

Improving LCFF Implementation Through User-Centered Design

Year 1 of the LCFF Test Kitchen

Policy and Practice Brief

FEBRUARY 2019

Author

Joel Knudson
American Institutes for Research

About the LCFF Test Kitchen

The LCFF Test Kitchen is a joint project of the California Collaborative on District Reform, the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence, Pivot Learning, and WestEd. It is designed to foster innovation in local school districts as they implement LCFF. Beginning in 2017, the effort brought together design teams from three California districts—Azusa, Elk Grove, and Oceanside Unified School Districts—to develop solutions to challenges that had been identified in the LCAP development and implementation process. For more information on the project, see <https://lcfftestkitchen.org/>.

“Are we improved process-wise and outcome-wise with our LCAP? There’s no question.”

Introduction

More than 5 years after the passage of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), California school districts continue to develop and refine strategies to act on the opportunities and expectations associated with the state’s school finance system. A new project called the LCFF Test Kitchen has enabled three school districts to make progress by leveraging the power of user-centered design.

LCFF fundamentally altered the way the state allocates resources to school districts and the expectations for how districts should report on the use of those resources. As the California education community began navigating this new territory, the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) became the vehicle through which a range of policymakers, advocates, and others sought to achieve their goals for the new policy. However, the process suffered from many of the flaws of traditional approaches to policymaking, and in trying to serve many interests, the resulting LCAP template served none well. Beginning in 2017, a project known as the LCFF Test Kitchen brought together a set of partners and three school district design teams to address the policy development and implementation process in a new way. This brief describes progress in Year 1 of the LCFF Test Kitchen and the solutions it has generated.

What Is the LCFF Test Kitchen, and What Did It Set Out to Do?

Addressing a Flawed Approach to Policy

The LCAP template calls on a district to define its goals, outline strategies to achieve those goals, and identify the resources it will use support those strategies. Required by LCFF statute and first shared with districts during the 2013–14 school year, the LCAP template was the product of a traditional approach to policy development through negotiation.¹ A wide range of stakeholders, many of whom supported the original LCFF policy for different reasons, provided input on guidelines that would guarantee attention for the priorities they most valued. Among these were promoting strategic planning and budgeting, ensuring authentic community engagement, monitoring progress toward key outcomes, communicating about district² plans with parents and other community members, and ensuring that districts receiving funds to support traditionally underserved students actually allocated resources to support those students. LCAP designers incorporated different components to satisfy a range of stakeholders and serve a variety of purposes, but the resulting product was bloated and opaque and met none of the purposes well (see, for example, Koppich, Humphrey, & Marsh, 2015; and Blum & Knudson, 2016).

Exploring a New Path Forward

In November 2016, a collection of stakeholders came together to rethink how best to achieve the purposes incorporated in the LCAP template. They used an approach called “user-centered design”—a process that has emerged as an effective way to address design challenges in other sectors and has demonstrated promise in an expansion to K–12 education settings. Through a 3-day design sprint

organized by the California Collaborative on District Reform and Pivot Learning, design teams comprising administrators, advocates, parents, researchers, students, and teachers developed prototypes³ as alternatives for meeting each of the purposes that drove the LCAP. Because the sprint was exploratory by design, these initial prototypes were never fully developed and the process did not produce concrete changes in the LCAP itself. Design teams lacked the time and resources to fully develop and test their prototypes, and there was no obvious path to enacting policy changes locally or statewide. However, the experience generated substantial excitement among participants and produced some concrete ideas for improvement. (For details about the design sprint and the prototypes it produced, see Knudson, Ramanathan, Carter, & O’Day, 2017.)

Creating the LCFF Test Kitchen

The LCFF Test Kitchen sought to harness the potential of user-centered design and the energy from the November 2016 meeting and apply them to improving implementation of the LCAP template and development process. The California Collaborative on District Reform and Pivot Learning joined with the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence and WestEd to form a leadership team that leveraged the knowledge gained from ongoing LCFF implementation efforts across the state. Design teams from three California school districts—Azusa, Elk Grove, and Oceanside Unified School Districts (USDs)—joined the project to carry out the design process. Three features characterized this new effort.

First, the LCFF Test Kitchen focused fundamentally on the end users of the LCAP, as defined by each participating district. In contrast to the original LCAP development process, which primarily reflected the views of policy-focused Sacramento stakeholders, the Test Kitchen directly engaged those charged with developing, and using the information from, district LCAPs. Each participating

district incorporated some combination of district/school administrators and community members as the end users whose experiences and needs it aimed to address.

Second, the project capitalized on the collective power of multiple perspectives and skill sets. This was evidenced by the partnership across organizations that drove the work—the four facilitating organizations and three school districts. Diversity within district design teams was also essential to the organization of the project. Although each district assembled its design team with a slightly different combination of participants, members included central office staff from multiple departments, principals, teachers, and parents. The LCFF Test Kitchen also brought in outside members of the education community to provide feedback on the ideas generated by district design teams and to identify strengths and potential gaps in their approaches. These partners included advocates, community-based organizations, county office of education staff, and researchers.

Third, in terms of content, the LCFF Test Kitchen sought to address some key LCAP implementation challenges. Absent a waiver that might have enabled districts to innovate without the constraints of existing statutory requirements, the project focused on improvement within established policy parameters. Each district design team organized its work around one of two design challenges:

- 1. How can LEAs engage in meaningful, strategic planning to most effectively align budgets and priorities?**
- 2. How can LEAs communicate transparently and coherently about planning and budgeting to a wide range of stakeholders?**

Comments from the three districts at the outset of the project revealed an interest both in improving the LCAP and in developing participants' capacity to apply user-centered design to local challenges. Elk Grove USD Superintendent Chris Hoffman

described his motivation in this way: “Our team is excited to take a deep dive into the LCAP process to help move that work forward. The LCFF Test Kitchen provides an opportunity to build capacity within our district by engaging in the design process and developing a skill set that will help us operate more effectively.”

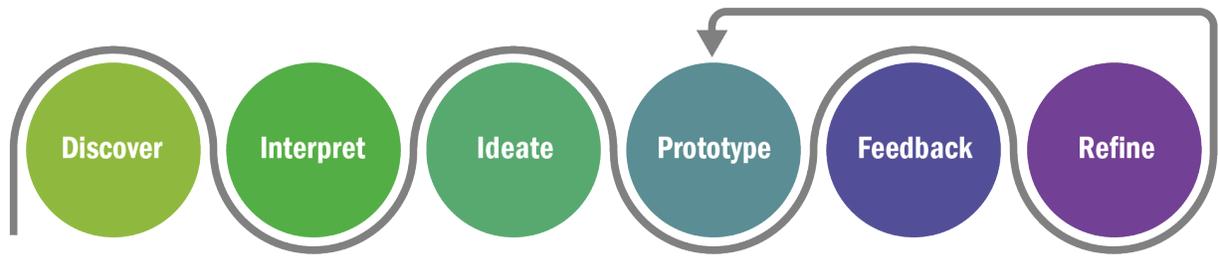
What Did the LCFF Test Kitchen Design Process Look Like?

User-centered design involves seven steps in an iterative process. Figure 1 displays the steps of the design process as practiced by Pivot Learning, as well as a brief overview of how district design teams worked through each step over the course of their first year on the project. (For a more thorough description of the seven design steps, please see Pivot Learning Partners, 2013). District design teams worked through each step of the process over the course of their first year on the project.

What Prototypes Emerged From the LCFF Test Kitchen?

Each of the participating districts developed, tested, and began implementing a prototype that grew out of its Test Kitchen participation. Azusa USD created a video—which team members called an animated infographic—to inform parents and other community members about the process through which their input contributes to the district's LCAP development and how they can become involved. In Elk Grove USD, a new, school-based electronic LCAP has enabled school leaders to document their resource allocation decisions, communicate about them with district leaders, and complete a streamlined internal review process to ensure alignment. Oceanside USD developed spreadsheets that ask principals to articulate the evidence base that supports their resource allocation decisions; these spreadsheets also help to facilitate communication between the district's program staff and budget staff.

Figure 1. The Pivot Learning Design Cycle



Discover

The district design teams began by collecting data from their local constituents in late 2017 and early 2018 that helped them better understand the challenges they sought to address. This typically involved some combination of “empathy interviews” and surveys with local stakeholders that the teams identified as end users of their LCAP.

Interpret

All three district design teams assembled for an in-person meeting in February 2018. Through a facilitated process that involved conversations within and across design teams, participants from each district examined the data they had collected and focused on some key areas of need.

Ideate

At the same February 2018 meeting, design teams brainstormed possible solutions to the area(s) of need they identified. Participants engaged in conversations within their teams and collected feedback from others to prioritize and refine these initial ideas.

Prototype

In subsequent individual team meetings, design teams selected one prototype from their brainstorming activity, then began designing a solution and transforming the original idea into a concrete product.

Feedback

Throughout spring 2018, each design team tested its prototype with end users from its local context. The teams also shared the prototypes with one another and collected feedback from their cross-district peers through virtual sessions held in April and June.

Refine

Based on the feedback they received locally and from other LCFF Test Kitchen participants, district teams adjusted their prototypes, then continued to collect feedback based on their revisions. The teams shared this progress with each other at another in-person meeting in October 2018.

An Animated Infographic: Azusa USD

The Azusa USD design team set out to address the second design challenge: *How can we communicate transparently and coherently about planning and budgeting to a wide range of stakeholders?* To begin the design process, members of the team engaged in the first phase, *Discover*, by seeking feedback from end users in three groups: district employees at all levels of the system, parents and students, and community and business partners. The Azusa team ultimately collected more than 50 survey responses from parents, plus a similar number

from students, and interviewed more than 20 district employees and 10 district partners. The interviews included questions about the LCAP like these: What do you know about the LCAP? Where have you received that information? What benefits have you seen? And what concerns do you have?

As the design team transitioned into the *Interpret* phase, members noted that knowledge about the LCAP was increasingly limited the further stakeholders were from the central office. Perhaps more importantly, team members realized that the original design challenge might not align with Azusa’s

needs. The district had already communicated a lot with community members about the contents of the LCAP, team members observed, but the missing piece for many of those stakeholders was an understanding of the process that creates it and the impact that those who provide input have. As one person explained, “At the outset, we felt that we were pretty strong in communicating about LCAP. We were producing executive summaries of the LCAP and doing updates, but we felt that what was missing was the background on what gets us to the LCAP.” In response to this finding, the Azusa team set out to address a slightly revised design challenge:

How can we communicate detailed information about how stakeholders are involved in the LCAP process and the impact they have on the LCAP?

Through the brainstorming process of the *Ideate* phase, the Azusa team considered several possibilities for better communicating about how stakeholder input influences LCAP decision making. Ideas that surfaced included a documentary, an infographic, a “quick-draw” video, and in-person events. The team ultimately chose to focus its attention on an animated video infographic. The team thought a video would be a good way to provide an overview about the LCAP process to a broad range of stakeholders; subsequent activities could develop additional levels of information, which interested users can peruse when they are available.

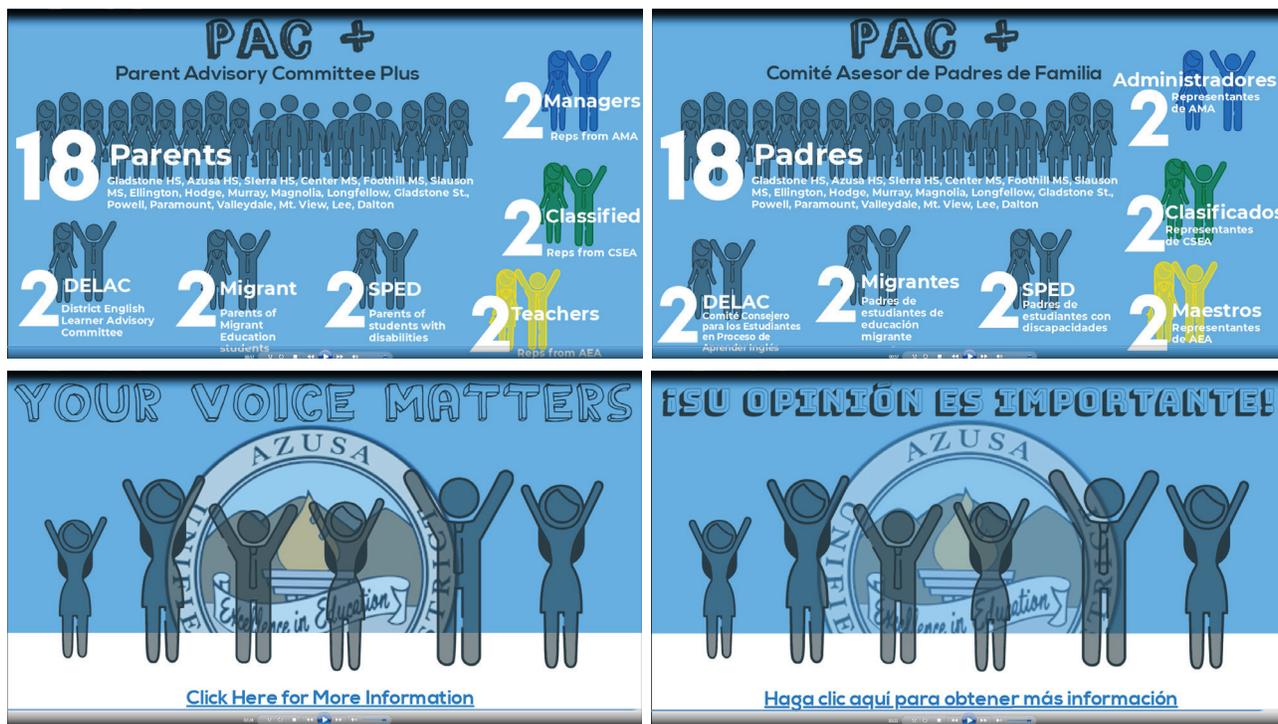
After choosing to develop an animated infographic, or video, design team members spent the remainder of the academic year developing and testing a prototype. When the Azusa team completed the video, members sought feedback from more than 25 parents, administrators, teachers, and students through a set of open- and close-ended questions.

Feedback was encouraging overall, especially from students. Stakeholders reported that they were learning about the district’s LCAP development process, which suggested that the prototype was achieving its desired purposes. Responses also generated several recommendations for improvement. Among these were refining the timing and speed of the slides and voice, as well as fine-tuning some of the descriptions of resources. Stakeholders also requested additional information, including contact information and guidance for how to get involved in the LCAP process. The design team also recognized the need to create a Spanish-language version of the video.

The video is 2-and-a-half minutes long. It provides brief background information on California’s system of school funding and how the LCAP fits into that system. The video goes on to identify the vehicles through which the district generates input from parents (a collection of stakeholders the district calls the PAC+) and students (the Student Advisory Committee) and provides updates to those same audiences (see Figure 2 for screenshots from the video, or access the full video at <https://ausd-ca.schoolloop.com/LCAP>). In doing so, it explains that the information the district collects directly informs changes to the LCAP moving forward. The video concludes with an invitation to get involved and displays a link where users can find additional information.

The completed video is now available on the district’s website, with additional distribution through social media channels like Facebook and Twitter. Principals can also use the video in conversations with staff, parents, and students. Reflecting on the video and what it has already accomplished for Azusa, one design team member observed, “It’s met a need and made us a better district in our LCAP process.”

Figure 2. Screen Shots From the Azusa USD Animated Infographic in English and Spanish



Moving forward, Azusa USD will continue to actively use the video as part of their ongoing community engagement efforts. Information about the number of views through various online platforms will provide additional feedback about the district’s success. Just as important will be feedback from stakeholders about their reactions, including any increase in interest and participation in the LCAP process.

A Site-Based LCAP: Elk Grove USD

The Elk Grove USD team embarked on the design process with significant interest in both design challenges posed to LCFF Test Kitchen participants—one focused on strategic planning and one on communication. In theory, the *Discover* step might have helped the team refine or narrow its focus for continuing through the process. However, just as the project kicked off, the responsibilities of running a large school district and responding to a sudden crisis became more pressing priorities. Despite the delay that truncated the *Discover* process,

the design team soon returned to the table and refocused its efforts to reflect on the design question, synthesize different challenges the district faced, and seek input regarding the LCAP process.

As the design team convened for the *Interpret* phase of the design process, it drew primarily on the perspectives of its design team members. Much of the group’s conversation focused on challenges in communication both to and from stakeholders. As they sought to gather input from parents and other community members, design team members recognized that the voices currently captured in the LCAP process were not necessarily representative of the district community as a whole. They also observed that the information relayed in a 200-page LCAP did not provide the coherence or clarity necessary for stakeholders to truly understand the district’s approach. Through the discussion, design team members further clarified that any solution needed to consider the role of schools and

principals, not only as critical contributors to the district community, but as the primary connection that most parents have with the district.

In its transition to the *Ideate* phase, the Elk Grove design team considered several possibilities for a prototype. One idea was an LCAP van that would travel directly to sites to listen to and share information with audiences who might not currently be reflected in the LCAP process. Other approaches included redesigned avenues for gathering stakeholder input, including a survey differentiated for specific stakeholder groups, or focus groups conducted at school sites. Ultimately, the district chose to leverage work already underway to develop a site-specific LCAP. This approach aligned most closely with the second design challenge:

How can we communicate transparently and coherently about planning and budgeting to a wide range of stakeholders?

By building on existing work, the design team could also make progress during the academic year despite the unanticipated delays early in the process.

The prototype on which the Elk Grove USD team spent most of its attention in Year 1 is a web-based LCAP developed at the site level for each of the district's schools. It aligns with the district's LCAP—which follows the state-mandated template—and meets requirements in California Education Code for the School Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA), eliminating the redundancy that burdens many districts. The site LCAP/SPSA features several components:

- **Introduction:** The main page for each school's plan includes both background information about the district (including a description of the district, its mission statement, and its core values) and about the school (including an overall description and summary of demographics).
- **Timeline:** A schedule of milestones throughout the LCAP development process appears on this page, including deadlines for each step and checkmarks to indicate whether each step has taken place. Examples include a School Site Council training held in September and LCAP stakeholder engagement meetings held in November, January, and April.
- **Analysis of Student Data & Action Plan:** This piece includes the crux of a school's plans. A goal-setting category lists the eight state priorities and four district goals, then includes fields where schools list their actions associated with each goal, the research base supporting those actions, plans for measuring progress, and funding sources. According to one member of the design team, "The most important page we use as principals is the goal-setting page." (See Figure 3 for a screenshot of this page from an Elk Grove elementary school.)
- **Funding:** The next section shows all funding sources allocated to a school site and amount of money available from each source, then allows the principal to demonstrate the allocation of money toward an appropriate district goal. Allocations determined at the district level are pre-populated into the form.
- **Plan Approval:** Before a site LCAP/SPSA is finalized, its components require review and approval from various administrators within the central office. This component allows all reviewers to provide feedback—both suggestions for principals to consider at their discretion and required revisions to ensure alignment with student needs and district priorities. Entries into this form automatically generate an email to the principal, who can then update the LCAP for further review and eventual approval. (See Figure 4 for two example entries from this form, taken from the same Elk Grove elementary school used in Figure 3.)

Figure 3. Site Goals, Actions, Research Base, Measures of Success, and Funding Sources From the Anna Kirchgater Elementary School Site LCAP/SPSA

B. Goals, Actions, and Progress Indicators

<p>District Strategic Goal 1:</p> <p>All students will have access to standards aligned curriculum and receive high quality instruction to promote college, career, and life readiness and eliminate the achievement gap.</p>	<p>District Needs and Metrics 1:</p> <p>Students need high quality classroom instruction and curriculum as measured by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to Courses (Honors, AP/IB, CTE) • A-G Completion • AP/IB Exams • CAASPP • Content Standards Implementation • CTE Sequence Completion • EAP • Instructional Materials • Progress toward English Proficiency • Redesignation • Teacher Assignment 																				
<p>Jump To: District Goal 1 District Goal 2 District Goal 3 District Goal 4 Justification Certification</p>																					
<p>Site Goal 1.1</p> <p>Provide targeted instruction for students assessed to be below grade level using the following measures: SBAC data, Fountas & Pinnell Running Record data and I-Ready data and increase the efficiency of initial teaching and capacity of PLC's to close the achievement gap by providing professional development opportunities in research-based best practices.</p>																					
<p>Metric: Other (Site-based/local assessment)</p>	<p><input type="button" value="Add Site Goal"/> <input type="button" value="Edit Site Goal and Metric"/></p>																				
<p>Actions/Services 1.1.1</p>																					
<p>Principally Targeted Student Group</p> <p>• All • EL • Foster Youth</p>																					
<p>Specific Actions to Meet Expected Outcome</p> <p>Tier II Intervention: Academic Intervention Teachers on contract and on timesheets will utilize Flex and/or Guided Reading for students they which teach. The AIT who is paid 42.5% from EL Supplemental Funds will be working only with EL students for 42.5% of her day.</p> <p>All students in Grades 1-6 will be taught at their instructional levels using Guided Reading daily. Students will access I-Ready at least 45 minutes a week in Reading and 45 minutes a week in Mathematics in order to complete lessons which have been differentiated to meet their individual needs.</p>	<p>What is the Research Confirming this is an Effective Practice?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Base for Guided Reading as an Instructional Approach, Fountas & Pinnell 2010 • Small Group Learning Effect Size 0.49 • Reading Phonic Instruction Effect Size 0.60 • Reading Comprehension Programs Effect Size 0.58 	<p>How will you Measure the Effectiveness of the Actions/Services?</p> <p>34% students in grades 1-6 were on grade level according to our March 2018 Running Record data. This will increase to 38% reading at grade level by December 2018, by 44% in March 2018 and by 47% reading at grade level in June 2019.</p> <p>Additional data will support our claim of having our students reading on or above grade level. We will use our I-Ready March Assessment Data to predict what percentage of our students will be on grade level or above according to the CAASP/SBAC 2019 Assessment.</p>																			
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 40%;">Funding Source</th> <th style="width: 15%;">Amount</th> <th style="width: 30%;">Description of Use</th> <th style="width: 10%;"></th> <th style="width: 5%;"></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>EL Supplemental (7150/0000)</td> <td>\$17000</td> <td>Certificated Salaries</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="button" value="Edit"/></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="button" value="Delete"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Title I - Basic (4900/3010)</td> <td>\$23000</td> <td>Certificated Salaries</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="button" value="Edit"/></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="button" value="Delete"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Title I - Basic (4900/3010)</td> <td>\$120943</td> <td>Certificated Salaries</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="button" value="Edit"/></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="button" value="Delete"/></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p style="text-align: left; margin-top: 5px;"><input type="button" value="Add Fund Source"/></p>		Funding Source	Amount	Description of Use			EL Supplemental (7150/0000)	\$17000	Certificated Salaries	<input type="button" value="Edit"/>	<input type="button" value="Delete"/>	Title I - Basic (4900/3010)	\$23000	Certificated Salaries	<input type="button" value="Edit"/>	<input type="button" value="Delete"/>	Title I - Basic (4900/3010)	\$120943	Certificated Salaries	<input type="button" value="Edit"/>	<input type="button" value="Delete"/>
Funding Source	Amount	Description of Use																			
EL Supplemental (7150/0000)	\$17000	Certificated Salaries	<input type="button" value="Edit"/>	<input type="button" value="Delete"/>																	
Title I - Basic (4900/3010)	\$23000	Certificated Salaries	<input type="button" value="Edit"/>	<input type="button" value="Delete"/>																	
Title I - Basic (4900/3010)	\$120943	Certificated Salaries	<input type="button" value="Edit"/>	<input type="button" value="Delete"/>																	

Figure 4. Example Reviewer Comments From the Anna Kirchgater Elementary School Site LCAP/SPSA

Department: Curriculum and Professional Development		Reviewer Name: Jerrilyn Ewing	Date Reviewed: 5/02/2018	Req'd Revision Completed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Suggestions		Required Revisions		
No suggestions for curriculum-related goals. Goal 1: consider the data you will use to determine early numeracy just as you have outlined for early literacy; consider professional learning to increase math proficiency (Trunnell)		Goal 1: Need to see indicators for math proficiency noted. (Trunnell) Goal 2: Need to see indicators for math proficiency noted. (Trunnell)		
Save		Submit		

Department: Learning Support Services		Reviewer Name: Christina DeWaal	Date Reviewed: 5/16/2018	Req'd Revision Completed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Suggestions		Required Revisions		
Action/Service 2.1.1 - Please add funding source information if you plan to compensate teachers during this time. Action/Service 4.2.1 - Please add allocation for teacher compensation if you plan to pay them for the outlined events		Action/Service 3.1.2 - The action described in a contracted service with an outside agency. Please change the description of use. Please be aware that playground supervision is not allowable under Title I. The other aspects of the contract are not necessarily allowable under Title I. The details will need to be provided & the contract approved before this is allowable		
Save		Submit		

Members of the Elk Grove design team report that the site LCAP/SPSA enables better planning and communication within the district—and especially between the central office and school sites—about local planning and resource allocation. They explain that the template, already in use by site principals, has improved both plan quality and efficiency in the plan development. Elk Grove USD also reports receiving positive feedback from the Sacramento County Office of Education, which is excited to propose the template as a model other districts might adopt or adapt.

Elk Grove leaders also chose to use their design team to address additional LCAP implementation challenges. During the *Discovery* process, as team members reviewed results from the district’s annual LCAP survey, they observed that they did not have representative participation in their surveys and that the distribution of respondents across the district and across stakeholder groups was uneven. In response, the team led a redesign of Elk Grove USD’s annual survey. Different versions of the survey now specifically target three sets of stakeholders: parents, students, and staff. The surveys also map directly to the four components of Elk Grove USD’s learning vision—high quality

curriculum and instruction; assessment, data analysis, and action; wellness; and family and community engagement—and ask respondents to prioritize areas of focus within each component.

In addition, the design team is in the early stages of developing what they call a program improvement continuum: a rubric through which schools and district leaders can collaboratively rate each school’s capacity for developing site LCAP/SPSAs.

Moving forward, Elk Grove USD leaders plan to continue refining and implementing each of the three prototypes: the site LCAP/SPSA, the redesigned survey, and the rubric. The site LCAP/SPSA is the furthest along, and has already been made a part of the district’s review, revision, and approval process for school sites. District leaders administered the new survey for the first time in late fall 2018 to collect input through the updated tool. The rubric is still under development; the design team, the superintendent’s cabinet, and the Elk Grove research and evaluation team will continue to refine the tool before beginning use with school sites.

Budget Planning Spreadsheets: Oceanside USD

The Oceanside USD team considered elements of strategic planning and communication before ultimately deciding to address the first design challenge: *How can we engage in meaningful, strategic planning to most effectively align budgets and priorities?* The district design team’s work began with an exploration of whether stakeholder engagement was as productive as it could be. Through its *Discovery* process, team members interviewed students, surveyed and interviewed families and community members, and surveyed staff from school sites and the central office. Questions included items about knowledge (e.g., Do you know what the district goals are?), involvement (e.g., Were you involved in the process? Was your input valued?), and resource allocation (e.g., Are budget priorities aligned with student needs?).

As the Oceanside design team analyzed its findings through the *Interpret* phase, members first focused on takeaways related to communication. Participants observed dissatisfaction among stakeholders who did not see their input reflected in district plans and did not understand how the district made its decisions. The team concluded from this conversation that one of Oceanside’s key challenges was providing a rationale for its spending decisions. Through further discussion, however, the design team also identified a gap in stakeholder understanding about how district plans serve the best interests of students. This raised questions about how the district determines whether the programs and services to which it allocates funds truly produce desired outcomes.

The *Ideate* process honed the Oceanside’s team focus on this last question. Some of the initial ideas posed by team members were focused on communication—for example, messaging to stakeholders via email, newsletters, and

online resources. Other suggestions focused on evidence-based resource allocation decisions. The brainstorming exercise introduced approaches like using logic models to explain the desired outcomes of actions, a process to evaluate the effectiveness of actions, and progress monitoring that involved collecting, analyzing, and reporting data. As they narrowed these ideas, the design team moved in this direction—documenting the connection between budgeting decisions and evidence of success.

Sample Instructions to Principals From the Oceanside USD Budget Planning Spreadsheet

1. Review 2017–2018 expenditures and reflect on the following questions:
 - What student learning need did this expenditure address?
 - Are there multiple expenditures addressing the same need?
 - Did the expenditure have the intended impact on student learning?
2. Identify student learning needs for 2018–2019 and allocate funding to address these needs. Use the following questions to help guide decisions:
 - What student learning need will this expenditure address?
 - Does the expenditure support a need not currently covered by an existing program or service?
 - Which LCAP goal does this expenditure support?
 - How and by when will you know if the expenditure impacted student learning?
What data or feedback will you collect?
 - How will progress be monitored? What data or feedback will you collect?
3. Enter allocation amounts, the LCAP goal, and a brief description for each line item on the budget spreadsheet.
4. Review the Title I budget with and get approval from School Site Council (SSC). Although budgets are due to fiscal by April 20, you have until May 25 to share with SSC. The template to share with SSC has been added to the spreadsheet and will pre-populate.

The Oceanside team ultimately decided to prototype a new budget development process that combines resource allocation, program alignment, and evaluation. It developed revised budget planning spreadsheets, with guiding questions to encourage school leaders to reflect on the purpose and effectiveness of expenditures and actions. (See the text box on the previous page for a sample of the instructions this spreadsheet provides to school leaders for their budgeting process.) A key emphasis of these tools is pushing site leaders to identify the outcomes they expect to see as the result of a strategy—especially when those outcomes are not student achievement. The spreadsheets also call for school teams to align their expenditures with specific LCAP goals, and to include descriptions of the expenditures to avoid the ambiguity and confusion that comes from complicated strings of account codes. To support the effective use of these tools, the district also held collaborative budget meetings with several site leaders that included both educational services staff and fiscal services staff from the central office.

As Oceanside educators tested their prototype, they reported finding that the new budget development process and the collaborative budget meetings helped both district and site leaders understand site budgets and district LCAP priorities better. As one member of the design team explained, “This really helped the principals take a critical look at what they were using their dollars on, what they were spending, what the budget development process was.” Within the central office, the district also experienced increased collaboration between the education services and fiscal services departments. The team representative went on to say that now people in the two departments “finish each other’s sentences” and that the process had “helped our accountants and everybody understand what the principals were trying to do.”

However, challenges also emerged in the testing and feedback phase. At the time the district was testing its prototype, looming deadlines for budget and the LCAP had the effect of overwhelming people involved in those processes. These deadlines compounded struggles to coordinate schedules with school leaders, meaning that the design team could not arrange meetings with all of the district’s principals. Design team members also reported that not everyone came to the site meetings prepared. When people had not reviewed the materials provided in advance, it made the meetings much less efficient. These experiences and other feedback from principals have prompted a process of mapping the supports the district needs to provide principals in order to maximize the effectiveness of new tools and processes.

The path forward in Oceanside is murkier than that in Azusa and Elk Grove. The district welcomed a new superintendent in summer 2018, and that transition invited a review of a variety of initiatives to determine whether they would remain priorities moving forward. The Oceanside USD design team has stopped meeting as a result of those decisions and no longer participates in the facilitated components of prototype testing and refinement through the LCFF Test Kitchen. Nevertheless, the budget spreadsheets remain part of the school planning process, and will continue to inform and reflect the decisions principals make as they allocate resources in an LCFF environment.

Conclusion

The LCFF Test Kitchen applied a novel approach to addressing district policy creation and implementation by leveraging the unique benefits of user-centered design. After one year, the project has shown the promise of user-centered design as an approach that incorporates various stakeholders’ perspectives

into the process of developing solutions to locally defined challenges. District teams will continue to refine and apply the solutions they have developed, and they may offer useful ideas and models for leaders in other settings to address similar problems in their own contexts. Questions about policy relevance of the work remain; these have

NOTES

1. The State Board of Education has subsequently made modifications to the LCAP template in response to stakeholder feedback, primarily by adding additional requirements to address incomplete or misunderstood information in district plans. However, the format of the template remains the same.

2. The LCFF statute defines roles and responsibilities for local education agencies (LEAs), which are typically school districts but can include entities like independent charter schools or county offices of education. For the purposes of this brief, we use the terms district and LEA interchangeably.

3. Pivot Learning uses “prototype” to mean “a tangible representation of an idea.” In their words, a prototype “takes something from your mind and turns it into something that others can see, hear, interact with, and react to” (2013, p. 8). In this brief, “prototype” refers to the product that each district developed in response to its design challenge.

shaped an evolution of the approach as the LCFF Test Kitchen moves through the 2018–19 school year. For more information about plans for Year 2, please see the accompanying brief, *User-Centered Design As a Pathway to Effective Policy: Lessons From the LCFF Test Kitchen*.

References

- Blum, J. & Knudson, J. (2016). *Implementing LCFF: Possible solutions to emergent LCAP challenges*. San Mateo, CA: California Collaborative on District Reform.
- Knudson, J., Ramanathan, A., Carter, A., & O’Day, J. (2017). *Fostering innovation: How user-centered design can help us get the Local Control Funding Formula right*. San Mateo, CA: California Collaborative on District Reform and Pivot Learning.
- Koppich, J. E., Humphrey, D. C., & Marsh, J. A. (2015). *Two years of California’s Local Control Funding Formula: Time to reaffirm the grand vision*. Stanford, CA: Policy Analysis for California Education.
- Pivot Learning Partners. (2013). *Pivot Learning Partners’ design cycle: A tool for change*. San Francisco, CA: Author. Retrieved from http://pivotlearningpartners.org/sites/default/files/PivotChangeDesign-2013_0.pdf



The development of this brief was supported through generous contributions from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The views, findings, conclusions, and recommendations here are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the viewpoints of the Foundation. The author gratefully acknowledges partners from the CCEE, Pivot Learning, WestEd, Azusa USD, Elk Grove USD, and Oceanside USD for their invaluable contributions to this project and for their feedback on early drafts of this brief.

For more information about the California Collaborative on District Reform and its work, visit www.cacollaborative.org.
For more information about the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence, visit <http://ccee-ca.org/index.asp>.
For more information about Pivot Learning and its work, visit www.pivotlearning.org.
For more information about WestEd and its work, visit <https://www.wested.org>.



This brief is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. You are free to copy and distribute the material in any medium or format, and you may adapt this work for noncommercial purposes. The following citation is preferred: Knudson, J. (2019). *User-centered design as a pathway to effective policy: Lessons from the LCFF Test Kitchen*. San Mateo, CA: California Collaborative on District Reform.