants sharing their perspectives and understandings while honoring the parameters of the study.

There were many benefits to the use of semi-structured interviews. The main benefit was the organic conversations that resulted, allowing the participants to share their experience at a deep level. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed participants to freely express their views and perspectives, thus allowing their voices to shine through the data. While also being a reliable source. Yin (2014) stated that the use of interviews while conducting a case study provides needed detail and insights into the process and personal experience of participants.

Participants selected for interviews met the criteria of being a district-level decision-maker or having worked in some capacity on the development of the district LCAP for at least one year or being a community stakeholder that has participated in the development of a school district LCAP. Participants were given information on the purpose and process of the study and signed the informed consent prior to being accepted for participation. Participants that agreed and signed the informed consent form participated in a 45 to 60-minute interview that followed the approved interview protocol. Each interview was conducted in an agreed upon location free from interruption using a recording device. Following McNamara's guide (2009), I worked to ensure that my recording device worked properly and asked questions slowly with a neutral tone. I was careful not to display any type of emotions or body language that may influence the responses of the participants. It was vital that I kept the participants engaged in the process by displaying a calm demeanor and providing transitions between topics. As a novice researcher, this was my greatest challenge. As I conducted the interviews, the process of engaging my

participants in the interview process and resulting conversations became more natural. All interviews were digitally recorded to ensure that the data collected were representative of the participants' voices and experiences. Due to scheduling conflicts, summer vacations, and conflicting work schedules, the interviews took three months to complete in full. During this time, I also triangulated the data by connecting with participants multiple times to clarify responses.

Document Review

Documents can also provide valuable information that is central to the phenomenon studied (Creswell, 2009). The qualitative researcher analyzes official and public documents to learn about the experiences of the people that created them. Documents reviewed during qualitative research can provide insights into the perspectives, assumptions, and concerns of those who produced them (Taylor et al., 2016). Documents can include archival records, newspaper articles, minutes from the California Department of Education (CDE, 2019) and committee meetings, CDE documents, and school accountability report cards. During this study, I reviewed district LCAPs documents from 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019.

Observations

The study used observation to collect data. I observed district LCAP meetings. For sites that did not have a meeting scheduled within the study window, I interviewed a stakeholder that had attended an LCAP meeting. To fully understand the phenomenon, I attended a workshop on LCAP participation and formation given by the California Teachers Association. The workshop discussed how districts in California are embracing the LCAP. The workshop also discussed concerns held by the CDE regarding the initial years of LCAP implementation.

Creswell (2013) stated that observation is a primary tool for collecting data in qualitative research. Observations were based on the questions driving the study. It was essential to observe the participants in the context of an LCAP meeting to understand the process and experience of participants. Creswell (2013) stated that as a nonparticipant observer, I should record data while making sure not to interact with participants or other meeting participants. As the workshop was open to all teachers in California, I observed as a nonparticipant observer. Although qualitative research seeks to explore and understand the individual experience of participants and the phenomenon observed, it is still a scientific study (Angrosino, 2007). Therefore, to not bias my data, I chose to observe as a nonparticipant observer. To support consistency across the study, I used an approved observational protocol as a method to record notes during the meeting. Creswell (2013) asserted that it is crucial to not only use an observational protocol but also to include descriptive and reflective notes as a part of the observation.

Data Collection Procedures

Before collecting data, I received the required permission and confirmation from the University of the Pacific Institutional Review Board (IRB). Upon obtaining the required permissions, I sent an invitation and study background to identify potential participants asking each if they would agree to participate in the study (see Appendix A). After participants agreed to participate, I scheduled an appointment to verbally discuss the nature of the study and asked potential participants to complete an informed consent form (see Appendix B). Participants that agreed to be part of the study completed the informed consent form as required for participation.

In preparation for the face-to-face interview of participants, I used McNamara's (2009) guide for preparing and conducting individual semi-structured interviews. I was careful to select

a timeframe that allowed the interview to be conducted in a place that was not distracting to both myself and the participants and honored confidentiality. To maintain confidentiality and help participants be at ease during the process, I honored their request to not meet at their place of work if requested. Only two participants agreed to meet at their place of work. The interview commenced with a discussion of the purpose of the interview, a discussion of confidentiality, and a review of the informed consent form. Next, I asked the participant to start with a discussion of their role within the school district and their understanding of the purpose and goals of the LCAP. To support consistency, I used the approved interview protocol (see Appendix C) for each participant interview. The use of a semi-structured interview protocol allowed for additional probes to be used to gain a deeper understanding of each individual's experience.

Qualitative case studies call for researchers to use multiple sources of data. Therefore, I reviewed district LCAP documents using an approved document analysis tool (see Appendix D). The use of a consistent document analysis tool made sure that each case in the study was explored consistently. Merriam (2009) stated that document analysis is a systematic procedure for describing the contents of communications. Therefore, I used the document analysis tool to review district LCAPs from 2016-2017, 2017-2018, and 2018-2019. As a result of exploring the LCAPs from multiple years, I chose to focus on LCAP documents from 2018-2019. Yin (2014) stated that the review of documentation and archival records is a stable source of data and can serve to triangulate other sources of data.

Meeting observation was a challenge due to changing school calendars; however, I was able to attend district and community meetings regarding LCAPs. All the meetings I attended as a nonparticipant observer. The purpose of attending the meetings was to gain insights into the process used in each meeting. Meetings were observed, and field notes were taken using my

approved observation protocol. The use of my approved protocol for observation allowed me to take organized field notes that lead to me being able to analyze the notes for the identification or absence of common codes and resulting themes across the cases (see Appendix E).

Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing data for examination. Qualitative research utilizes an inductive form of data analysis. Using inductive forms of qualitative data analysis requires that collected data be organized and reduced into themes using a process of coding (Creswell, 2009). The coding of data is defined as the reducing of data into segments and assigning a name or code for the segments. The next step requires the codes to be combined into broader themes, with the final representation of data in figures, tables, or a discussion (Creswell, 2007).

Qualitative data analysis is an ongoing process that coincides with data collection. In qualitative data analysis, the researcher continually returns to the data to analyze previously obtained data in an effort to look for and connect significant ideas and themes. Creswell (2007) identified this process as being iterative, which is the cycling back and forth between data collection and data analysis. Creswell (2007) posited that qualitative data analysis and collection are not separate as in quantitative data analysis, but instead, they are interrelated and can be conducted simultaneously. Unlike quantitative research, the research does not stick to a linear approach but rather moves in an analytic circle with the goal of developing a deeper understanding of the information provided by participants (Creswell, 2007).

To make sure that the resulting themes are true to the participants, I used an audio recording device and a secure online transcription service. Once I receive the transcript back from the transcriber, I listened to the audio recordings a second time to make sure that the

transcripts matched the recording. The resulting transcripts were forwarded to each participant to allow participants to check their responses and clarify any statements. Member checking ensures that the transcripts and resulting findings are representative of participant thoughts and experiences (member checking). Creswell (2013) found that this step is necessary to make sure that the data are reflective of participants and void of misunderstandings. Each transcript and audio file were stored in accordance with the directives of the University of the Pacific's IRB.

The organization of data is vital when working with qualitative data. The coding of data assists the researcher with the organization of information into themes. Creswell (2009) argued that it is vital to the reliability and validity of the research to develop an organizational system while in the planning stages of the research study.

The coding of data involves a process of segmenting and labeling data in the form of text to create descriptions and broad themes of information. As previously stated, qualitative research uses an inductive process of categorizing data, which results in a large number of themes reduced to a few themes (Creswell, 2009).

I initially used Rubin and Rubin's (2005) model of data analysis. The first phase of the analysis consisted of organizing and preparing the interview transcripts in an effort to identify codes. During this phase, I was able to identify codes that were connected amongst the cases. I then moved to the second phase, which required me to begin to make insights into the overall meaning of the data. I used color coding (highlighters) as I sought to make connections amongst the data. Rubin and Rubin (2005) defined coding as "systematically labeling concepts, themes, events, and topical markers so that you can readily retrieve and examine all of the data units that refer to the same subjects across all your interview" (p. 207). Upon completion of coding the interviews, I sorted the data by grouping all similar data into categories and themes in addition to

identifying outliers. During the third phase of data analysis, I summarized the data into emerging themes and organized them in a table. It was at this point as a novice researcher that I wanted to ensure that my data analysis was trustworthy and accurate to the emerging themes. I chose to use Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method as a second data analysis method. This is a 6-phase method that focuses on the researcher becoming familiar with the data and generating codes that are then categorized into themes. It required me to review the themes in addition to defining each theme. Following the 6-phase method supported an in-depth analysis of revisiting of the data to ensure that the emerging themes were accurate to the data and reflective of the participants' voices. The Braun and Clark's (2006) 6-phase method is explained in Table 1.

Table 1
Braun and Clark's (2006) 6-Phase Thematic Analysis Method

Phase	Description of the Process
1. Read the data multiple times to familiarize yourself with it	Review audio files, review transcripts of data, take notes of initial ideas and thoughts.
2. Generate initial codes	Identify themes that can be organized under a code. Review data to make sure that the identified data are relevant to the code
3. Search for and determine themes	Organize codes into themes. Organize data to support under each potential theme in an effort to make sure that the data are relevant to theme.
4. Review themes	Check if the identified themes make sense with the codes and overall data. Work to generate a thematic map as a visual representation of codes and themes.
5. Define and name themes	Review themes to ensure that the theme aligns with the data and that the appropriate definition is given to each theme.
6. Produce the report	Review the data one last time. Identify compelling quotes that relate to the themes and can serve as connection between the research questions and findings. Finally write a report of the analysis.

Trustworthiness of Findings

Qualitative research seeks to illuminate, understand, and extrapolate to similar situations (Golafshani, 2003). Creswell stated (2007) that in order to accomplish trustworthiness, there is a need to make sure that what is being measured is done so with accuracy and credibility (Creswell, 2007). Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that the goal of trustworthiness in qualitative research is to support the claim that the findings of a qualitative study are worth paying attention to. To meet this goal, I triangulated the data used member checking and external audits.

Triangulation

Triangulation includes multiple sources of data collection and data analysis but does not require a fixed method for all qualitative researchers (Golafshani, 2003). The methods adopted to triangulate the data are based upon the questions driving the research. Creswell (2007) posited that it is necessary that multiple types of data must be analyzed to increase the credibility of the study (Creswell, 2013). Patton (2002) argued that triangulation strengthens the study by combining methods. Successful triangulation of the data works to make sure that the emerging themes are established and based on not one, but multiple sources of data. Furthermore, the triangulation of data makes sure that the findings are reflective of the voices and perspectives of participants.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, I utilized a number of strategies. I used multiple sources of data, including semi-structured interviews, meeting observations, and document analysis. I also used a voice recorder and transcription services to ensure that the data was accurate to participants' experiences and perspectives.

Member checking. Member checking is the process in which the researcher requests that participants review and verify the accuracy and credibility of the data (Creswell, 2013). Member checking also requires the researcher to share the data with the participants prior to the final report to ensure that the resulting interpretations and themes are accurate and free from misunderstandings. The use of member checking ensures that the voice of the participants is evident and apparent in the findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted that member checking is one of the most critical phases of a qualitative study. I used member checks to allow the participants to review their transcripts for clarity and asks any questions. If desired, participants were allowed to change, add or delete any given responses.

External audits. I used external audits to support the reliability and credibility of the study. External audits employ the use of an auditor to review the process, data, interpretation, and final report for accuracy (Creswell, 2013). The auditor can be a professional colleague or an individual versed in qualitative research that acts as a critical friend. The auditor's primary role is to analyze the data to determine if the findings and resulting interpretations and conclusions are supported by the data (Creswell, 2013). For this study, I used two critical peers who are scholars in education and versed in qualitative research. Their support and direction proved valuable as they assisted me by providing guidance in regard to qualitative methodology and sound research practices. I also enlisted the continued guidance and support of my study chair.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 focused on the methodology and methods used to conduct the study. All cases used were school districts with enrollments over 5,000 students. Participants were district-level administrators or stakeholders of the school district. Each selected participant met the criteria of participating in the development of a school district LCAP as a school administrator, teacher, staff member, parent, or community member for at least one year. Chapter 3 began with a description of each of the cases. Each was given a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. Chapter 3 then discussed the methods for data collection with a detailed description of the methods employed. Chapter 3 then moved to a discussion of how the data were analyzed to reveal themes. Initial steps of data analysis utilized Rubin and Rubin's (2005) method of qualitative data analysis. Seeking to ensure that the resulting themes were truly representative of the participants' experiences and to support trustworthiness and reliability, Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis method was used to analyze the data. Chapter 3 closed with a discussion of

how trustworthiness was established by using a critical friend for feedback, member checking, and triangulation of the data.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Chapter 4 shares the findings of this qualitative, multiple-site case study. A multiple-site case study provides the researcher with the opportunity to understand a phenomenon that occurs across multiple cases (Yin, 2013). The value of a qualitative multiple-site case study is its ability to understand the unique perspectives and experiences of individual cases while also identifying common threads or shared experiences across cases. This case study focused on three traditional school sites nested in Northern California. The sites were selected as they reside in the area that the researcher has a keen interest in as an educator, researcher, and community stakeholder. Chapter four first presents a case description of each of the cases. The purpose of doing is to understand how each case defined themselves, embraced the process of the LCAP, and the lessons learned. The case descriptions also provide insights into the participants and their relevant roles to the development of their district's LCAP.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the process of local school districts as they developed LCAPs. The study also sought to understand the experiences of district-level administrators, teachers, principals and community stakeholders as they worked collaboratively to design and implement LCAPs.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this case study:

1. What are school districts' processes as they work to develop LCAPs?
2. How do school districts respond to the mandates of the LCAP?

3. What factors do school districts perceive to be important when developing a district LCAP?
4. What challenges do school districts perceive in the development of district LCAPs?

Case Descriptions

DUSD

Table 2 identifies the pseudonyms given to participating stakeholders, the pseudonym of the site and the role the stakeholder performs in the school district.

Table 2
DUSD Stakeholders and Roles in District

Pseudonym	Role
Benson	Teacher, Former Principal
Bryce	Board Member, Retired Teacher, Parent
Steven	Director of District LCAP

This is us. DUSD consists of a diverse student population located in a city that struggles with poverty and violence. In addition to the city's struggles, DUSD is considered a low-performing school district (CDE, 2019). Document review finds that the district is eligible for support at the county and state level in its efforts to attain its LCAP goals (CDE, 2019). Historically, the district has not performed well on standardized assessments such as the Smarter Balance Assessment System California and its predecessor, the Standardized Testing and Reporting Program Test. High school graduation rates were below standard. Graduates often were ill-prepped to attend a four-year university. Historical efforts to address these concerns included a controversial move to lower the number of credits required to graduate. This move,

while increasing graduation rates, lead to less rigorous course completion requirements furthering the problem of students not being prepared for the demands of college. The school district has been plagued by not having consistency in the superintendent position. Participants were able to name four superintendent changes that resulted in a shift of vision, mandates, protocols, and procedures. One participant likened the school district to the troubled child that everyone states that they can serve only to find that the historical and contemporary problems faced by the child are numerous, quitting before action plans are actualized and goals attained. One participant shared: “It is easy to say I am going to come in and clean things up for the benefit of our students. Things are going to be different.” Once in the work can be daunting, the factors that implement the daily operation of a large school district stuck in the middle of a city in crisis can be exhausting, and then they leave.

Embracing the process. Document review reveals that DUSD’s LCAP goals focus on building the pedagogical capacity of teachers by implementing culturally relevant pedagogy and new English language arts and math curricula. LCAP goals include an explicit effort to address the social-emotional needs of students and adopting restorative practices in efforts to reduce the use of exclusionary practices as the dominant form of school discipline. A review of DUSD’s LCAP stakeholder engagement strategy reveals an organized effort to engage parents and students of color to address low academic achievement and discipline issues. One approach established by LCAP goals was to build a stronger partnership with Latino and African American families. Sierra focused on attaining this goal by reaching out to families via school communication systems, community events, churches, and the news media. Steven from DUSD shared, “We were trying to spread the message of we may have messed up historically, but now we are ready to work as a team with the community to help your kids. Join us!” As a result of

these efforts, a new parent engagement team established parent groups for Latino families and African American families organized around the needs of their children. An administrator of equity worked to change past practices in terms of providing an equitable education for students. Efforts to address opportunity gaps have resulted in the implementation of focus groups that promote college readiness across student groups with an added push for Latino and African American students. Parent engagement workshops assist parents with understanding Common Core State Standards, establishing homework routines, and developing parent capacity to help their students read and comprehend at higher levels. Community fairs helped parents gain access to resources ranging from mental health services to nutrition classes.

Lessons learned. Steven serves in a leadership role in DUSD. His efforts center on gathering and analyzing survey and academic data to present to the district's leadership team as part of the process to develop the district's LCAP. Steven spoke proudly of the district's efforts and believed personally in the current focus and direction of the district.:

Our leadership team is new we are embracing new practices that speak to inequities both inside and outside of the classroom. We want our students to be able to make choices that lead to them being leaving poverty and scarcity.

Steven shared that the district moved from a solely academic lens to an equity lens in efforts to identify and address outside environmental, societal and economic challenges that they believe must be addressed if students are to grow academically:

It's a new day, a new approach in the district. We as a school district are not afraid to admit to that inequitable practices have been prevalent in our district, and we must work to address the challenges faced by our students; if not, we will fail our students.

Bryce serves as a school board member or figurehead, as he stated (jokingly). Bryce's unique lens is that he views himself as a three-time stakeholder, he is a board member, and he has children and grandchildren in the district and also was a teacher in DUSD. He views the

district as one that flows with the person that sits on the “throne.” “Our journey has not been an easy one. The teachers are wary because as our conductor changes, so does the mission,” Bryce stated. Bryce expressed a love of the district in its totality. He spoke of the need to not forget anyone down to the hourly staff that is often left out when developing any educational plan:

For once, Davis hit the jackpot; we have a large population of English learners and low-SES students; these students are generating big bucks....How and what we implement will determine our success, I can only hope that we are on the right track.

CUSD

Table 3 identifies the pseudonyms given to participating stakeholders, the pseudonym of the site and the role the stakeholder performs in the school district.

Table 3
CUSD Stakeholders and Roles in District

Pseudonym	Role
Rachelle	Parent
Robert	Teacher
Richard	Teacher
Sheila	Parent Educator

This is us. CUSD is referenced as the school district that parents want their children to attend, especially for high school. The district is large and economically and racially diverse. The boundaries of the district include single home housing in areas worth up to and over \$1 million to triplexes located in areas plagued by poverty and high rates of crime. Although the district’s sub-groups’ academic performance is at higher levels than the other participant sites, it

has similar struggles in terms of engaging and responding to the needs of students of color. CUSD in past years focused on managing access to their schools. District officials sought to attain this goal by conducting “morning raids.” These raids consisted of a school district official along with a school resource officer going to the listed home of a student between the early morning hours of 6 to 7 a.m. to determine if the child resided in the house. Parents and students subjected to these raids reported that district officials would often ask to see proof of residency such as a bedroom, opening drawers to determine if the child had clothing in the drawer as evidence of the child living in the home. One stakeholder reported:

I was mad as hell when the Vice Principal stated that the house was too clean and orderly for young kids to be living there. I couldn't believe my ears. This person that was supposed to be working in the best interest of my child was acting more as an agent to keep her out.

Racial tensions inside the district grew as the majority of these raids were conducted on students of color. When community groups such as the NAACP approached CUSD about these practices and the goals of the methods, the response centered on the need to save limited resources to serve the students that live in the district's boundaries. A parent stakeholder shared:

I placed my son in this district because I believe it provides better opportunities than DUSD and PUSD....It is not without cost. He has not had one teacher of color. I, along with his father, have had numerous meetings regarding his unfair treatment by teachers, not other kids at this point, but teachers. We worry that we are giving up something to attain a good education.

CUSD has historically had success in preparing students for college; in fact, the students enrolled in CUSD attend college at higher rates than the other two cases (CDE, 2019). However, the achievement gaps between students of color and their peers are present in CUSD, as in the other two cases. CUSD does not explicitly address this concern but points out that they focus on the achievement of all students. CUSD points to its strong visual and performing arts programs at

all levels and its growing focus on career and technical education (CTE) as strong efforts to address gaps in achievement and opportunity.

Embracing the process. Document review finds that CUSD LCAP goals focus on every student reading on grade level by the third grade. To accomplish this goal, CUSD provided elementary teachers with pedagogical training in reading with an emphasis on comprehension. CUSD's focus on CTE resulted in a large facility that provides students with opportunities with hands-on learning in construction and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning programs. The district has harvested and implemented partnerships with area building consortiums resulting in apprenticeship opportunities for CTE students upon graduation.

Three stakeholders for CUSD were invited to participate in the study. One administrative level stakeholder could not agree to join due to challenges with work demands. Two identified stakeholders are long time staff members of the district, and the third is a parent with one child that graduated from CUSD and one that currently attends. Richard, a high school teacher with CUSD, agreed to participate in the study and meet on campus in his classroom. While walking to his room, he shared the recent environmental accomplishments that are based on the goals of the LCAP. Richard discussed the district's long history of addressing the challenges of being the sole high school in the district, which has placed space demands on the high school. Richard shared that he has been working with the district for at least 15 years and was excited about the adoption of the LCFF and LCAP legislation. He believed that his district, although located in the same geographical areas of two other districts, has unique challenges and needs that need to be addressed locally. Since the adoption of the LCAP Legislation, he has participated in LCAP stakeholder sessions, reviewed LCAPs as part of committees, informed and encouraged

community members to attend meetings, and provided district leadership with the feedback of LCAP drafts.

Sheila serves CUSD as a parent educator. Sheila's position requires her to work with families within the district that experience barriers to their children's education to include poverty, violence, and chronic truancy. Sheila views her role as a bridge between the community she hails from and the school district. Sheila openly shared that the number of unduplicated students identified low socio-economic status has grown in the district. Some school sites located in affluent areas have struggled to embrace and assist these students and their families. The demographic change at many schools is driven by the district moving to a centralized enrollment process. "The initial impact of the district's decision to go with centralized enrollment brought more brown and Black kids in certain schools," Sheila asserted. She shared that this is a challenge for some educators not accustomed to teaching large numbers of brown and Black students:

The identification of English learners in LCFF and LCAP as a targeted group forced the district to stop ignoring the needs of these students and begin to seek ways to provide an equitable education for English learners and students of color.

Rachelle, a parent in the CUSD, finds that sending her children to CUSD has not been without costs. Rachelle reports that although CUSD is sought after for its facilities and course offerings it has its issues. Rachelle stated, "I guess the saying all that glitters is not gold is true when it comes to CUSD." When asked to elaborate, Rachelle shared: "Historically to be blunt this district has been White. The influx of kids of color is not always welcomed."

Lessons learned. Richard and Sheila both shared that one of the biggest lessons learned from the initial years of LCAP is that the process of goal development and resource allocation in the district has changed. An equally important lesson learned from the initial years of the LCAP

is that there is an immediate need to educate all stakeholders, including teachers of the purpose and mandates of LCAP. Richard added that participation is weak because the initial understanding of the LCAP was that it focused solely on the needs of the targeted groups (ELLs, low-income, foster youth and homeless):

So if it only focuses on these groups and my kids do not fit into one of the categories, why be involved. This is the biggest problem that I see. There is a need to understand that although there are targeted groups, there is a need for all parents to participate for the benefit of the student body as a whole.

Sheila shared that the lesson learned for her as a parent and a district employee is that while Latino parent participation has grown, the involvement of groups such as African American students and families living in poverty still is not increasing:

How we reach out is vital. We can't reach out because we feel sorry for these students and their families or because we feel compelled to reach out because they have less than we do. There is a need to reach out and educate because doing so is part of providing an equitable education.

Rachelle, a CUSD parent, shared that the lesson she learned is that the district provides parents opportunities to participate in meetings and events, but the sessions are structured and guarded:

These meetings don't discuss the ugly side of things shall we say. The district still employs strategies to limit what is discussed, acknowledged, or expressed in front of large groups. The response is, "Oh, can you please use the parking lot poster? That concern will be discussed during another session."

PUSD

Table 4 identifies the pseudonyms given to participating stakeholders, the pseudonym of the site and the role the stakeholder performs in the school district.

Table 4
PUSD Stakeholders and Roles in District

Pseudonym	Position
Carl	Parent, Alum
Michelle	Teacher
Mitchell	Union Leader, Teacher

This is us. PUSD is a unique district as it covers multiple cities and rural areas. During the early 2000s, the district assumed the leadership of a large part of an urban city in the area. The resulting challenge was that large numbers of students and their families moved from more expensive urban areas seeking affordable housing. This changed the district from one that served a small number of “urban” students to a much larger number of urban students. These students changed the face of the district, once predominantly White to a district that had large numbers of African American, Latino, and Middle Eastern students. This resulted in an “us versus them” mentality in the school district. PUSD enrollment was growing at a fast rate. As a result, the PUSD moved to implement year-round schooling. Being the first district to move to this schedule caused problems as the majority of schools outside the district’s *home city* (defined here as where the district originated; due to growth the district spread to a neighboring city) were placed on a year-round schedule while the traditional schools within the home city boundaries were not.

Novice teachers with limited years of service worked in year-round schools often forced to take leftover tracks. Challenges to year-round schedules such as childcare and a lack of supervision of middle school students off-track lead to tensions in the neighborhood and calls for

the district to provide childcare and off-track activities for families. Concerned parents interpreted PUSD's slow response as ignoring the needs of their students.

Embracing the process. Mitchell is a dual stakeholder in the PUSD; he serves as a local union leader and teacher in the district. He has held these two positions for over 8 years in total. He also refers to himself as a community stakeholder as he has resided in the city of Peloton for over 25 years. Mitchell shared that he has watched his city go from a small agricultural city with rural roots to a suburban city that struggles with the influx of diverse ethnic groups and moving from a small city feel to a suburban city. These changes have placed new demands on district resources. The district still experiences cultural clashes between stakeholders that want to retain the agricultural identity of the school district to those that say that times have changed, and there is a need to be more reflective and responsive to the changing demographics of the district. He stated that "it is a constant struggle between the needs and wants of the different groups that comprise the district."

Carl is a community stakeholder of PUSD, and a graduate as well. Carl fondly shared the history of the district and the memories of 4H and football being the focus of the district. Being identified as an area of affordable housing, PUSD experienced growing pains and culture clashes as it grew from one small high school to four high schools. The school district mirrored the ethnic tensions in the city. Families recently moved to the city demanded that their students be provided with an equitable education and sought and gained seats on the school board. Carl shared that school board meetings that were once boring by his description became contentious with angry exchanges between different ethnic groups and accusations of systemic racism within the district. The change was hard, and tensions continued to climb. The introduction of LCFF and LCAP legislation gave a district an out of sorts, Carl elaborated that LCFF and LCAP

required the district to address the academic needs of the targeted groups and sub-groups in an explicit manner:

It was interesting watching the back and forth between different groups. Shame to say that these groups were often aligned along ethnic and socioeconomic lines. The feeling of they are coming in and taking over our schools was rampant, and the tensions and opposing goals were often reported in area newspapers.

As the demographics of the students changed, there was a need to grow a more diverse teaching population. Carl shared that the district has made small gains in getting teachers of color to teach in the school district:

When attending school board meetings concerned parents of students of color would often bring this concern to the school board. Many school board members were baffled as to how to respond. There seemed to be a lack of awareness of how representation in both the curriculum and staffing as part of equitable education.

Michelle is a novice teacher in PUSD. Michelle taught at the high school level and was excited to participate in the LCAP process in an effort to make sure that science, her beloved subject, was acknowledged and provided for in the PUSD's LCAP. Michelle stated that she responded to the invitation to attend the LCAP, understanding that the LCAP requires a collaborative process. She brought science materials, questions, and ideas to the meeting:

I was eager to participate when I entered the room. I was expecting the room to be configured in a manner that supports an environment that allows for the equal consideration of ideas from all stakeholders. What I found was a presentation. It was at this point that I believed that what was really needed was signature on the sign-in sheet. There was very little discussion, we sat and listened. Towards the end of the meeting, we were invited to share our concerns, but I believe it was more "lip-service." ...The goals, the plans were already a done deal. We were all invited and tolerated as part of the process.

Lessons learned. All participants shared that PUSD has a long way to go to move from a compliance model to harnessing the power of autonomy and discretion provided by the LCAP legislation. Participants shared that the district's efforts to develop the LCAP seem to be to get the meetings done and go write the plan. Mitchell shared that PUSD may be approaching LCAP

in this manner because the district is so large and struggles to include all stakeholders. Carl shared that there seems to be a fear that the LCAP because it explicitly identifies target groups is meant to leave out or take resources from other students, or the traditional students of PUSD.

Carl shared that to quell this; PUSD must take advantage of its growing new teacher force:

Educating new teachers about the purpose of LCFF and LCAP can lead to more stakeholder engagement (teacher) that lends itself to an LCAP that is more inclusive of all students. Teachers are on the front lines daily, and teachers as stakeholders can have a large impact on involving more parents as stakeholders for the benefit of all students.

Table 4 identifies the pseudonyms given to participating stakeholders, the pseudonym of the site and the role the stakeholder performs in the school district.

Emergent Themes

The following section is organized around the questions driving the study. Emerging themes for each question are organized under each question. The identified themes are the result of analyzing multiple sources of data and the merging of resulting codes into themes.

Understanding the need for the themes to truly represent and describe the experience and insights of participants, I used thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method for the identification, analysis, and reporting of themes within data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Developed by Braun and Clark (2006), thematic analysis follows a six-step process to analyze qualitative data. Thematic analysis requires the researcher to become familiar with the gathered data, generate codes from the data, search for themes, and review the themes before writing and including the themes in the presentation of the data.

Understanding the need for the data collected to truly represent the experience of the participants, I employed thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) in an effort to capture and describe the experience of the participants. Thematic analysis supports deep analysis and detailed description of qualitative data by requiring the researcher to follow a 6-phase method.

Phase 1 requires the researcher to familiarize themselves with the data. Phase 2 focuses on the generating of initial codes. Phase 3 then requires the researcher to combine the codes into themes. Phase 4 focuses on ensuring that the data listed under each theme are relevant to the potential theme. During Phase 4, the researcher reviews the themes and generates a thematic map based upon the codes. During Phase 5, the researcher returns to codes and themes in an effort to refine the themes. An additional purpose of Phase 5 is to generate clear definitions and names for themes. During Phase 5, the researcher returns to codes and themes in an effort to refine the themes. An additional purpose of Phase 5 is to generate clear definitions and names for themes. In the final phase, Phase 6 is when the final report of the data is presented using rich details to describe the findings of the study.

Research Question 1. This section starts with a list of cascading quotes associated with each research question (see Table 5). The chapter then proceeds with a presentation of the findings and the associated emerging themes.

Table 5
Cascading Quotes for Research Question 1

Stakeholder	Quote
Bryce Board Member, Retired Teacher, Parent DUSD	“A year ago, we had people tearing up sticky notes saying, ‘Hey throw these out. We’ll get back to you,’ and nobody got back to me. Nobody got back to a lot of other people.”
Steven Director of District LCAP DUSD	“The process, I would say, is the first thing we do is, as a district the leadership of all the areas of representation within the district looks at all of the data points for usually a three-year period to see the process of growth, where it’s happening also looking for themes or areas of need.”
Carl Parent and Alum PUSD	“When participating in a stakeholder meeting the leaders gave all stakeholders dots to use to identify what they believed district priorities should be. The final document did not really resemble what the community believed to be important.”
Michelle Teacher PUSD	“The meeting, LCAP was presented as just another opportunity for parental involvement, there wasn’t an added emphasis to explain the importance of the LCAP and the meeting to the immediate future of the district.”
Sheila Parent Educator CUSD	“Since everyone does not fully understand the purpose of the LCAP many parents or stakeholders do not attend.”
Mitchell Union Leader and Teacher PUSD	“The process, oh the process focuses on limiting access and understanding. Only supporters are valued and sought out.”

There is a process. Each participant reported that there was a process employed as they participated in the development of school district LCAPs. Although each stakeholder participated at different stages, a common trend was that they did not fully understand the power of the participation or the role they played in the development of their district LCAPs. Richard,

from CUSD, shared that the district utilized a process of first identifying which higher-level administrator would be responsible for writing all drafts of the LCAP:

The assumption of stakeholders, such as himself, is that this work would be done as a team. The fact is that although the stakeholders are allowed to give feedback, the final drafts are written by one individual and signed off by the Superintendent and presented to the board.

Mitchell shared that PUSD made an effort to invite and include everyone, but the invitation seems to be the sole goal and not the inclusion of ideas of stakeholders. Carl from PUSD shared that the LCAP being so new it is often considered just one more meeting. Carl elaborated that there is a need to build an understanding that this meeting is part of a process that not only sets goals but begins to define the direction of the district: “Being an educator, I am still learning the process, the must-dos, and may dos of the process. However, it is the community stakeholders that need a greater understanding of the process.” Participants from all three cases shared that initially, districts implemented the timeline as just that a timeline. There was not an added focus on building an understanding of the LCFF and LCAP. Sheila, from CUSD, shared:

I mean, do they really want the public to be aware of the process? Can you imagine how many stakeholder perspectives they would have to listen to and try to merge into the document? If parent groups, community groups, and church groups had a real awareness that could be very disruptive to the status quo.

Mitchell from PUSD shared that the process focused on having the meeting instead of using the meeting as an opportunity to build the understanding of the LCAP and really empower community stakeholders. Mitchell stated:

Okay, it seems as if the school districts are able to present a plan and prioritize where they want to spend the money, and they have to take input from the community or from the bargaining groups and from other groups, but my experience with the LCAP process has not been a positive one because they take the input and then do whatever they please.

Time and costs constrain the process. Mitchell, from PUSD, shared that the process focused on completion rather than a genuine effort to be inclusive of all stakeholders. I recall the

focus more so being on completing the document rather than embracing the LCAP as an opportunity to really sit down with all the parts of PUSD and write a plan that would be responsive to both the history and the changing demographics of the school district. The issue with the process is that if it is done correctly, there is a time factor, a cost factor. So once again, the process is new and costly. It costs money to hold meetings, and it takes time to reach out to stakeholders to make sure the meetings are scheduled at a time that the majority of stakeholders can attend. So the process becomes courtesy meetings and then back to the old way of doing things.

Rachelle, a parent in the CUSD, shared that meetings times need to be varied or on the weekend: “Parents have to work, many want to be involved, but they often cannot take off from work.” Michelle, a teacher in the PUSD, shared that meetings are often after work: “After an exhausting day, who can really give it their all? If a teacher has after-school commitments, then forget it.”

Just get it done. Richard, from CUSD, shared that in order for the process of the LCAP to be implemented as intended by the state department of education, there is a need to understand the process:

The implementers are learning as they are conducting the process. Therein are the challenge and problem. When those in charge are learning the process there is a tendency to just schedule and hold meetings and required sessions to just get it done. There it is in a nutshell, just get it done.

Carl from PUSD shared that he would think that districts would want a great deal of thought behind the LCAP: “From my observation, it is not the importance of thought that drives the LCAP but the timeline.” Carl believes that school districts value how quickly and efficiently the LCAP can be written: “If the concern or needs are too much to address or too complex or disturb the dominant narrative, they will be ignored.” Carl stated:

I observed it myself. Complex issues such as nutrition and transportation were given low priority because these issues required Peloton to begin to address issues such as poverty and equity in a manner that they had never had before. This would take too much time, effort, and redirection, so ignore these factors and move on.

Research Question 2. The following cascading quotes are relevant to Research Question 2 (see Table 6). Following the quotes is a detailed discussion of the themes that emerged from a detailed analysis of the qualitative data.

Table 6
Cascading Quotes for Research Question 2

Stakeholder	Quote
Steven Director of District LCAP DUSD	“Listening and learning from the stakeholders helps us as a district and system to support and educate our young scholars. Listening helps us to understand exactly what the barriers and obstacles are.”
Sheila Parent Educator CUSD	“They send out notices for meetings and hold meetings. I think the biggest response has been holding meetings.”
Bryce Board Member, Retired Teacher, Parent DUSD	“You have community input; you have board wants and desires. You really have management, strong management input, and you have teacher input.”
Robert Teacher CUSD	“It’s an opportunity for stakeholders to have a voice, but they really have to put themselves into it okay.”
Carl Parent and Alum PUSD	“Transparency has been the biggest response. So when it says local control, it really does provide if done correctly, for local control for parents and stakeholders and people to be able to see and understand the budget.”
Benson Teacher, Former Principal DUSD	“Tons of professional development for English Language Arts and English language development, oh yeah and a change in how students are discipline.” “Very little in class support for teachers, very little, just more demands.”

We are finally in control. Steven from DUSD shared that as an administrator and previous principal the strength of the LCAP is that it provides the district the opportunity and discretion to address local district needs. Steven shared:

My understanding of the intent of the LCAP is that it is the Department of Education under the direction of Jerry Brown’s approach to providing a process by which districts would be able to highly leverage and address the needs they see fit across the district through a LCFF and LCAP. A district can also use the discretion and autonomy provided

to address the needs of all students while also looking at how they increase and improves the services they're providing to high-need student groups and their families.

Discretion is powerful. Steven explained that DUSD used its discretion to embrace a holistic approach in order to increase student outcomes in the eight priority areas. Steven explained that DUSD believes, as is evidenced by their LCAP goals, that the local needs of their students cannot solely be addressed in the classroom but require an approach that recognizes that the family, community stressors and life experiences have an impact on student achievement. In an effort to both identify and address these factors, considerable resources have been devoted to increasing parent engagement to support student achievement. Study participants also discussed how discretion is powerful if the discretion is used to meet the needs of local students. Steven further elaborated that “student needs should be driving the development of all LCAPs, districts have the opportunity to ask themselves what the needs of their students are? Then, use those needs to develop goals and align resources.”

Bryce, who serves as an DUSD board member and who is also a parent, shared that “the ability to retain local control of the funds so that local jurisdictions can meet the needs of students is a welcomed change.” Richard, from CUSD, stated that the LCAP is simply a manifestation of how the district will use resources to serve the needs of students:

The discretionary power of being able to move money around to better meet the needs of students is valued. I believe without the discretion provided by the LCFF and LCAP district general funds would only be used to support reading and math. LCAP and LCFF allow for the support of local initiatives.

Limitations of legislation. Sheila from CUSD expressed that although the LCAP allows districts to identify their own goals, the focus on the LCAP is limited in that it requires additional supports only for the targeted groups. Sheila stated:

This led to districts limiting their goals to focus on those three groups. CUSD has historically offered strong programs in the arts and music. Parents expected that there

would be an influx of funds to support and further develop these programs. Really, there is such a limited knowledge of how the LCAP works because of lack of stakeholder education, engagement, and participation that parents simply do not understand the opportunities and the limitations of the LCAP.

Equitable and responsive to whom?

Equity for targeted groups. Each participant discussed the importance of discretion as a factor in meeting the unique needs of students each district serves, along with the appreciation of funding decisions being made at the local level was also a common thread. However, discretion and autonomy often fed tensions that were present and often ignored in the cases. Specifically, Richard, from CUSD, shared that his initial reactions were excitement as he really believed that the LCAP was a tool that school districts could use to take a long honest look at the culture of the district, and with an honest and critical eye discuss the racial tensions and belief held by many African American families that African American students are not treated fairly in CUSD. Furthermore, the lack of African American teachers, staff, and district leaders also fed tensions. Richard shared that African American parents and educators organized around this issue and sought a remedy from the CUSD, but none were offered. However, with the introduction of the LCAP, Richard believed that there was a chance to change things. As a teacher with an awareness of the needs of African American students in his district, he believed that the historical needs of African American students, both academic and behavioral, would be considered and addressed via the LCAP. Upon reading the final LCAP document and realizing that CUSD chose not to explicitly address African American students' needs, Richard was concerned and frustrated. The parent group moved forward with their concerns by going to school and district administrators. These tensions often fed over into student populations with many racial charged incidents occurring on campus. Richard believed that the school district missed an opportunity to openly critique and address not only the academic and behavioral

performance of African American students, but the district's recent and historical responses.

When this did not take place tensions grew and Richard grappled with the intent of the LCAP asking, "The LCAP is equitable for whom?" Richard shared:

You know, I guess for the first couple of years, I went, and I invited other African Americans to go because I was willing to make sure that they included funding for African American students. LCAP does not address African Americans as a subcategory, even though the academic and behavioral struggles of African American students are well documented in the district.

Acknowledgement, but still no real response. Richard, from CUSD, shared that he wondered why the district failed to identify in writing a need to address African American opportunity and achievement gaps. Richard shared that these issues are not new to the district and need to be addressed:

African American achievement is simply not explicitly addressed in the district's LCAP; therefore, discretion in this case is not powerful when discretion can be used to ignore historical and systemic problems in the district; it is an enabler or a double-edged sword.

Sheila spoke about CUSD's efforts in the Latino student community: "There is definitely a visible focus on the education of English learners." She shared that she understood this resulted from the mandates of the CDE: "There are questions for consideration for sure, why an added emphasis for English learners when other students of color as a group are not performing at the level of their peers." Rachelle, a parent in CUSD, believes that the limited focus on the three groups lends itself to create divisions: "As long as the emphasis is one group rather than another, there will be ill feelings." Rachelle elaborated further that for a district like CUSD, discretion is not working in its favor: "Believe me, if they did not have to have concrete plans to address the targeted groups, there would be zero additional efforts there." When asked if she agreed with CUSD's goal of focusing on reading and career education, Rachelle replied, "Yes,

that seems to be fair.” Richard revealed that he is not sure why the sub-groups are what they are, Richard discussed:

It deals with foster care, Els, and low socioeconomics, okay. They do not deal with African Americans per se, and we were trying to get them to at least put together some programs that will help our African American students.

Research Question 3. This question asked participants to identify the factors that they believed to be important when developing a school district’s LCAP. Cascading quotes that speak to the question were selected and are presented in Figure 3. Each quote was selected as I believed it spoke to the experiences of participants and was relevant to Research Question 3 (see Table 7).

Table 7
Cascading Quotes for Research Question 3

Stakeholder	Quote
Michelle Teacher PUSD	“This is where districts could really push the envelope and change how their students, our students our educated, but no they really on believe how they serve the targeted groups are the biggest factors.”
Benson Teacher, Former Principal DUSD	“Responding to the targeted groups and making progress in the goals that are written. These factors tend to take over all initiatives in the district.”
Robert Teacher CUSD	“Well they do not exclude anyone when they invite. So they make sure they get input from everybody, the exclusion comes because they can actually write it however they want to write it.”
Mitchell Union Leader, Teacher PUSD	“Meetings and presentations. Being selective of the stakeholders they really include in an effort to make sure that their perspective is honored and others ignored during the process.”
Sheila Parent Educator CUSD	“Hispanics and English learners, these are the biggest factors I believe the districts believes are important. I guess it’s good since these groups were pretty much ignored by the district previously.”

Choices. District’s being able to make choices is a huge factor in the development of the LCAPs. In fact, local control and school districts having the power to make their own choices were factors driving the design of LCFF and LCAP. Although having a choice is welcomed, choice can and has led to tensions between stakeholder groups. Mitchell from PUSD shared that choice and discretion to independently develop LCAP goals is apparent in his district. In spite of PUSD’s academic achievement data that indicates a need to address reading comprehension, the district chose to invest large resources in technology instead of resources such as reading intervention teachers or paraprofessionals to help with reading instruction. Richard explained

that via the use of abstract language and vague academic goals, technology was touted as an appropriate and relevant response to poor student achievement. Mitchell shared:

About 8 years ago, they spent \$40 million of their reserves on technology, and they devoted a large chunk of money to technology. Now and the last time I checked, I don't see technology as a big force to help kids learn as much as hiring qualified educators and lowering class sizes.

Competition or collaboration? Carl, from PUSD, discussed discretion as to the ability to simply ignore that which does not apply to you. As a teacher, but not in PUSD, his lens prompts him to advocate for ELLs in the LCAP development process; as a community stakeholder (parent), his role as a parent seeks educational opportunities to be provided for students that fall outside of the targeted student groups. Carl stated that these roles often collide with one another. When asked to elaborate, he said that the needs of his students differ from the needs of his children and his children's peers: "The school district, while given the mandates to focus on targeted groups, also has the discretion to write goals and align resources that meet the needs of the general student population." Carl made reference to how wealthy school districts have added additional CTE classrooms and experiences for general population students, while many local districts seemed to write goals to targeted student groups only or set goals that focus solely on raising achievement in reading and math. This leaves him, and many parents asking, "Where is our voice, how are the needs of my child addressed in this process?"

Self-Identification. The change of being able to self-identify goals and direct resources were exciting and a breath of fresh air. Participants shared that districts seemed to be happy to be free from the constraints of funding driven by compliance models and categorical funding regulations. The excitement stemmed from the idea that local school districts would be given the resources necessary to meet the needs of their students. Although this novel idea brought excitement after participating in the process for at least one year, the discretion allowed was also

characterized in a negative light. Richard, from CUSD, shared that when the state allows districts to write their own story, that is a green light to address what they want to and ignore what they want to:

The needs of African American students in this school district are well documented, CUSD has failed to present an organized response as to how to meet those needs as an educational community is not well documented. So again, I ask, who is the LCAP equitable for?

Richard added that CUSD is losing out on a wonderful opportunity to be responsive to a growing African American student population. Mitchell, from PUSD, also discussed how the needs of students could be overlooked with the discretionary power afforded by the LCAP legislation:

When participating in a stakeholder meeting, the leaders gave all stakeholders dots to use to identify what they believed district priorities should be. At the end of the session, after much discussion, the stakeholders came to the conclusion that nutrition should not be one of the district initiatives to be included on the LCAP.

Lack of agreement. Carl of PUSD explained while the process engaged multiple stakeholders, the majority of community stakeholders identified needs according to their personal lens and not a broader inclusive lens. Steven of DUSD shared that the discretion of the LCAP process allows for school districts to be responsive to student needs that are easily identifiable in the district along with small student groups that are less apparent by using an “equity approach.” Steven shared that DUSD embraces an equity approach when developing its LCAP. When asked to share the what and the why of an equity approach, Steven shared that historically some student populations have not been served equitably, which has fed gaps in opportunity and achievement. The district’s decision to embrace and apply an equity approach led to an LCAP that not only sought to support student academic achievement but student social-emotional health as well. Steven elaborated that an equity approach allowed DUSD to adopt

approaches and educational philosophies that focus on educating students holistically. “When reading DUSD’s LCAP, you will find efforts to hire more counselors, build partnerships with the community, and help our educators understand how bias impacts education and student achievement,” he stated.

Research Question 4. Cascading quotes that speak to Research Question 4 are found in Table 8. A discussion of themes that emerged from the findings that connect with Research Question 4 is presented after the cascading quotes.

Table 8
Cascading Quotes for Research Question 4

Stakeholder	Quote
Robert Teacher CUSD	“Well, you know I can say that it is an opportunity for them to really have a voice, but they have to put themselves into it, okay.”
Steven Director of District LCAP DUSD	“The Local Control Accountability Plan is really a multi-tiered approach to setting up a district to successfully meet the needs of all the stakeholders it serves-the engagement process requires more participation and collaborative opportunities.”
Bryce Board Member, Retired Teacher, Parent DUSD	“The numbers are huge.” So, primarily the LCAP has grown, the funding source has grown, but the decision-making is still pretty centered at the top.”
Mitchell Union Leader, Teacher PUSD	“It’s like they’re following the law, but they’re doing whatever they want, so personally, I think it gives them too much autonomy.”
Benson Teacher, Former Principal DUSD	“The biggest challenge is how the LCAP limits what the district focuses on.” “Really needs outside of that are ignored or given very little resources.”
Michelle Teacher PUSD	“The challenge is that LCAP still feeds the deficit model. The targeted groups are supposed to be given additional supports with these additional dollars; those dollars went to positions outside of the classroom.”

We (districts) are forced to listen. The LCAP requires that school districts engage stakeholders in the process of developing and implementing LCAPs. The goal of this process was to make sure the smallest of voices are heard as district leaders identify areas of needs,

design, and implement plans to achieve the student outcomes they seek. Steven from DUSD shared that the district seeks to provide services that are responsive to the needs of its students, “We want our students to feel valued and connected to their schools. One way to achieve this is to make sure that they have a hand in how we develop our LCAP.”

DUSD, like PUSD and CUSD, relied upon giving surveys during instructional time to students across all grades. Steven from DUSD shared, “Having input from a variety of stakeholders is an important factor without these voices, we are still operating under previous models of setting priorities and funding schools.” Carl from PUSD shared that while listening is part of the LCAP, the biggest issue is which voices are honored, “Just simply listening to individuals is more an art of tolerance, not inclusivity.” Mitchell shared the same sentiment believing that the district leadership simply tolerates the presence of stakeholders because it is a huge factor in the legislation, but the decisions are still made with a very limited lens.

Inclusivity. The LCAP, requires school districts to include stakeholders in the development of school district LCAPs. This requirement led to school districts having to include not only teachers and staff members but community stakeholders. School districts used community meetings as a method to invite and include school stakeholders. Review of participating districts LCAPs showed that cases used more than one mode to invite and include community stakeholders. Document review found that notices were posted at the school sites, mailed to the homes of students, posted on school district websites, and school district social media accounts. This being a new process, a participant shared that the notices often did not result in large numbers of community stakeholders participating. This trend was found to be true across all three cases. More than one participant shared that initial LCAP meetings would

consist of district leadership teams, and very few if any community stakeholders. Richard shared his experience with the lack of stakeholder participation:

Well, you know, I can say that it is an opportunity for them to really have a voice, but they have to put themselves into it, okay, So, even teachers, you know, they are a stakeholder, but they have the attitude well, the district is going to do what the districts want to do anyway, so why waste my time going.

Steven of DUSD shared that the process school districts embrace is important to the final draft, goals, and resource allocation to achieve the student outcomes stated in the LCAP, “DUSD embraced the process as a continuing education process, a continuous cycle of improvement.” Steven explained that the district embarks on a needs assessment to identify specific needs via a process of engagement that uses town hall meetings and collaborative approaches to build stakeholder capacity and have a discussion around district-wide data and sub-group data in an effort to write goals that are true to student needs. Steven closed by stating that “the process is in place by the legislation; however, we need the stakeholders to participate.”

Sheila of CUSD shared that although stakeholder engagement is low, the intention of stakeholder engagement is valuable and necessary and should be continued: “Without having diverse stakeholders at the table, there is a danger of not having all students’ needs included in the district’s LCAP.” Bryce of DUSD shared that stakeholder engagement is an opportunity to not only reach out to district stakeholders for the purposes of the LCAP but also a great way to connect with families, build community partnerships, and develop trust between the school district and the community. Carl of PUSD expressed that stakeholder engagement, when done correctly, leads to families, students, and student groups coming together as collective with a common focus of growing student achievement and supporting a positive social-emotional development of students.

Frustration. All participants in the study shared how hopeful they were upon understanding the process of the LCAP and how it could support successful student outcomes at the local level. Frustration is also a common theme across the participating cases. Robert from CUSD characterized the process “as song and dance, and in the end, it’s all the same.” Michelle, a teacher in PUSD, shared that if a focus or interest is outside of the targeted groups, it gets very little attention. Michelle added: “So once again reading and math are at the center of everything when the arts and science can really engage and motivate kids to be better readers, writers, and thinkers.” Michelle further elaborated that school districts like PUSD are missing out on a wonderful opportunity to really change the educational experience of students, not replicate what was already done under the guise of another program. Sheila, a parent educator with CUSD, expressed that the frustration with LCAP is simply a lack of awareness in the community. When prompted to share how this could change, Sheila responded school districts must engage with the community at every available opportunity to build not only an understanding of LCAP but a relationship with the community. “This means civic groups, barbershops, and churches everyone should know about the LCAP” she asserted. Carl from PUSD stated that he was excited about the LCAP: “I would go to LCAP meetings regularly.” Carl shared, “Here is what teachers have been asking for local control of the decisions, and LCAP is where parents can have their voices heard. The challenge I see is that there is simply very limited participation.”

Learning curve. The theme of being in a learning curve emerged from the data. Mitchell from PUSD shared that the LCAP is new, so it will take time for community stakeholders to fully understand the power of the school district LCAP. This finding is in with Sheila of CUSD admitted that although she is very active in her district and works with parents, there is still very little conversation around LCAP. Parent questions still center on how to help my child succeed

in school or negative feelings about how teachers interact and treat students. Sheila explained that once community stakeholders understand that by attending and participating in LCAP, they can have input on these very issues, they may begin to participate. She shared that “Hispanic families, for some reason, have learned the power of LCAP. They have organized parent groups and attended LCAP sessions in good numbers to make sure the needs of their students, ELLs, are addressed in the LCAP.” Steven from DUSD was initially very quiet when discussing the challenges of the LCAP, taking longer to respond. When prompted why he shared that a big challenge of the LCAP is the competition that it can create. School districts are mandated to respond and provide for the needs of sub-groups such as ELLs and foster youth and homeless students. Community stakeholder groups often question why to focus on these populations when students such as African American males and Latino males (Non-ELL) are struggling academically and have historically had negative experiences within school systems. Stakeholders that advocate for student groups and issues that are not directly related to ELLs and foster youth and homeless students often argue that valuable resources should be used in an equal manner. Steven shared that these viewpoints highlight a lack of understanding of the intent of local control and specifically the concentration grants. He explained that although discretion and local control has been wanted for years, the challenge is finding a balance that is in line with the legislation and also the needs and demands of the local community:

This discretion we have is making sure that when you’re opening up conversations with dialogue and input as a district, you are addressing the mission of the district and making sure that through conversations and communications with stakeholders that you always bring it back to a student-focused and student-centered approach to find solutions.

The power is in the holder of the pen.

The writer has the final say. Every stakeholder, with the exception of Steven, who wrote DUSD’s LCAP, shared that they believed that they were part of a presentation instead of

collaboration in the development of the LCAP. This experience resulted in many asking, “Am I here to work on developing goals and discussing which programs and processes are most appropriate for our local students?” or “Am I here to listen to a presentation and sign the attendance sheet?” Bryce of DUSD shared that the phrase “community input” is often used as evidence of, “Hey, we included all stakeholders; however, input could simply be sign the sign-in sheet, please. Take the survey, please, place your post-its next to a list of initiatives that we should pursue.” Bryce continued:

It seems as if the school districts are able to present a plan and prioritize where they want to spend the money and they have to take input from the community or from the bargaining groups and from other groups in the community, but my experience with LCAP hasn't been a positive one because they take the input and then they do whatever they please.

Community stakeholders still needed. Participants discussed the importance of continued stakeholder engagement. Mitchell shared:

The intent of the LCAP is to give local control to the school district, the community and the bargaining units to work collaboratively to prioritize funding for schools. This goal cannot be attained if stakeholder input is not honored and only tolerated.

Carl, from PUSD, shared that if an invitation and a meeting is really only an invitation to be in the room, and not inclusion, then the intent of the LCAP is not actualized. Carl stated:

The danger of discretion offered in the legislation is that it can lead to input not being taken seriously. It just seems as if they take the input and the district basically knows what they want to do and doesn't really-doesn't take our input seriously.

Richard, a teacher in CUSD, shared his experience with stakeholder engagement as being more of a process or a box to check rather than an experience that is collaborative and speaks to diverse members of a school district working as a team to build an LCAP. Richard stated:

For the most part, you know they are bringing stakeholders together because this is part of the process, but the district has a way of saying that you are included. But you're really not, you know, they allow you to give input, but then you know they do their own thing, you know. When stakeholders participate in meetings with district leaders

and teachers and complete surveys, there is a belief that the input will result in programs and resources that are reflective of the needs and concerns that the stakeholder brings to the table. You leave the meeting thinking, great this new way of doing things will help our kids get what they want and need.

Richard shared that it is a game and that districts are playing the LCAP game in a masterful manner:

Yeah, again, they want you to believe that you have input, but in the end, they put the plan together, and they get the board to sign up on it, okay. You search and search to find your input to no avail. You look at how monies are spent and the programs that are adopted, and you realize that it's more of the same. The discretion that the district has is changed by the lens of those that are making the decisions. It is on their discretion, oh yeah. They get to do; however, they want.

Recognizing the challenge of increasing stakeholder engagement, PUSD sent out special invitations to stakeholders in the district. Mitchell, a union leader with PUSD, shared that although this appeared as an action to increase stakeholder engagement, the invitations were not sent out to all stakeholders in the district. Mitchell explained that when stakeholders are hand-picked and are not representative of all community stakeholders, those present tend to simply go along with the district leadership and writers of the LCAP. "It's almost as if they are afraid, especially if they are teachers to express a different viewpoint or ideas" he shared.

Sheila, from CUSD, also shared similar concerns regarding stakeholder engagement:

Since everyone does not fully understand the purpose of the LCAP, many parents or stakeholders do not attend. Once again, English learners and Hispanic parents are participating at greater rates than other ethnic groups. I think this is stemming from the confusion that the LCAP is solely for the three targeted groups and not all students. When asked how districts can respond to this trend, I think it will take time. While school districts are busy building their LCAPs, there is a need to educate the public, the stakeholders about this new process.

These findings align with Otash (2017) who found that the implementation of LCFF and LCAP brought in a new era of required stakeholder engagement. Otash (2017) shared that

district leaders highlighted the steep learning curve necessary to not only listen to stakeholder input but to authentically integrate stakeholder input into the LCAP.

Where is my voice? Rachelle, from CUSD, shared: “Initially, I believed the LCAP to be solely for English learners.” When asked to elaborate, Rachelle explained that each time the district sent out notices via email or social media, it seemed that the emphasis was on English learners. LCAP document review finds that CUSD notices described the LCAP as a general meeting and also at times, had an added emphasis on the groups targeted by the LCAP legislation prompting parents of these sub-groups to participate. Rachelle stated: “Look, if you want to get more people involved in the process, CUSD must show how the LCAP benefits everyone in the district.” As we continued to discuss how LCAP can benefit all students, Rachelle shared the clarity gained from our discussion is vital to clear up the rumor mill or perception that it is for “those kids.”

Bryce from DUSD stated that “teachers fail to participate at the rate they should because they too believe that it does not speak to the population they teach.” Bryce shared that when prompting teachers to attend LCAP meetings, he would often hear: “I don’t teach ELD or the LCAP doesn’t provide the necessary funds for science, art or music. So, I am not going to another meeting that does not benefit my students or me.” A common thread across all the cases was the need to address the misinterpretation of the LCAP as a program that only addresses educational needs of the target student populations. Mitchell, from PUSD, feels that the district must take the lead in this area:

When meetings are being planned, there is a need to make them sequential to build an understanding of the LCAP. There is an immediate need to make a clear connection to how the general student population benefits. Yes, the concentration grants are to address the targeted population, but the general fund is for the entire district. The LCAP still mandates that we ALL participate in planning goals for the student population as a whole.

Compliance in another form. Michelle, from PUSD, pointed to the fact that although California has moved from categorical funding to one that provides concentration grants to serve the targeted populations, the LCAP still operates from a deficit model. When a deficit model guides district decision-making, students without the targeted deficits are often left out of the decision-making process. She expressed the following:

Just think if we focused on bringing in science, I mean really focus on hands-on science at all levels to engage students in not only science but critical reading, writing, and problem-solving. Moving to a model that provides students with engaging activities can benefit all, not just the targeted populations. Aren't these the sorts of things that students that have been marginalized are missing anyway. But no! What we see are districts using those valuable dollars to drill and kill students with an additional focus on English language arts and math. Been there, done that!

Robert of CUSD explained that although the diversity of the district has grown, groups are still tribal. Richard stated, "Each group may buy into making it better for all, but in the end, everyone wants to know, how does this benefit my child?" Richard closed by stating, "If the benefits are not clear for them or their students, they (the stakeholders) will continue to be ambivalent to the process."

Chapter Summary

Three school districts, DUSD, CUSD, and PUSD, were selected to participate in this qualitative multiple-site case study. Data gleaned from multiple sources were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). The findings were presented by first identifying cascading quotes for each question. A description of the findings was then presented by each research question and the themes that emerged from the data that were relevant to the question. The emergent themes resulted from a deep analysis of the qualitative data gleaned from semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and observations (see Figure 1 and Table 9).

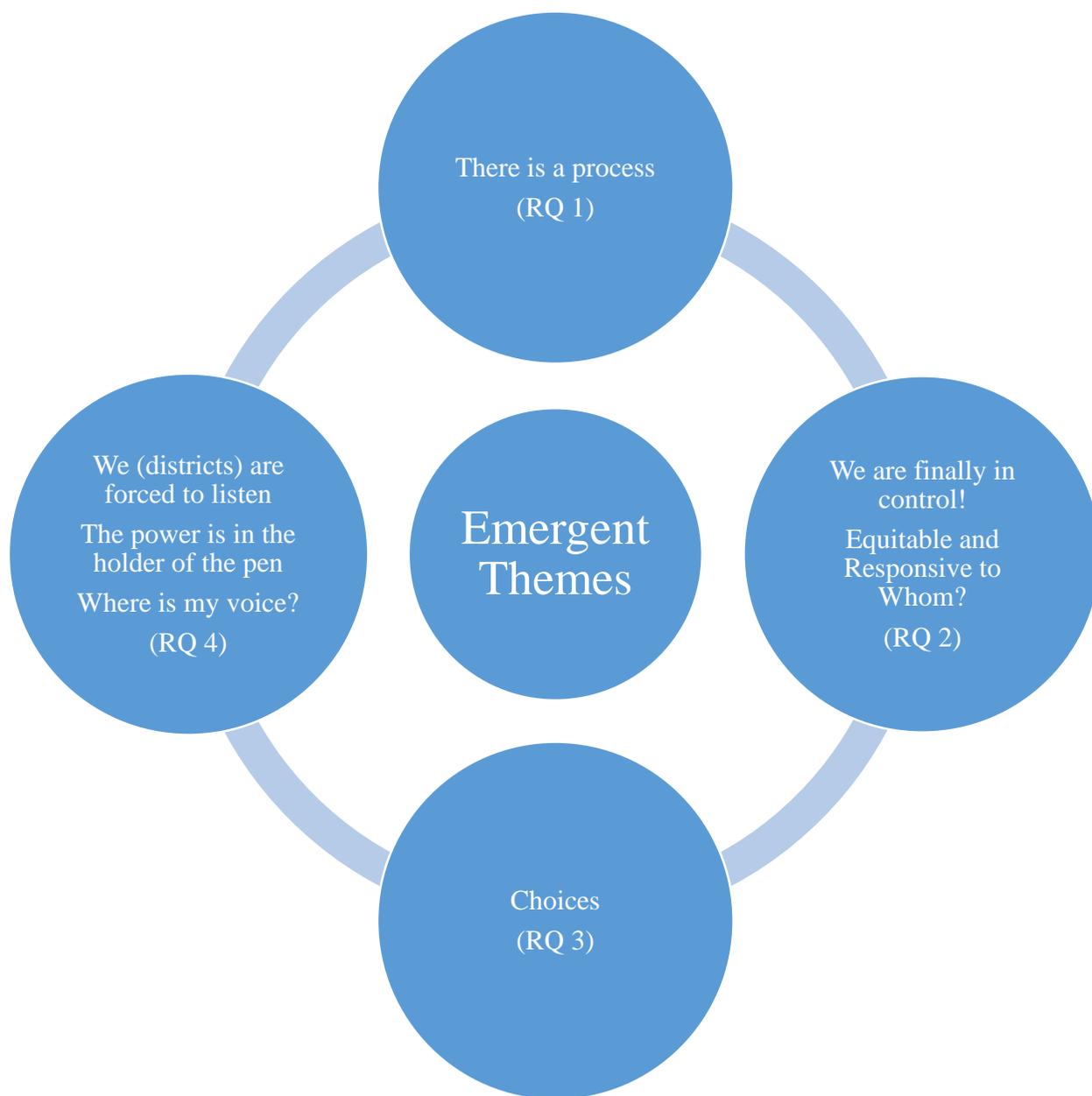


Figure 1. Emergent themes.

Table 9
Emergent Themes and Supporting Codes by Research Question

Theme	Supporting Codes	Research Question
There is a process	Time and Cost Constrains the process, Just get it done	1. What are school districts' processes as they work to develop LCAPs?
We are finally in control	Discretion is powerful, Limitations of legislation	2. How do school districts respond to the mandates of the LCAP?
Equitable and responsive to whom	Equity for targeted groups, Acknowledgement, but still no real response	3. What factors do school districts perceive to be important when developing a district LCAP?
Choices	Competition or collaboration, Self-Identification, Lack of agreement	
We (districts) are forced to listen	Inclusivity, Frustration, Learning curve	4. What challenges do school districts perceive in the development of district LCAPs?
The power is in the holder of the pen	The writer has final say, Community stakeholders still needed,	
Where is my voice?	Who matters, compliance in another form	

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

As a researcher, I have an interest in the education of marginalized students that are characterized as high-need, or at-risk of academic failure, students, commonly labeled as hard to serve. As a teacher in alternative education, I believed that those in power did not hear the unique needs of my students; the only goal was to provide them a place to go to school versus a responsive education. The LCFF and LCAP seemed to be a fresh start to initiate an authentic conversation about my students, their needs, and the gaps in opportunities provided to them. These frustrations, interests, and questions sparked my interest in LCAP meetings. Sitting in those initial meetings, I recalled numerous conversations where teachers would state that there is no need for experts: “We know what our students need, if only we could make the decisions as to how to serve our students.” In the community, I would hear parents and community members, specifically those of color, state: “The schools are not responsive to the needs of our students. Our students are not valued, and therefore the schools do not provide for or respond to their needs.”

A primary purpose of the LCFF and LCAP policy is to give more discretionary control to a school district to make budgetary and program decisions to increase services for all students, with an additional focus on students living in poverty, ELLs, and foster youth and homeless students. Affeldt (2015) shared that Governor Brown sought to provide the opportunity for local school districts to identify the needs of their students and align resources to actualize student achievement goals.

Governor Brown’s efforts to include stakeholders were novel in that not only did he offer a seat to those that work in education, he also sought to include local members of the

community. The change from categorical funding models to local control sought to allow local discretion to school districts as to which programs and goals are adopted, implemented, and funded. The experience challenged districts to change practices and move to models that require deep reflection, revision, and collaboration.

This qualitative study sought to understand the experiences and perspectives of district leaders, teachers, staff, and community stakeholders as they participated in the development of LCAP in school districts with over 5,000 students. Study participants included stakeholders from three large school districts, all nested in Northern California. Each of the districts met the requirements of having been identified as a traditional school district with an enrollment larger than 5,000 students. The participants participated in semi-structured interviews, and all met the requirement of having participated in the development of the LCAP as a district leader, teacher, staff member, or community stakeholder.

The adoption of LCFF and LCAP required local superintendents to lead their school districts in identifying goals and deciding how funds are allocated. An additional new mandate was the requirement to seek and gain input from school board members, parents, teachers, and administrators (Polikoff et al., 2014). Although discretion was a much sought-after change, LCFF and LCAP mandates did not provide specific guidance as to how school districts should respond to the LCAP eight priority areas. School districts were given a wide berth to be creative change practices and direct funds to address gaps in achievement and while also providing new opportunities for students.

Sound research includes the use of theoretical frameworks to frame the research. After researching theoretical frameworks, I concluded that I needed to conduct my research with a framework that allowed for autonomy and discretionary decision-making. I also needed to

consider how districts and the individuals in charge of LCAPs interpreted and impacted the implementation of educational policy. These requirements led to me selecting, Lipsky's (2010) street-level bureaucracy as a theoretical framework. Street-level bureaucracy states that all public policy is impacted and changed by those that interpret and implement the policy. Street-level bureaucracy was an appropriate theoretical framework as school districts can exercise discretion without strict mandates to follow as they work to develop their LCAPs.

School districts are allowed to use substantial discretion to develop and implement plans that support the local needs of their students. During the initial stages of my research, I started with a wide berth of questions. After a preliminary study was conducted and with guidance from peers and professors, my interests and questions merged into the following four research questions which focused my research:

1. What are school districts' processes as they work to develop LCAPs?
2. How do school districts respond to the mandates of the LCAP?
3. What factors do school districts perceive to be important when developing a district LCAP?
4. What challenges do school districts perceive in the development of district LCAPs?

My review of the literature focused on former school reform movements and school funding models. I read about different school funding models that focused on addressing poverty and its impact on student achievement. I also reviewed scholarly literature that focused on school reform efforts that center on accountability, teacher efficacy, and standardized assessments. Reading the scholarly literature set the stage to understand why Governor Brown worked to develop a funding model that directly connected with an accountability model. Via the development of LCAP school districts would not only identify goals and pathways to attain

the goals, but they would also be able to state how they would measure progress. While reviewing the literature, I concurrently read Lipsky's (2010) street-level bureaucracy. The framework was appropriate as it speaks to the changes that school systems embarked on as they moved from a compliance model to a model that provided substantial discretion and autonomy.

Lipsky (2010) defined the job of street-level bureaucrats as being "characterized by relatively high degrees of discretion and regular interaction with citizens" (p. 27). Lipsky (2010) also theorized that the jobs of street-level bureaucrats share similar work conditions:

1. Resources are chronically inadequate relative to the task workers are asked to perform.
2. The demand for services tends to increase.
3. Goals and expectations for the agencies in which they work tend to be ambiguous, vague, or conflicting.
4. Performance towards goal achievement tends to be difficult, if impossible, to measure.

In response to these challenges, Lipsky (2010) argued that street-level bureaucrats respond to the demands of their work by developing coping mechanisms to meet the demands of the job. Lipsky (2010) identified these coping mechanisms as follows:

1. Street-level bureaucrats develop patterns of practice that tend to limit the demands and maximize the utilization of available resources.
2. They modify the concept of jobs, to lower or otherwise restrict their objectives and thus reduce the gap between the available resources and achieving objectives.
3. They modify their concept of the raw materials with which they work (clients) to make more acceptable the gap between accomplishments and objectives.

Lipsky's (2010) framework finds that street-level bureaucrats identify coping mechanisms as responding to the routines of work. Lipsky explained that coping mechanisms and routines of work intend to help the street-level bureaucrats manage the demands of the job. According to Lipsky, street-level bureaucrats ration services and make hard decisions as to how to serve clients differently. Clients are controlled in order to reduce the consequences of the uncertainty of processes and outcomes.

Street-level bureaucrats develop special procedures to absorb or manage client dissatisfaction. Implementing these coping mechanisms allow street-level bureaucrats to continue to work with their clients and cases in a routine manner (Lipsky, 2010).

Discussion

The LCAP policy has been in place for less than 10 years. As there is limited research on the experiences of district leaders and school and community stakeholders developing LCAPs, this study is timely and relevant to assist school districts, county, and state leaders in understanding the processes undertaken when developing an LCAP. Early studies of any new educational phenomenon are compelling as they help guide and inform the subsequent processes and experiences for educational leaders across the K-12 span. This study is valuable to the scholarly literature as it provides insights into the experiences of not only district leadership, but all stakeholders that are required to be part of the development of school district LCAPs.

Research Question 1. What are school districts' processes as they work to develop LCAPs?

This question sought to understand how districts responded to the new demands of the LCAP and how each stakeholder experienced the phenomenon. Value is found in understanding the process and experiences as there is a need to inform district leaders of the efficacy, responsiveness and appropriateness of the processes they undertook on this journey. While the

study was limited to the participating cases, school districts can look to the findings to understand how district leaders, teachers, labor leaders and community stakeholders respond, with the benefit of being able to use these experiences to frame, revise and refine their processes.

There is a process. The dominant theme that emerged from Research Question 1 was, there is a process. This theme indicates that school districts immediately decided in order to meet the demands of the LCAP; there needed to be standardized processes in place. The need to develop processes was regarded as necessary; however, the findings indicate that the focus on processes often led to school districts building compliance models instead of reflective and creative processes. Participants across the cases shared that although the meetings were held as mandated, and surveys used to gather input the processes seemed to lack authenticity, meaning that they were not vastly different from how the district performed prior to LCAP. The voices at the table heard the loudest were those that seemed to already be in power. School systems seem to miss out on the opportunity to be innovative and listen carefully to stakeholders. Instead, the findings indicated that completion of the LCAP template often drove the process, deadlines identified at the state level led to a process that felt rushed and did not adequately inform community stakeholders of the power of their role. This finding matters as stakeholder input is not an extended courtesy, but a core tenet of the LCAP mandate.

In order for a new educational process to be impactful all constituents must be informed not only of the nuts and bolts of the process but the essence and intention of the process. Recent research on LCAP developments share the importance of stakeholder education. Otash (2017) found that it is necessary to go beyond engaging stakeholders to educating stakeholders. The findings show that each case approached the LCAP in a similar way to previous educational (compliance) mandates. This continued practice is problematic because the LCAP is not about

simple compliance, but an undertaking of self-review via the use of multiple sources of data along with community stakeholder input to identify, refine and implement goals to increase outcomes in the eight priority areas. This finding is significant as the LCAP is a young educational mandate. Therefore, school districts can refer to the findings of this study to support the changing processes to harness the power of LCAPs to serve the needs of local students successfully. The emerging themes share that we, as an educational community, are not yet there.

Research Question 2. How do school districts respond to the mandates of the LCAP?

The emerging themes indicate that early on, district leaders celebrated the fact that the decisions on how to address the needs of local students would no longer stem from the CDE. Participants shared that the early reactions to this change in policy were positive. However, an unexpected challenge was that the transfer of power led to tensions as to who would make the final decisions and how those decisions would manifest themselves into goals and programs that deemed to be in the best interest of students.

We are finally in control. This was the first emergent theme from this question, this phrase that can be misinterpreted. Although school districts are granted more control of their decisions, this power should not remain at the district office. The LCAP calls for shared power amongst the school district and its stakeholders. The LCAP legislation requires that community stakeholders along with district-level leaders, teachers and labor leaders engage in every part of the process in collaborative manner. The study found that district leadership teams valued stakeholder input in a limited manner and did not include stakeholders at all levels of decision-making and implementation. These findings are relevant to the gap in knowledge as district leaders, and policymakers at the county and state level begin to not only measure the impact of

school districts' LCAPs on each district's goals and student achievement but also look at processes that districts are undertaking to change or refine the LCAP process. This finding requires both school districts and the CDE to consider how the power to make local decisions is actualizing, stagnating or hindering local student achievement. The three case sites shed light on the problem of not having accurate representation by all stakeholders. To remedy this issue, community stakeholders must realize that they are not merely audience members, but an active part of the "we" in "we are in control finally." This lack of understanding has led to community stakeholders that simply attend LCAP meetings to hear a presentation instead of being an active part of the decision-making and writing processes. Initial years of the LCAP as experienced by study participants indicated that power has not shifted to the *people* of the district, but to a small "we" who hold all the power of the LCAP in their hands. This shifting of power, as indicated by the findings, has led to LCAPS that are written from the ideological and educational philosophies of the writers or educational trends that may be in line with their vision and not reflected, connected or driven by the local needs of students.

The importance of this finding shows that being in control locally does not always lead to plans that speak to the needs of students. School district leadership teams must be willing to use a critical and reflective eye when asking if programs and resource allocations made via the LCAP are responsive to the needs of local students. County leaders charged with reviewing school district LCAPs need to ask school districts tough questions to ensure that LCAPs are not based on the ideas of few, but stem from multiple sources of data, collaborative efforts by stakeholders and are driven by local student needs.

Equitable and responsive to whom? This was the second theme that emerged under Research Question 2. This theme speaks to the core and intent of the LCAP to be responsive to

the needs of local students. Equity was a tenet referred to as one of the primary goals of both LCFF and LCAP. Ladd (2008) stated that vertical equity provides for the additional costs to educate certain student populations such as students living in poverty, English Learners and Foster Youth. LCFF and LCAP is based on the tenets of vertical equity. The move from categorical and base funding to LCFF and LCAP represented the first time that California sought to provide a more equitable education for students living in poverty, ELLs, and foster youth and homeless, by providing additional funds to meet the needs of these students. In short, the decision to provide additional funding to districts that are comprised of large numbers of students in the targeted groups is viewed as an opportunity to address historic inequitable practices. For many of the study participants, this was not their experience. While the LCAP did mandate that districts focus on the targeted groups and align their efforts with monetary resources, study participants shared that school districts simply employed old practices and curriculum under the guise of increasing services for these student groups. This finding is significant as LCFF and LCAP seek to remedy past inequitable practices, and if this is not the case, the long sought after student outcomes for these students may not be actualized.

Study findings present a dilemma for school districts, or an opportunity to apply a critical eye to LCAP goals and allocation of monetary resources. In seeking to provide an equitable education for targeted groups, some districts limited their LCAP efforts to these students. While LCFF and LCAP mandate the use of concentration grant funds to support these student groups, it does not suggest that school districts narrow their efforts to serve only these student groups. School districts must realize that the term equity does not equate to a deficit model by providing only intervention services or language support services. The LCAP, as a model of equity, supports school districts' efforts to serve their student populations in a manner that increases

opportunities for all local students. Although the charge to achieve equity for all students is hard the LCAP mandate requires districts to work in a collaboratively manner to achieve this goal. However, the LCAP does not require school systems to implement models solely based on reading, writing, and math, but provide experiences such as field trips, art, music, and opportunities to connect education with college and career aspirations to increase student outcomes in the eight priority areas. This practice or lack of explicit responsiveness to all local students has led to the myth that the LCAP is only equitable for students of poverty and ELLs. The benefit of this finding is that school districts can begin to look at the LCAP as a policy that can inspire innovation and creativity instead of one that is driven by deficit models that only focuses on historical challenges. Continued interpretation and presentation of the LCAP as a model that focuses only on the target groups and not the overall student needs of the district, will continue to lead to questions such as, who is the LCAP equitable for? The findings show the challenge to school districts to increase equitable practices without diminishing services for other student groups. Although this is a challenge the findings align with Blankstein and Noguera (2015) shared that school systems must continue to work to achieve equity because it is the right thing to do.

Study participants shared the beliefs that the needs and visions for students not living in poverty or performing at or above grade level were not being addressed in the LCAP. The need to address the historical marginalization of students living in poverty, students of color, and ELLs by identifying and providing additional funds to meet the needs of these target groups has fed into an “us versus them” mentality. This misunderstanding has led to groups often competing for acknowledgement and monetary resources in LCAP community meetings. Parents with students not in one of the target group regard the policy as not speaking to the needs

of their students. Study findings indicate that this issue may stem from school districts concentrating their efforts on the targeted populations. Otash (2017) reported similar findings sharing that there is a need to be inclusive of all stakeholders in the planning process. Study findings also show the need to include stakeholders in an authentic manner and not just as an audience member. Otash (2017) aligned with this finding as he stated there is a need to ensure that stakeholder representation is authentic and balanced. This finding should inform school districts to employ strategies to educate all stakeholders regarding the intent of LCAP and the opportunities it provides to develop and implement opportunities for all local students. This finding is essential to the scholarly literature regarding LCAP if LCAP is going to be an educational initiative that is responsive to the needs of the entire student population, not just the targeted groups. This study finding can assist leaders in developing LCAPs that consider the needs and yes some wants of all local students in a balanced manner. School districts' leadership teams and stakeholders must have courageous conversations to change the perception of LCAP from a deficit policy that meets the needs of "those kids" to one that allows for collaborative conversations that support opportunities for all local students.

Research Question 3. What factors do school districts perceive to be important when developing a district LCAP?

This question is key to the study as it requires participants to use a process of reflection to determine and state what they valued when developing LCAPs. Discretion and autonomy are core tenets of Lipsky's (2010) framework. Discretion and autonomy are also afforded by the LCAP legislation. The ability of choice welcomed by participating sites provided insights into what is valued in the district, and some might state what is not valued. When reading school districts LCAPs one can determine the districts' core beliefs, focuses or theory of action.

School districts that are looking to refine the LCAP processes must be sure to understand how value statements are made by what is included in the LCAP and most definitely by what is left out of the LCAP. Community groups in one case shared that the LCAP can hide the fact that districts do not tackle complex issues requiring deep reflection and honesty regarding past practices and policies. Ensuring that this does not become a practice of the LCAP will be the responsibility of county offices and educational commissions responsible for reviewing school districts' LCAP and providing feedback to districts. The study fills a gap in the scholarly literature as it shares the importance of questioning and not merely signing off on LCAPs. The process of including multiple stakeholders should also include the use of *critical friends* who not only celebrate the LCAP but challenge school district leaders responsible for writing final drafts to ask questions such as, whom does this document serve? Which needs are honored, and which needs are ignored? What is the purpose and intent of these goals, do they increase opportunities for all students? Are the goals clearly written and measurable? Are the data sources used, real, timely, and relevant to all district students in some manner? These questions derived from the study findings share that while the ability to make local choices is valuable and necessary, knowing who is making the choices and developing the processes is equally valuable and important. Recent studies on the LCAP have found that community stakeholders ask how students other than the targeted groups benefit? Lovato (2017) found that the issue is not the supplementary grant, it provides for the additional needs of the targeted groups, the challenge is the diminishing base grant which would support district efforts in creating opportunities for all local students.

The study identified the need for school districts to receive guidance on how to adopt LCAP processes that lead to collaborative and authentic engagement of all community

stakeholders as well as critical and honest reflection. School districts should embrace the idea that well-written LCAPs take time to design, refine, and implement. Community members, along with county and state educational leaders, must not shy away from challenging and yes denying school district LCAPs that lack creativity, limited in their view, vague or fail to support the academic achievement and opportunities of local students.

Research Question 4. What challenges do school districts perceive in the development of district LCAPs?

This question required participants to consider the challenges they expected to encounter and also share challenges that were not expected. New educational policies always bring challenges, and the LCAP was not different. Participants shared that districts were caught off guard by the staffing demands of the LCAP. Districts were forced to acknowledge that relationships with community-based organizations were weak, especially so in communities of color, impacting the districts' ability to work collaboratively with some groups. There was a lack of knowledge of how to shift from a compliance model to a model that required the use of data in multiple forms to design goals that aligned with the eight priority areas. The level of honesty required by the LCAP challenged districts to change their practice of sharing information with community stakeholders to working collaboratively with its stakeholders. These findings align with Otash (2017) as he stated that districts must work to incorporate the input from different groups in a manner that supports effective student outcomes.

The findings show that school districts must shift how they view and embrace their local communities to address these challenges. School districts are no longer regarded as the sole expert, the "sage on the stage," but a member of a collaborative team that serves students. Relationships must be forged with groups that have, in some cases, been contentious. This

finding highlights the importance of building relationships of trust to a successful LCAP. Otash (2017) found that without trust the LCAP process will continue to be challenge. These challenges are not just between the community and school district, but between the school district and labor leaders where wider chasms are found (Otash, 2017). This challenge cannot be solved by issuing a call to help us (the district) decide upon goals and how to spend money. Districts must employ novel methods to build relationships while honoring cultural differences and lived experiences of their communities. A change in how school districts operate is required to employ a process that builds an LCAP that is reflective and responsive to the needs of all local students.

Study participants shared that their districts have made some efforts to change practices. Participants highlighted the increase in hiring parent engagement staff, the new practice of providing workshops to build an understanding of the historical practices and data that led to the identification of the targeted groups, highlighting the why of the targeted groups. Increased efforts to increase community stakeholder participation. Seeking of outside agencies to provide feedback and suggestions as to how to write and implement LCAPs driven by increasing opportunity instead of simply addressing deficits.

All participants shared a concern that the power of the pen simply moved from the California Department of Education to district offices. Community stakeholders shared that being included in the LCAP process to meet a mandate is not different from historical compliance. The study findings suggested that school districts, county, and state-level educational leaders must work in tandem to build school districts' capacity to write LCAPs that are inclusive of the many students' needs present in a district. Participants in all three cases shared that recent LCAPs in their school districts often resembled the master's projects or dissertations of school

district leaders. One participant shared that he wondered who the document sought to serve, the students, or the ego of the writer. To change practices school districts, need to examine the framework that is being used to frame their efforts. Lovato (2017) shared the importance of using ethical frameworks to provide concrete evidence as to how district leaders are making decisions during the LCAP development process. This finding matters as well written LCAPs must be the result of authentic collaboration and critical conversations with the goal not solely being serving the academic needs of students but increasing opportunities for all students and families by successfully addressing all eight priority areas.

Implications for Practice

The LCAP is an educational policy that is less than 10 years old. LCFF and LCAP represents a significant shift in how schools are funded and held accountable. LCAP also ushers in a new practice that requires school districts to be inclusive of community stakeholders in the process of developing goals in the eight priority areas. Educational leaders must reach out to all community stakeholders of the school district and offer them a seat at the table. Study findings indicate that although stakeholders are allowed at the table the degree to which their participation is included in the final document can be questioned. Lipsky's (2010) street-level bureaucracy framework speaks to these findings as it calls into question how those who are in power have discretion over what's included and not included in school districts' LCAPs. One implication of the study is that LCAPs should not be written by an individual or a limited team but should always be an effort of a diverse team from start to finish. Including a team of diverse voices supports the design and implementation of an LCAP that speaks to the diverse needs of the school district.

Although LCAP allows district discretion to build and implement programs, document review, observations, and participant interviews indicate that school districts are primarily focusing their efforts on the targeted groups. Although the concentration grant requires school districts to explicitly state in their LCAPs how they are meeting the needs of the targeted groups, it does not mandate how school districts should attain this goal. Document review, interviews, and observations show that districts are embracing practices and instructional programs that were in place before LCAP. To the point, very little has changed, as was shared by the experiences of teachers, district leaders, and community stakeholders. This finding shows that districts are still struggling with moving from instructional programs and policies that are driven by categorical funding and compliance models to fully embracing the creativity and responsiveness that LCAP affords school districts.

The study also found that there was very little understanding of the eight priority areas that districts must address when developing LCAPs. Building an understanding of the eight priority areas can assist all stakeholders when participating in LCAP community meetings. Building an understanding of the eight priority areas can also be a strategy to address community stakeholder apathy and statements, such as: “My students or my kids do not benefit from the LCAP, so why should I participate?” Based upon the experiences of the participants’ school district leadership teams must seek to build a collaborative culture that shares an understanding that the LCAP drives all district initiatives and therefore requires ongoing input from all community stakeholder groups.

Implications for district leadership teams is the need to work to build a firm understanding of the purpose of LCAP. The LCAP process should not begin with surveys but informational sessions that build an understanding of why the shift to LCAP in addition to

building an understanding of the school district's approach or theory of action. Educating community stakeholders can help ensure that LCAP community meetings are not just presentations, but collaborative sessions that support diverse groups working together to build LCAPs that are responsive to the needs of all local students. Finally, community leaders and school leaders must work to fully include the diverse community groups within school district communities to promote community stakeholder participation. Increasing community stakeholder participation requires school districts to engage community members in novel ways. Educational leaders initially applauded LCAP as a long-awaited gift of sorts. Having the ability to control budgetary decisions and educational programs locally have been long sought after. However, study participants shared that the road to a successful and sustainable LCAP is plagued with challenges.

Recommendations for Further Study

The goal of the research focused on understanding the experience of multiple stakeholders as they developed their school district's LCAP. Recommended areas for further study include:

1. A phenomenological or case study on exemplary school districts that are closing the achievement and opportunity gap via their LCAP.
2. A phenomenological study that explores county offices as they support school districts develop and implement LCAPs as county offices of education are beginning to see school districts needing support as indicated by the CDE Dashboard.
3. A mixed-methods study that measures academic gains made in districts and explores how districts learn from previous LCAPs and revise LCAPs in efforts to improve student achievement and close the opportunity and achievement gaps between student groups. While understanding the experience of case participants, there is also a need to measure progress in the eight priority areas. Using mixed methods would allow researchers to understand not only the experience but measure student progress based on the district's written goals.

4. The conduction of a longitudinal study which focuses on the academic achievement of LCAP targeted groups across California school districts. A study of this nature would measure if the concentration grant provided by the LCFF legislation is leading to the increased academic success of the targeted groups. Research in this area also would provide school districts with the best practices to meet the needs of the targeted groups.
5. Employ the use of an “ethics of the profession” theoretical framework to explore the moral aspects and questions that educational leaders must consider as they make critical decisions for school systems. Ethics of the profession reminds educational leaders that students’ best interest must be at the center of the decision-making process in schools (Stefkovich, 2014).
6. Case selection was based on researcher interest and proximity for the researcher. The cases selected were appropriate for this study and provided sufficient data to sufficiently answer the questions driving the study. This study focused on traditional school sites that had a student population of 5,000 students or more. Additional studies could include smaller school districts, charter schools, and alternative school districts.

Final Summary

Chapter 5 provided a discussion of the findings and their importance to filling the gap in the scholarly literature regarding the experiences of participants that develop school district LCAPs. This study employed Lipsky’s (2010) street-level bureaucracy as the theoretical framework to help gain an understanding of the role that discretion and autonomy have when implementing an educational policy. Findings highlighted the need to build an understanding of the purpose of LCAP for both stakeholders and teachers. Building community stakeholder and teacher knowledge and awareness of the LCAP and LCFF will help change the beliefs by both stakeholder groups that LCAP benefits the targeted student populations only. Changing this belief is necessary if school districts are to move from approaching LCAP as a deficit program to an educational mandate that if done correctly can increase opportunities for all local students.

Findings also show the lack of trust amongst all three stakeholder groups. To build trust, district leadership teams must take the lead to engaging community stakeholders in novel ways, such as moving meetings from the district office to dispersing leadership teams into the

communities and meeting stakeholders there. The findings show the importance of acknowledging how past practices have negatively impacted school district and community stakeholder relationships in an effort to diminish the tensions that are present between the school district and some stakeholder groups. This finding also highlights the importance of not characterizing the LCAP as a competition of sorts between community stakeholder groups, but a valuable resource for all local students.

To change practices requires school districts to move from center stage or the expert role and take on the role of collaborative team member. Teachers and school staff can support these efforts by working to remove previous barriers to cooperation with district leadership. One way that this can occur is using the LCAP to guide all collective bargaining efforts. Doing so assures that student needs are the basis of all collective efforts and school district goals. Going back to the table and building a foundation of understanding of LCAP is necessary in order for all three stakeholder groups to let go of historical stances and hegemonic practices that stand in their way of working collaboratively to write LCAPs that are successful in increasing student outcomes in the eight priority areas in an equitable manner.

This qualitative study was an exploration of the experiences of community stakeholders, teachers, labor leaders, and district leaders as they participated in the development and implementation of school district LCAPs. Study findings are organized by research questions and the themes that emerged. The findings from this study have implications for all educational stakeholders in the K-12 educational system and especially so for those charged with developing LCAPs. Educational leaders at the county and state levels can look to the study to ascertain if the processes in place to develop LCAPs speaks to the spirit of the original legislation and are

leading to increased positive outcomes in the eight priority areas. Table 10 provides a summary of the study findings.

Table 10
Summary of Findings

District Administrators	Teachers, Principals, Staff	Community Stakeholders
Embrace the LCAP as a continuous cycle of improvement.	Use LCAP as a guide during collective bargaining.	Build awareness of LCAP to diverse community-based organizations.
Engage stakeholders in novel and authentic ways.	Work to establish trust in relationships with district leaders and community stakeholders.	Recruit a diverse group of stakeholders that are representative of all local students to work with the district in developing the LCAP.
Increase stakeholder knowledge of LCAP purposes and limitations.	Change beliefs that LCAP is driven by deficits to LCAP is a policy that creates opportunities for all local students.	Change and challenge beliefs that the LCAP is only for “those students” to LCAP represents an opportunity for “all” students.
Change mindset from the expert to a member of a collaborative effort.	Work to increase knowledge amongst peers regarding LCFF and LCAP.	Challenge the practice that the school district and district leaders are the sole experts. Be willing to question practices and policies that do not support local student achievement.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPATION INVITATION LETTER

Dear Invitee,

My name is Angela Carter-Pascual. I am a doctoral student at Teachers College of San Joaquin in collaboration with University of The Pacific, Benerd School of Education. I am kindly requesting your participation in a doctoral research study that I am conducting titled: The Experience of a Local Control Accountability Plan. The purpose of the study is to explore the experience of district-level decision-makers as they work to develop Local Control Accountability Plans.

The study involves participating in an in-person interview with the researcher. The interview should not exceed 60 minutes. Prior to the finalizing the data you will have an opportunity to review your responses and request corrections, additions or deletions.

The study is confidential and completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time.

Your participation in the research will be of great importance to address the gap in the knowledge as the Local Control Accountability Plan is a relatively new educational mandate.

If you would like to participate please read the Informed Consent letter below. If you would like further clarification of the nature and purpose of the study please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED] or a_pascual1@u.pacific.edu.

Thanking you for your time and consideration.

Angela Pascual

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The Experience of the Local Control Accountability Plan

You are invited to participate in a qualitative study that explores the experience of developing a Local Control Accountability Plan. My name is Angela Pascual, I am doctoral student at the University of the Pacific, Benerd School of Education. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you have been identified as key participant in the development of your school district's Local Control Accountability Plan.

The purpose of the study is to understand the experiences and processes an individual undertakes as part of a school district that works to develop a Local Control Accountability Plan. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in an in-person interview and a subsequent interview to allow you to member check the final findings to ensure the resulting data is trustworthy and reflective of your voice. Participation in this study will last approximately 60 minutes for the initial interview and 60 minutes for member checking. For participants that are reluctant to participate in the interview at their worksite there is the option of conducting the interview at a mutually agreeable location other than the participant's worksite.

There are some possible risks. The risks include study findings being interpreted as district perspectives and experiences and not those of the participant. The possibility that readers may be able to identify participants in spite of efforts to establish and maintain participant and district confidentiality. There are also some benefits to this research; one potential benefit is that participants may gain insights into which processes undertaken meet the needs of their local districts and processes are not supportive of writing and implementing a successful Local Control Accountability Plan for their school district.

If you have any questions about the research at any time please call me at [REDACTED], or Dr. Brett Taylor my Chairperson at [REDACTED]. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project please call the IRB Administrator, Research & Graduate Studies Office, and University of the Pacific (209) 946-7367.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. One measure to ensure your confidentiality are the use of pseudonyms for both school district sites and individual participants. The data obtained will be maintained in a safe, locked location and will be destroyed three years after completion and publication of the study.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and your decision whether or not to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, that you will receive a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

The results of the study can be obtained by contacting the primary researcher. You will be offered a copy of this signed form to keep.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Please share your understanding of the intent of the LCAP.

Please discuss your experience with the autonomy that is afforded to school districts by the LCAP legislation.

What role do you believe discretion plays in the development and implementation of the LCAP?

Describe the process your district used in creating your LCAP.

Describe how the LCAP has impacted district focus or goals.

Describe the process used to engage stakeholders.

Describe how discretion impacted or was part of your experience.

Describe what a successful LCAP looks like.

Please share anything else that you would like to.

APPENDIX D: LCAP DOCUMENT ANALYSIS TOOL

The researcher will adhere to the following protocol:

Document Identification

- Ask interview participants for any relevant documents
- Search school district and district websites for Local Control Accountability Plans
- Ask interview participants at physical sites for relevant documents

Analyzing Documents

- Read each Local Control Accountability Plan thoroughly identifying patterns and themes
- Highlight important information
- Transfer direct quotations to a spreadsheet

LCAP Demographics

Total enrollment		
Hispanic students		
White students		
Asian students		
African American students		
English language learners		
Disadvantaged students		
Foster youth and homeless		

LCAP Goals and State Priorities Addressed

Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4
State priorities addressed by the goal			

Review of Performance

	Greatest Needs
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Budget Summary

Total General Fund Budget Expenditures for LCAP Year	
Total Funds Budgeted for Planned Actions/Services for the LCAP Year	

Reflections Noticed, Trends or Questions

APPENDIX E: OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

All observations will have the physical space mapped out.

Field notes will be taken during the observations . Field notes will include:

- Description of actions, setting, people and activities observed.
- Direct quotations or paraphrasing of dialogue.
- Collect document and artifact information from meetings observed.
- Record researcher's comments and thoughts that connect to the study.
- Observations will last the duration of the meeting.

Immediately following observations the researcher will:

- Record thoughts about the observation that are relevant to the study.
- Document questions or concerns that arise for the researcher.
- Identify possible next steps for further collection or analysis.

Setting:

Observer:

Role of Observer:

Date:

Length of Observation:

Start time _____

End time _____

Summary of observations:

Resulting Questions