

Strengthening Science Education and Environmental Literacy in California's New Era Of Local Control: The Toolkit

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Local Control and Advocacy for Science Education and Environmental Literacy: A Primer on How to Participate in Developing your District's LCAP

In 2013, California passed a landmark law to change the way our schools are funded. The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) was designed to allocate funding more simply and equitably. The LCFF replaces dozens of different state funding streams with a single allocation formula that provides each school district with a base-funding amount for every student, plus supplemental funding for each low-income, English learner, and foster youth student – children who need additional support to succeed. In this new approach to funding, school districts also receive additional money if they have greater concentrations of these high-need students, and all districts have more control and flexibility over how they can direct spending to serve their students' needs. At the same time, districts have new requirements for planning, transparency and accountability, with every district now required to create a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) to identify its priority goals and report on student outcomes.

The development of LCAPs is an important new process by which local stakeholders – from educators, parents and students to local business and community leaders – can have a say in their school district's budget choices. Given that more than 80% of school district funds are encompassed by the LCFF, it is critical that all significant educational activities, including science learning and environmental literacy, are clearly described and appropriately funded within the LCAP. To support the improvement we need in science education in California, **every LCAP should include comprehensive strategies and resources for implementation of our state's science, and history-social science standards in support of environmental literacy, across all grade levels.** Such plans should include support for strong integration of engineering design and environmental literacy within science and history-social science instruction, as well as investments in programs shown to increase the engagement and success of our highest need students in science learning. Advocates for science education must get involved to make this happen. Here we explain the basics of the LCAP development process and how all-local stakeholders can participate to advocate for key investments in science education.

What is a Local Control Accountability Plan?

A Local Control Accountability Plan or LCAP is a document that every school district must create and update annually to show how it plans to spend funds allocated through the Local Control Funding Formula. The LCAP must be a three-year plan showing the district's priority goals and the services and funding it will provide to meet those goals. The goals must address eight priority areas identified by the state, as well as other local priorities the district may want to include. The LCAP must make clear how it will

State Required Priorities that Every LCAP Must Address:

1. Basic Services
2. Implementation of State Standards
3. Course Access
4. Student Achievement
5. Other Student Outcomes
6. Student Engagement
7. Parent Involvement
8. School Climate

serve the high-need students for whom LCFF funds are targeted. The LCAP must also include metrics to report annually on the district's progress in meeting its goals.

LCAP Template: Required Plan Components*

- **District-wide and school-wide goals**, as well as specific actions to be taken to achieve the goals for all students, including specific subgroups of students, in each of the eight state priority areas, plus any locally identified priority areas.
- **Expected progress toward meeting the goals**, and as part of a district's required annual update of the plan, the district must describe actual progress made toward meeting the goals and describe any adjustments to be made.
- **Expenditures required to implement each of the goals and actions**, including a description of how additional funds provided for low-income students, English learners and foster youth will be used to increase or improve services for these students.
- **The process used to involve parents, students, community members, school employees and other stakeholders** in developing, reviewing, and supporting implementation of the LCAP.

*Source: California PTA <http://capta.org/focus-areas/lcflcap/accountability-plans/>

Who is Responsible for Creating a District's LCAP?

District officials, led by the district superintendent and school board, are responsible for deciding the priorities, plans and funding allocations that will go in the LCAP. District officials must offer multiple opportunities for the public to provide input to the LCAP. Each district's elected school board must vote to approve its district's LCAP plan no later than July 1st of each year for the following school year. Once the LCAP is approved by the school board, it is submitted to the County Office of Education (COE) for review. The state has developed an "LCAP Evaluation Rubric" to provide guidelines for COEs to assess whether districts are doing an adequate job of establishing and making progress on their LCAP goals. For districts that are not meeting expectations, the COE and state Department of Education will determine what supports or interventions are needed.

How Can I Participate in Developing My District's LCAP?

School districts are required to solicit public input into the contents of the LCAP and to describe their stakeholder engagement efforts in the LCAP. Community members should be able to obtain a copy of the LCAP and learn about dates of public hearings from the district's website. The law sets the following minimum requirements for stakeholder engagement:

- **Consultation with teachers, parents and students:** The school board must consult with teachers, administrators and other school personnel, as well as parents and students in developing the LCAP.
- **Public review:** The district must make the LCAP available for the public to provide feedback via written comments and at least one school board hearing separate from the meeting at which the board votes to adopt the LCAP.
- **Parent Advisory Committee (PAC):** The district must have a PAC, present the LCAP to the PAC for review, and provide written responses to any comments from the PAC.
- **English learner parent advisory committee:** Districts with 15% or more English learners must also have and seek input from an English learner parent advisory committee.
- **Consistency with School Site Councils plans:** The LCAP must be consistent with plans created by School Site Councils and incorporate school-specific goals related to the LCAP state and local priorities.

Many districts are going well beyond these minimums, holding community meetings and forums throughout the year to gather input from a wide range of constituencies. Advocates can also request individual meetings with school district officials and school board members to ask questions, raise concerns and share ideas about science learning.

How Does the LCAP Address Science Learning?

State guidelines for LCAP development do not explicitly address science or environmental literacy. But State Priority #2 does require that every LCAP must address the implementation of all state adopted academic content and performance standards; this includes the state's new standards for science and engineering, the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), as well as the Common Core State Standards for Math and English Language Arts. California's commitment to implement new standards for science provides the biggest opportunity in decades to bring high-quality science education to all students. Therefore, all LCAPs should contain comprehensive plans for science implementation. In many cases, districts are focusing on Common Core implementation and have not yet begun planning how to implement the new science standards. Other state priorities, such as Priority #1 (which addresses students having appropriately assigned and credentialed teachers), Priority #4 (which focuses on pupil achievement through performance on standardized tests and other indicators of college and career readiness), and Priority #3 (which requires students to be enrolled in a broad course of study) are also ripe areas for NGSS implementation, as well as environmental literacy supports to be included.

Science education advocates should work with district leaders to make sure that the goals and services laid out in LCAPs are explicit about how NGSS implementation will happen and be funded. While students will not be required to take state tests aligned to the new standards until spring 2019, districts must begin investing now in order to prepare schools and teachers to make the major shifts in instructional practice that the NGSS call for. Further, advocates can assist in the development of strong LCAP plans by encouraging and guiding district officials to ensure that their plans not only strengthen core science instruction, but also embrace other enriching and innovative aspects of science education such as engineering design and environmental literacy to engage students in multi-disciplinary thinking, experiential learning, and real-world problem-solving.

Be sure to see our **Model LCAP Content** tools for examples of LCAP goals and strategies to support NGSS and environmental literacy in your district's LCAP.

How does the LCAP Address Environmental Literacy through History-Social Science Learning?

State guidelines for LCAP development do not explicitly address history-social science or environmental literacy. But State Priority #2 does require that every LCAP must address the implementation of all state adopted academic content and performance standards, which includes history-social science standards, California Next Generation Science Standards, and the Common Core State Standards for Math and English Language Arts. The latter includes an emphasis on informational texts – in many cases historical primary sources – to develop critical thinking, reading, writing, and speaking skills. These skills have been identified as important not only in the state-adopted Common Core State Standards, but in the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History. With the recent adoption of a new History-Social Science (HSS) Framework that includes four key instructional shifts – updated content, literacy, skills, and citizenship – the timing is right to emphasize high-quality history-social science instruction that will prepare students to succeed in their academic, career, and citizenship roles. As identified in the Blueprint for Environmental Literacy, environmental

education can support these same learning goals and prepare students for thinking critically about the environmental challenges their generation will face. Topics related to the environment are found throughout the new HSS Framework.

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What Else Can I Do To Help My District Provide A Strong Science Education And Build Environmental Literacy For All Students?

Whether you are a parent, student, school teacher, business person, community-based educator or simply a concerned member of your community, there is much you can do help your school district plan for and carry out improved science education and history-social science education that is infused with environmental literacy. In addition to participating in public meetings to give input to your district's LCAP, you can mobilize your community to bring more attention to the importance of science and environmental literacy through history-social science, and the role that other stakeholders can play to support better science and environmental education both within our schools and in the community beyond. These are only a few of the ways that science education and environmental literacy advocates can mobilize more community support:

- **Sign-up with your district to receive notices** about planning meetings, hearings and other opportunities to learn about and participate in the LCAP development process.
- **Be prepared to advocate for science education and environmental literacy within history-social science** by using the resources provided in this toolkit to identify your district's priority needs and how they could be addressed through the LCAP.
- **Attend district and community-sponsored LCAP planning meetings** to speak out about the positive examples, and needs of science education and environmental literacy in your district.
- **Attend school board meetings** (not just those when the LCAP is voted on) to ensure key investments in science education, environmental literacy, and history-social science are understood as a top priority as well as included in the LCAP approved by the district.
- **Participate in your district's Parent Advisory Council** if you have students who attend school in the district.
- **Reach out to County Office of Education officials** to provide them with additional perspective about the strengths and weaknesses of your district's LCAP.
- **Encourage other business, government and community leaders to get involved** – these respected leaders can do much to raise the profile of science education and environmental literacy within history-social science in your community and bring additional resources to the table.
- **Build coalitions with other groups** seeking to change instructional practices and other aspects of your local educational system. There are likely to be many areas of common ground where you can work together to have greater impact.