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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY SAN MARCOS

Should Needier Students Get More? The Role of Equity in the Local Control and Accountability  
Plan Process

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

Melissa M. Marovich

Committee in charge:

University of California San Diego  
Professor Alan J. Daly, Chair  
Professor Amanda Datnow

California State University San Marcos  
Professor Erika Daniels

2020

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The Dissertation of Melissa M. Marovich is approved, and is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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University of California San Diego  
California State University San Marcos

2020

## DEDICATION

This study represents my commitment to making the world a better place for all students by shining a spotlight on systems that we must attend to in our efforts to make a difference and close the achievement gap. With this study, I hope to honor of the dreams of millions of California's children and their families as they strive for the dream of an equitable education.

Thank you to the entire JDP faculty for a rich and rigorous experience, especially my chair, Dr. Alan Daly, for his encouragement and support throughout this process, as well as his skillful setting of tone for Cohort 14. You helped us become a cohesive cohort family of social justice warriors.

I dedicate this dissertation to my supportive family, especially my father, William Schrempf, without whom I would still be making excuses not to apply to the JDP. Thank you Mom and Joe Comella and my sister, Erin Dayus and her family.

Lastly and most importantly, I dedicate this to my children, Alex and Melanie, who have traveled with me on this journey. I am thankful for their patience, love and support, and am proud of your character. I did it for you!

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## VITA

### EDUCATION

- 2020 Doctor of Education, Educational Leadership, Joint Doctoral Program of  
University of California San Diego and California State University San Marcos
- 2003 Master of Arts, Education Administration, California State University San  
Marcos
- 1996 Single Subject Teaching Credentials, San Diego State University
- 1995 Bachelor of Arts, Spanish and Psychology (double major), California State  
University San Marcos

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- 2020 Coordinator of Special Education, San Dieguito Union High School District
- 2016 – 2020 Director of Special Education, Student Services and Career Technical Education,  
Fallbrook Union High School District
- 2008 – 2016 Principal, Fallbrook Union High School District
- 2005 – 2008 Assistant Principal, Vista Unified School District
- 1996 – 2005 Teacher, Vista Unified School District

## **ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

Should Needier Students Get More? The Role of Equity in the Local Control and Accountability  
Plan Process

by

Melissa M. Marovich

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California San Diego, 2020  
California State University San Marcos, 2020

Professor Alan J. Daly, Chair

The word *equity* is often used in education yet, there is not a widely agreed upon official definition. Equity might be thought of as equality turned into an action or the process of making something equal and fair. Educational stakeholders are tasked with making sense of equity within the context of student need, through the development of academic goals that prioritize the closing the achievement gap, and the allocation of resources. This dissertation examines how a small sampling of school stakeholders made sense of how equity is defined and implemented in the form of actions and services, and through the allocation of resources to students for whom

the achievement gaps persist, through the development of the Local Control and Accountability Plan. This case study of a small school district examined how stakeholders defined equity in the context of student and district need as well as how stakeholders made decisions to allocate services and resources to groups of students, how leaders guided stakeholders toward a common conception of equity in the development of the LCAP, and how stakeholder groups perceived the process. Guided by the sensemaking framework and social network theory, this dissertation examined how stakeholders, made sense of equity for students in word and deed, through the actions and resources discussed and dispersed through the LCAP process.

Understanding how the meaning of equity is developed and implemented through the LCAP process matters because it questions the state of California's assertion that local stakeholders know what is best for their unique, local population of students. The findings of this study suggest that leaders must attend to the research-based norms of a data-based decision-making process, to build effective collaboration and trust between groups and within systems of organizations. Understanding how stakeholders effectively collaborate to make sense of student need and convey these institutional values will provide insight into how local school districts create equitable systems for increasing academic achievement. The plan that results from this process needs be grounded in true engagement with all actors. Providing needier students with more requires stakeholders to acknowledge disparities in student achievement, access to rigorous programs, systemic barriers and other beliefs which inhibit achievement.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Background**

The word *equity* is used with increasing frequency in education these days however, there is not a widely agreed upon official definition of equity. In education policy, practice and academia, equity is widely used to mean that extra resources such as money, time, and attention are given to students who are considered low performing or below grade level (Tannock, 2008; Unterhalter, 2009; Tienken, 2012; Bulkley, 2013). It seems logical: needier students need more; they need more systems of support to build academic skills and remove existing opportunity gaps that are structural obstacles possibly due to race, language, or socioeconomic status (Noguera, 2008; Unterhalter, 2009; Tienken, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2004). The reality is that decisions are sometimes made without considering equity as a result of possibly competing interests for limited resources, misconceptions of equity versus equality, or existing systems and structures which are prohibitive of a philosophical mindset different from the established ethos (Unterhalter, 2009; Bulkley, 2013).

This dissertation examines how public school stakeholders made sense of how equity is defined and implemented in the form of actions and services, and through the input they provided about the allocation of resources to underserved student groups for who the opportunity gap persists, through the development of the Local Control and Accountability Plan. In California, stakeholders including teachers and staff, parents and parent groups, community members, board members, and students are mandated to provide input into the development of this accountability plan. This process brings many, sometimes competing, perspectives to the table creating space for negotiations and contests where the meaning of equity can take place. Evidence is emerging that smaller and rural school districts are experiencing greater challenges

in comparison to larger and urban school districts when it comes to engaging stakeholders, especially parents of historically low performing student groups, in the LCAP process as required by the law (Allbright & Marsh, 2019). California has 997 public school districts and 363 of those are categorized as rural and small, with enrollment of fewer than 2500 students (Vincent, 2018). More insight into the challenges faced by small, rural districts with limited resources, especially in understanding the requirements of the LCAP could benefit the many small districts around the state. Through a case study of a small, rural school district, this study examined how stakeholders defined equity in the context of student and district need. It also examined how stakeholders made recommendations to allocate services and resources to needy or low-performing students, how leaders guided stakeholders toward a common conception of equity in the development of the LCAP, and how two stakeholder groups, administrators and teachers, perceived the process of stakeholder engagement itself as equitable. Guided by a sensemaking and social network theory framework, this dissertation examined: how actors, referred to as stakeholders, made sense of equity for needier, underserved students in word and deed, through the actions and resources discussed and dispersed through the LCAP process. This case study was conducted by way of interviews, focus groups, document analysis, observations and participation in the LCAP process over the course a four month period during which all California school districts develop a three year Local Control and Accountability Plan, which will guide all aspects of districts' priorities until 2023.

### **Equity as a Mandate in California**

Equality in education generally indicates that goods and services are distributed evenly to all students, with everyone getting the same. Equality does not consider the needs of the child such as home language or socioeconomic circumstances (Unterhalter, 2009). Conversely, equity

incorporates the ideas of access, opportunity, and need to give all students the possibility of achieving equal outcomes (Jacobs, Beck & Crowell, 2014; Edley & Kimney, 2018). California's previous Governor, Jerry Brown, prioritized the state's commitment to equitable funding for students through new legislation in 2012 acknowledging that the neediest students need more resources, resulting from significant differences in their educational starting points (Brown, 2013). However, some researchers have suggested that inequity should be defined as an excessive disparity between groups, not just in the resources they receive or a greater need because of language, socioeconomic status or race, but also with regards to the outcomes they will achieve or fail to achieve as a result of the structural disadvantages they face (Jacobs, Beck, & Crowell, 2014; Bulkley, 2013; Edley & Kimney, 2018). The governor's philosophy means that through equitable funding and input from local stakeholders, students will have what they need to be successful and achieve equality (Jacobs, Beck, & Crowell, 2014; Allbright & Marsh, 2019).

In response to the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act and the 2010 Common Core State Standards initiative to better prepare students for college and career, Governor Brown's 2013 mandate to reform school funding in California was grounded in the belief that money for students should be allocated equitably, not equally (Brown, 2013). Based on the idea that disadvantaged schools should get substantially more money to help the neediest students, not the same or equal funding for every school, Governor Brown stated, "Equal treatment for children in unequal situations is not justice" (Brown, 2013). Changes to school finance were vital if California was to achieve this overarching goal that all students leave high school ready for college and career (Perry, 2013). Launched in 2013, the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)

identified eight state priorities and required all school districts to create a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) which addresses each priority.

The LCFF transferred the decision-making power from state categorical programs and state or federal agencies to local education agencies (LEA's), counties and districts, with the expectation that LEA's know best how to serve the students in their districts (Darling-Hammond & Plank, 2015; Marsh et al., 2018; Allbright & Marsh, 2019). The LCFF intentionally moved to a model where LEA's can be strategic and coherent in planning and budgeting to meet the needs of each unique, local student group, based on the size and demographics of schools and districts, while maintaining a focus on improving student outcomes (Perry, 2013; Humphrey et al., 2017). While well intentioned, the idea of *local control* leaves a lot of opportunity for bias or, rather variation as a result of the leaders within local districts (Mintrop, 2012; Humphrey et al., 2017). Historically, many student groups, such as those identified by the state as priority groups (low socioeconomic, English learners, and foster youth), have been disenfranchised in public education and the LCAP methodology has targeted how to better serve those who have been traditionally left out.

The state implemented the new Local Control and Accountability Plan in 2013 as its new measurement system to ensure funds were spent equitably on high need students (Hill & Ugo, 2015; Perry 2013; Humphrey et al., 2017). The LCAP requires LEA's to create a three year, overarching plan of goals, actions and interventions in response to the state's eight priority areas, and to annually report progress and expenditures to meet and match those areas (Hill & Ugo, 2015; Humphrey et al., 2017). Researchers have begun to examine the effect of community based reform, specifically the concept that local communities will better address their individual areas of inequities rather than working from a top down, from the state or federal government,



mandate (Vasquez Heilig, Ward, Weisman, & Cole, 2014). School districts are required to develop the LCAP collaboratively and must engage all stakeholders in examining the equitable use of supplemental and concentration funding for high need students (Hill & Ugo, 2015; Humphrey et al., 2017).

Research points to the LCFF and the LCAP as evidence of a purposeful effort on the part of the state of California to close the achievement gap, the financial gap, as well as opportunity gaps which exist in college and career readiness (Sciarra & Hunter, 2015; Johnson & Tanner, 2018). Policymakers also suggest a shift in the deficit thinking model employed by districts; rather than focusing on preventing dropouts, districts should frame LCAP goals more positively, and aim for post-secondary outcomes (Beach, Their, Collins Lench, & Coleman, 2015; Edley & Kimner, 2018). While more funding seems to help raise graduation rates and academic achievement, there is not yet enough evidence that local control and less oversight from the state will reduce inequities for California's students (Johnson & Tanner, 2018). By shining the spotlight on the inequities among student groups to the local education agency, the state has withdrawn from its' larger role in accountability, specific to educational equity goals and outcomes (Edley & Kimner, 2018).

The Education Trust West's 2017 report examined the extent to which low-income students, English learners, and foster youth who were promised greater support through the LCFF and LCAP are receiving a better education and found high-poverty districts are now receiving proportionately more dollars than more affluent districts however, disparities still exist. Improvements have been identified in poorer districts with gains in better student-teacher ratios and access to student support personnel (such as counselors) has improved but, are still not equitable with wealthier districts. Districts write and report progress in a Local Control and

Accountability Plan yet, the plans are long, dense and hard to quantify. Though the Dashboard measures progress on the eight indicators, districts are only required to show how the supplemental and concentration grant funds generated by high-need students are spent through annual reporting to their local community, as a part of the development of the annual LCAP.

Marsh and Koppich (2018) found strong evidence that a district's size and geographic location has an effect on stakeholder engagement, based on their survey of schools and district superintendents' experiences with the LCAP stakeholder engagement process. Larger districts, with higher concentrations of low performing student groups were more likely to report that the LCFF has facilitated more frequent and robust stakeholder participation, especially by families of student groups targeted for support by the LCFF (EL, foster youth, low socio-economic). Smaller districts and rural districts reported that participation among the parents of LCFF's target group students was more difficult than urban and suburban school districts. Small, rural districts were significantly more likely than their counterparts in suburban and urban districts to report these challenges with low-income stakeholders. Seventy-three percent of small, rural districts in California reported difficulties engaging LCFF targeted student and parent groups in comparison with 56% suburban or urban districts (Marsh & Koppich, 2018).

Small and rural school districts face the same fiscal and systems problems as larger districts with fewer resources and fewer stakeholders to make systemic changes needed to address achievement and opportunity gaps. Small and rural districts have difficulties raising revenue from local taxes, competing for teacher recruitment, and face a shortage of early childhood education services (Showalter, Klein, Johnson, and Hartman, 2017). In California, the graduation rate for the state in 2018 was 83% however, rural school districts reported an average rate of 77% just two years earlier (Swaak, 2018; Showalter et al., 2017). California has one of

the highest percentages of small and rural school districts in the nation and educates the largest percentage of rural English Learners. In addition, California's small and rural districts experience challenges with graduation rates for low socioeconomically disadvantaged students and English learners in those districts and students from small and rural schools engage in college readiness measures like AP, SAT and ACT less frequently and with less success when compared to urban and suburban school districts (Showalter et al., 2017). The LCAP is expected to address these gaps thus, the need to focus on small and rural school districts is an area of glaring need.

### **Purpose of Study**

To date, the LCFF and LCAP are now more than five years old, and there remains little research on the effectiveness of these mandates on student outcomes. Marsh et al. (2018) identified the need for continued study in the area of LCFF and LCAP stakeholder engagement, finding a relationship between “the nature of stakeholder engagement, the ways in which district leaders conceptualize equity, and the approach taken to allocating LCFF funds” (p. 3). Further, they observed significant variation in the level of engagement as well as many barriers to engaging stakeholders in the development of a Local Control and Accountability Plan. School districts have struggled to obtain input from stakeholders that equitably represent the demographics of the local areas, especially in smaller or rural school districts (Marsh & Koppich, 2018). Further, Daly and Finnigan (2010) found a gap in the understanding of networks within low-performing districts or between district and school leaders and recommended that further research could reveal how stakeholders facilitate or impede efforts at change. These findings lend themselves to an inquiry into the LCAP stakeholder decision-making process.

The purpose of this study was to understand the ways in which stakeholders are making sense of equity based on student need in a small school district in the development of a three year

Local Control and Accountability Plan. Through LCAP decision-making process, stakeholders examined students' achievement and opportunity gaps, prioritized students' needs and made recommendations to allocate resources in the form of funding and services. This study examined the LCAP stakeholder input process through the lens of equity; connecting stakeholder engagement efforts to the interpretation and enactment of equity in the development of LCAP goals. Findings from this study can inform school leaders on the process of attending to stakeholder engagement for the greater purpose of improving learning opportunities and outcomes for all students and closing "opportunity gaps" between privileged and historically underserved students.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study examined the research questions outlined below, through a sensemaking and social network theory framework. Organizational sensemaking seeks to understand the process of organizing ideas and words into actions and systems. At a basic level, sensemaking is about answering the question, "What's the story here?", naming and categorizing the unknown, making meaning of things that interrupt normal patterns or elicit surprise and confusion, and creating a system from the process (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 410; Ching, 2017). Specifically, people organize to make sense of "inputs" and enact sense back into the world to make that world or organization more orderly.

Social network theory enhances sensemaking theory in the context of equitable decision-making in education. Social network theory suggests that change, in an organization such as a school district, requires attending to the formal structures of the organization as well as the informal social networks. These informal networks create webs of understanding, influence, and knowledge throughout the process of change (Daly, 2015). As it relates to this study, the LCAP's

stakeholder process is about making sense of student needs in competition with individual belief systems, leadership philosophies and ingrained systems; actors in the system are tasked with making sense of information to make equitable decisions for schools and students.

Organizational change is socially constructed by making meaning with data, information and the people in the network; “Who you know defines what you know” (Daly, 2015, p. 2). Further, meanings can be adapted through interpretive processes such as disagreements, peer group norms and options, and other social products such as emotions (Schmidt & Datnow, 2005).

Combining sensemaking with a social network theory framework in the context of a single case study will enable an examination of how equity is defined and implemented, and might provide insight for other leaders into structures that support or inhibit a process like the LCAP (Daly & Finnigan, 2010). Sensemaking and social network theory are making “retrospective sense of the situations in which they find themselves and their creations” (Weick, 1995, p. 15).

## **Research Questions**

The current policies, practices, and the growing literature around the LCAP and LCFF, along with an overwhelmingly urgent need to understand how equity is defined and enacted, have informed the direction of this study. These factors, in tandem with the requirement to gather meaningful input into the needs of students in a local school district through participation of all stakeholders, have created the foundation to explore the following research questions:

1. How did stakeholders in a small, rural school district make sense of equity through their examination of student performance data and their interactions with other stakeholders within the context of the LCAP decision-making process?
2. How did this process of making sense result in an LCAP engagement process that stakeholders perceived as equitable?

Answers to these questions can inform the challenges faced by small, rural school districts seeking to improve outcomes for low-performing student groups. Marsh et al. (2018) affirmed that more studies are needed to examine what strategies can help leaders to create more equitable plans that support student learning and outcomes through stakeholder engagement, and that a focus on equity is vital to the urgent need to improve the lot for historically low performing students. A 2018 study of LCAP stakeholder engagement by Marsh et al. (2018) examined equity and drew some broad conclusions, finding a correlation between broad stakeholder engagement and a systematic understanding of equity in word and deed. Conversely, they also found districts with limited stakeholder engagement had a somewhat vague understanding of equity, which translated to equal not equitable plans and funding. These findings, combined with other recent studies of stakeholder engagement challenges especially in small and rural school districts, have framed the need to more closely examine how local actors define and implement equitable actions and services through the Local Control and Accountability Plan process.

## **Methods Overview**

Using the sensemaking and social network theory framework, this study was comprised of a single, narrative case study of Fairweather School District (FSD) by studying the Local Control and Accountability Plan development process as it unfolded. “Fairweather” is a pseudonym for the district of study, chosen for the purposes of confidentiality. The case study was appropriate because the phenomenon of interest, the Local Control and Accountability Plan stakeholder involvement process, has a level of complexity that requires multiple data sources and methods to gain an in-depth understanding of how decisions are made when competing

interests are at play; a single case study can also direct future research (Yin, 1989; Denzin & Lincoln, 2002).

All public K-12 school districts in California are required to develop a three-year Local Control and Accountability Plan which is aligned to state and local indicators and data. The process of developing this three year plan takes several months and requires an extensive analysis of school and district student needs, as they develop a limited number of overarching goals with related data-driven targets, actions districts will take to achieve their goals and funds are allocated to support the action and services. District budgets must be aligned with the three-year LCAP. Districts are required to meet with and gather input from all stakeholders and must describe the steps they took in their LCAP to engage parents, pupils, and the community and how this engagement contributed to developing the LCAP (“Local Control and Accountability Plan,” n.d.). Once a three-year LCAP is developed and approved, districts cannot change the overarching goals until the next three year cycle. The new three-year LCAP development cycle began in January 2020 when the state releases the new LCAP template and plans were initially approved by local school boards by July 1, 2020.

The COVID-19 school closures caused a delay in this process. At the time of the school closure, all stakeholders and stakeholder groups had two or more opportunities to review LCAP data and give feedback or suggestions. District officials were in the process of reviewing the feedback and writing the LCAP document, which is approximately 200 pages in length. In the original timeline created by the state, districts would have held additional meetings for stakeholders to review the proposed 2020-2023 LCAP before it went to the Board of Trustees for public review and approval in June 2020. Instead, the process was delayed and instead, all California districts present abbreviated, short-term plans using a state’s template to inform the

board about a temporary LCAP from July 1 - December 2020. The state extended the timeline for plan approval to December 2020 to ensure adequate time for stakeholder engagement. The state required all districts to develop an abbreviated LCAP Operations Report by June 30, 2020 explaining the changes the district has made to support students during the COVID school closures. Despite the closure, sufficient data was collected for the purposes of this study; this case study was focused on the process of developing the LCAP not on the product that resulted at the end.

Fairweather is a small, rural school district in southern California, which made it an ideal district of study, for the purpose of better understanding the complexity of 'local control' within the context of understanding how stakeholders defined equity and participated in the process of developing a plan for students which is the embodiment of their collective beliefs on equity. During this study, observations we conducted of stakeholder meetings, interviews of stakeholders through focus groups and one on one were completed ; and relevant documents such as meeting notes and agendas, student achievement data, budgets, and other district artifacts, were examined.

This dissertation explains, in narrative form, the observations and data gathered from the phenomenon of study, and the development of the Local Control and Accountability Plan in the Fairweather School District while observing the experience of Fairweather's stakeholders as they define what equity means for the students of the district, through their discussions and how they ultimately made recommendations to prioritize goals, services, and financial resources in the name of equity. Individual interviews were held to give stakeholders the space to reflect on how they viewed the decision-making process. Participants were selected for semi-structured interviews to gather more in-depth information about their sensemaking experiences in LCAP



process, their conceptions of equity, and their connections to and how they were influenced by other stakeholders. The researcher will also include personal experience as a participant observer.

### **Summary**

In 2004, leading education scholar Linda Darling-Hammond wrote,

The common presumption about educational inequality is that it resides primarily in those students who come to school with inadequate capacities to benefit from what education the school has to offer. The fact that U.S. schools are structured such that students routinely receive dramatically unequal learning opportunities based on their race and social status is simply not widely recognized (p. 236).

The LCFF and LCAP assign responsibility for improving academic outcomes for targeted student groups to local school districts however, for true substantive outcomes to change for historically underserved students, the quality of their learning opportunities must be improved. The responsibility for these improvements is dependent upon local stakeholders to carefully consider student needs and assign funding and services that guarantee that needier students have “high quality teaching within the context of a rich and challenging curriculum supported by personalized schools and classes”. To accomplish this, district leaders must guide stakeholders through the process of defining and implementing equity in the goals of the Local Control and Accountability Plan.

## **Chapter 2: Review of Literature**

### **Introduction**

The oft referred to “American Dream” is the idea that anyone, regardless of where they were born or what class they were born into, can be successful if they just work hard has been widely shared and underscores some dominant culture values. Wealth, upward mobility, and a better life are all “possible” for anyone willing to take advantage of the opportunity by working hard and getting a good education. The cornerstone of the purported American Dream is written in the Declaration of Independence in which the founders state, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.” This belief, that everyone has the same opportunities within a society which is vastly disparate and in which education is seen the great equalizer, is considered the myth of meritocracy (Zamudio, Russel, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). “Meritocracy assumes a level playing field where all individuals in society have an equal opportunity to succeed. Meritocracy also assumes that one’s work ethic, values, drive, and individual attributes such as aptitude and intelligence, determine success or failure” (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 12). However, national statistics and an overabundance of research tells us without a doubt that a ‘level playing field’ does not exist; home language, parent education level, socioeconomic status, race, class and institutional structure all are factors contributing to unequal opportunities and an ever-widening achievement and opportunity gap for historically underperforming groups of students (Jencks, 1988; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Noguera, 2008; Tienken, 2012; Stillings Candal, 2018)

Equality in education generally indicates that goods and services are distributed evenly to all students, with everyone getting the same. Equality does not consider the needs or socioeconomic circumstances of the child. On the contrary, equity incorporates the ideas of

access, opportunity, and need (Stillings Candal, 2018; Edley & Kimney, 2018). California's Governor Brown prioritized the state's commitment to equitable funding for students through the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) legislation in 2012 by recognizing that the neediest students need more resources, because of significant differences in their starting points (Brown, 2013). However, researchers have suggested that inequity should be defined as an excessive disparity between groups, not just in the resources they receive or a greater need because of language, socioeconomic status race, or institutional barriers but, also with regards to the outcomes they will achieve or fail to achieve as a result of the structural disadvantages they face (Edley & Kimney, 2018).

This review of literature will begin with an discussion of equity, including conceptions of equity, and then examine unequal educational systems that have perpetuated the achievement gap for historically underserved students - students of color, low socioeconomic students, English learners, students with disabilities and homeless or foster youth. This will be followed by an overview of the effects of school finance systems that sustained unequal schools before Governor Brown's 2012 legislation to reform California's school finance into the Local Control Funding Formula and the accompanying Local Control and Accountability Plan. A review of the relevant literature surrounding the ways equity is locally constructed and enacted in collective data-based decision-making processes is included. Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion of the two elements of this study's theoretical framework, sensemaking theory and social network theory.

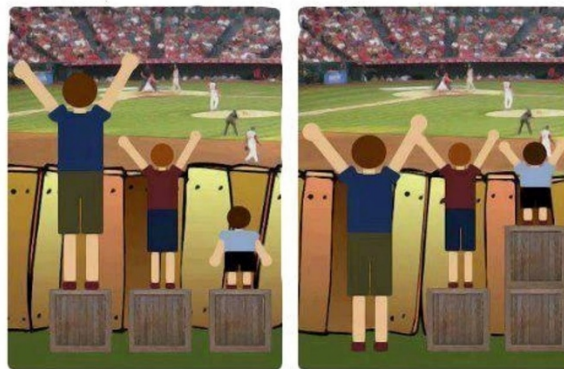
### **Equity and Equality**

The word 'equity' is used generously in this day and age in education, with the assumption that people – educators and others – share a common understanding of what equity

means, as well as an agreement about the precise conception of equity. In reality the meaning of equity is open to interpretation. Throughout the educational system, in practice and in research, what equity means, who and what should be considered when making equitable decisions, and what it necessitates from those who make decisions vary greatly in their interpretation of equity (Tannock, 2009; Unterhalter, 2009; Allbright et al., 2019). As a strategy or a philosophy, equity can be framed using different rationales and be based on different ideological conceptions which focus on different issues, student groups, decisions, and actions (Guiton & Oakes, 1995). The dictionary defines equity as ‘the quality of being equal and fair’ and ‘that which is fair and right’ (Oxford English Dictionary 2007). Therefore, equity might be thought of as equality turned into an action or the process of making something equal and fair.

There truly is no single, agreed upon definition of what equity is in K-12 education; instead there are meanings that educators, school leaders, researchers, and policymakers have constructed and legislated for students and stakeholders. In California, the following illustration (Figure 1) has been used with great frequency by experts and school leaders to show the difference between equity and equality without further formalizing or defining the how and the why of equity and equitable decision-making for students.

Figure 1. Equality versus Equity



*Figure 1.* In the first picture, all three people have one crate to stand on, an equal number of equal size, the same for each person. The tallest person does not need it, the middle person finds it somewhat helpful but for the shortest person, it is still not enough. Conversely, in the second picture there is supposed equity, each person has the number of crates they need to see the game.

This image has been used often in educational settings to frame the rationale behind the LCFF supplemental and concentration funding. Equal per-pupil funding would mean ensuring that all schools had the same amount of resources per student. However, using the concept of equity through the LCFF funding formula means allocating more funding, through supplemental and concentration funds, to schools serving larger numbers (or concentrations) of high need students. The State of California has identified three groups of students for additional, “equitable” funding: English Learners, low socioeconomic, and foster youth. The word equality has become synonymous with “leveling the playing field” and equity is synonymous with “more for those who need it” (Mann, 2014, “Equity and Equality Are Not Equal,” para. 5).

Equity recognizes the opportunities afforded to students are unequal and seeks ways to address the inequalities and structural barriers (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Singleton & Linton, 2006). Decision-making based on the concept of equality assume everyone has the same opportunities and experiences. In an equal educational system, all students are presumed to

arrive at school equally prepared to take advantage of the same schooling opportunities given to every student. Still, opportunities vary greatly school by school, as the result of school finance formulas, student demographics, average income, and geography (Stillings Candal, 2018).

Conversely, equity means that the students of greater need receive a more resources and support to guarantee they have the opportunity to achieve academic success (Stillings Candal, 2018). In an equitable school system, needier students need get more support and services. Unfortunately, equity is not a guarantee that a student will succeed rather, the focus is on increased access to additional resources, improved teaching and learning opportunities, and the removal of barriers.

As policy-makers and educational leaders continue the battle to close the achievement and opportunity gaps in the United States education system, understanding how the meaning of equity is defined and implemented is relevant because equity questions the overall morality and the ideals of a democratic political system in which education is the right of its citizens and of significant value for the greater good of a democratic nation. Additionally, the idea of equity is of value because the K-12 educational system faces increasing pressure from those within and outside education to address issues associated with equity and equality, specifically the improvement and elimination of disparities in achievement by race and socioeconomic status (Jencks, 1988; Noguera, 2008; Unterhalter, 2009; Stillings Candal, 2018). The United States educational system is thought by some American researchers to be one of the most unequal in the industrialized world because U.S. students routinely experience dramatically different learning opportunities based on their socioeconomic status, school of attendance, and race (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

A focus on equity is the overriding theme of most conversations around educational reform and closing the achievement gap in recent years, all concentrated on the overwhelming

need to establish learning environments in which all students succeed (Stillings-Candal, 2018). Ching (2017) asserted that equity is socially constructed and can mean a variety of things however, the true meaning of it emerges when tangible actions come into play. The California Department of Education (CDE) defines equity on their website as “fair outcomes, treatment, and opportunities for all students” (“California Department of Education, Equity,” n.d.). Singleton and Linton (2006) define educational equity as raising the achievement of all students while closing the achievement gaps between the highest performing and lowest performing groups of students. They expand the definition further by including the elimination of the predictability of race and socioeconomic status in determining whether students score high or low performance on achievement measures.

**Inequities and Inequalities.** Researchers have suggested that inequity is an excessive disparity between groups, not just in the resources they receive or a greater need because of language, socioeconomic status, race and organizational barriers but also with regards to the outcomes they will achieve or fail to achieve as a result of the structural disadvantages they face (Jencks, 1988; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Noguera, 2008; Unterhalter, 2009; Edley & Kimney, 2018).

Before continuing to further examine the need to adopt equity as the core value for educational consideration, it is important to consider the background of how the educational system had created unequal school systems and inequitable student outcomes, as well as the impact on both the nation and the global economy. With increased pressure at the state and federal level, and demands from a rapidly growing global economy, schools are called upon to close the achievement and opportunity gap between historically underserved student groups, in part by improving academic achievement outcomes.

California's new measures of college and career readiness, along with data measuring college degree entrance and completion for students, especially for underserved students, are forcing the education system to promote greater equity and to ensure all schools are providing the highest quality education to ensure all students graduate ready to enter twenty-first century economy. Studies have shown that educational spending in the United States is drastically different from European and Asian nations which fund schools centrally and equally; the wealthiest 10% of school districts in the United States spend nearly ten times more than the poorest 10% (Darling-Hammond, 2004). These vast differences in school funding exacerbate the existing inequalities in income among student groups, neighborhoods, schools and communities with more affluent students and schools receiving more funding and low socioeconomic students and schools receiving less, especially in high-minority communities. (Darling-Hammond, 2004). The need to increase academic achievement, especially college and career readiness success rates, for historically under-represented students will mean challenging institutionalized inequities and systematic disadvantages in the K-12 school system (Lindsey, 2017).

Studies of income, wealth, or parent education level remain a powerful predictor of educational attainment. Students from low-income families or families with no parent with a college degree are less likely to earn college degrees (Drotos and Cilesiz, 2014). Low socioeconomic students, students of color, and first generation college students far more likely to not graduate from college and are almost four times more likely to leave college after the first year than those with wealthier families or college educated parents. Low-income Latino students whose parents were not college educated have limited access to important information about how to prepare for or be successful in college, and that these students are disproportionately more likely to attend an under-resourced high school (Almeida, 2016). As the economy in the twenty-



first century has become more demanding and technical, the effects of leaving school without a diploma or leaving school with a lower quality education are more damning than ever before (Darling-Hammond, 2004 & 2010; Stillings Candal, 2018).

“Institutionally sanctioned discrimination in access to educational resources is older than the American nation itself” (Darling-Hammond, 2004, p. 214). The founding fathers of the United States encouraged local states and towns to support free public schools in the interest of educating a majority of citizens to participate in the new democracy. It was clear well before the Civil War that this ‘right’ was meant for primarily for Whites, especially White men (Hannah-Jones, 2014). School segregation was endorsed judicially as early as 1850 through legal measures which resulted in segregated facilities, including schools, and setting the groundwork for the concept of ‘separate but equal’. (Guthrie & Springer, 2004). Thirty years after the end of the Civil War, the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 formally introduced "Jim Crow" laws to the Nation. With this case, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that, as long as equal facilities were provided, segregating people by race was not a violation of the 14th Amendment's equal protection clause (Guthrie & Springer, 2004; Hannah-Jones, 2014). The precedent set by *Plessy v. Ferguson* oppressed people of color and brought about even more overt racial segregation in schools and all other aspects of society (Guthrie & Springer, 2004; Baker & Green, 2005), ensuring not only separation of races but also unequal resources and access (Daniel Tatum, 2007; Hannah-Jones, 2014).

Under the auspices of ‘separate but equal’, the gaps in student achievement and access to opportunities grew even greater. Educational resources allocated to segregated schools were not equal: black schools received significantly less funding than white schools (Baker & Green, 2005; Hannah-Jones, 2014). Between the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case of 1896 and the landmark

Brown v. Board of Education case of 1954, several other cases made headway in the debunking of the fallacy of ‘separate but equal’, however it is Brown v. Board that remains the touchstone of the desegregation movement in the U.S. educational system. Nevertheless, Brown v. Board addressed only student access to school; the federal government has not yet tackled the notion of how a lack of school funding, among other factors, causes the achievement and opportunity gap for historically low performing student groups to persist (Noguera, 2008).

### **Educational Funding in California**

In California, prior to Governor Brown’s 2013 Local Control Funding Formula, it was widely acknowledged that in California, many schools were overcrowded, lacked basic textbooks and materials, lacked qualified teachers, and did not offer the courses needed for college preparedness (Oakes & Lipton, 2004). These profound inequalities were primarily the result of disparate resource allocations and perpetuated the re-segregation of schools both in California and across the United States (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Orfield, 2001; Edley & Kimner, 2018). For many decades prior to the mid-1970’s, California’s schools were funded by local property taxes and supplemented by state and federal aid, which resulted in significant inequality in the funding amount per pupil (Barondess, Schroeder, & Hahnel, 2012; Oakes & Lipton, 2004). The California Supreme Court case of Serrano v. Priest (1976) asserted that this model of education funding is unconstitutional because it violated the standard of equal protection; districts with higher income families generated more revenue for schools creating disparities by neighborhoods and the state was ordered to make funding for schools districts and students more equal (Oakes & Lipton, 2004; Barondess, Schroeder, & Hahnel, 2012). California lawmakers initiated several reforms to make districts less dependent upon property tax revenue and developed a new system known as “revenue limit”, which called for each district to receive a

base level of funding. In 1978, California voters, and first time governor Jerry Brown, passed Proposition 13 to limit property taxation, which reduced both the revenue available for schools and the ability of cities or communities to raise more funds for schools by increasing property taxes. The state tried to make up the difference by replacing the property tax proceeds with money from the state general fund which resulted in a transfer of decision-making power for education funding from the local level to the state (Barondess, Schroeder, & Hahnel, 2012).

Twenty years later, in 1998, California voters passed Proposition 98 which pledged a minimum amount of the state's general fund would be spent on schools but included exceptions, allowing lawmakers to defer or delay that funding guarantee in times of fiscal crisis, or to reduce the amount of funding to schools in years when the state's revenue growth was low. More than a decade later, significant disparities still existed; school districts with the highest concentration of low-income students received \$620 less per pupil on average than more affluent districts in the state and California ranked near the bottom of all states in per pupil funding (Barondess, Schroeder, & Hahnel, 2012). By the early 2000's, California was still not adequately funding schools nor were schools receiving equitable funds to serve the state's neediest students leading to a new round of legal challenges in the state's courts (Barondess, Schroeder, & Hahnel, 2012; Oakes & Lipton, 2004).

In 2004, the *Williams v. State of California* was settled by the state Supreme Court. The plaintiffs argued the state of California was not providing the basic tools of a decent education to millions of students who were mostly low income, English Learners or students of color. The plaintiffs argued that California's state education system fails to provide them education on equal terms. The goal of the Williams lawsuit was not equality through racial integration like *Brown v*

Board, but to guarantee all students have equal access to the fundamental and necessary tools needed for their education. (Oakes & Lipton, 2004).

Equitable preparation for student achievement is increasingly important in response to the needs of the twenty-first century economy (Foley, Mishook, & Lee, 2013; Drotos & Cilesiz, 2014). Substantial gaps in academic achievement and college readiness exist by race, income, and parents' education level and a significant discrepancy endures between the academic attainment levels of those from lower income and middle to high income families. California's students score well below the national average on the 8<sup>th</sup> grade National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and low socioeconomic students score a grade level below peers nationwide (Stillings Candal, 2018; Brighthouse, Kurlaender, Reardon, Doss, Reber, Kalogrides, & Reed, 2018). Inequalities among California high schools in the number of students being prepared for and admitted to a University of California (UC) exist by ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and school district (Martin, Karabel & Jaquez, 2005). Pointing out that many California school districts and high schools are segregated by socioeconomic status (SES) and race as a result of both geography and boundary lines, these researchers found that students in poorer high schools had unequal access to college, to some extent as the result of unequal access to academic preparation.

Schools serving predominantly minority and low socioeconomic status students offer fewer advanced and more remedial courses in academic subjects, and as a result, offer fewer advanced opportunities, resulting in tracking which exacerbates an inequitable access to knowledge (Jencks, 1988; Martin, Karabel & Jaquez, 2005; Brighthouse et al., 2018). Students are tracked into remedial courses that segregates many minority students within schools, allocating fewer academically challenging opportunities. Tracking compounds inequalities and expands the

achievement gap, which many have blamed on everything from genetic differences in intelligence to parenting or race (Darling-Hammond, 2004). In short, low SES means fewer opportunities to access rigorous educational opportunities which in turn means poor students are less likely to be college ready and prepared to compete in the global economy (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Hannah-Jones, 2014; Brighthouse et al., 2018).

To further exacerbate the achievement gap, students in predominately low-SES and high concentration minority schools are taught by a greater number of unqualified or underqualified teachers, as well as high turnover rates for teachers (Koppich, Humphrey, & Marsh, 2015). The unavailability of teachers who could more rigorous academic or advanced courses reinforces these inequalities in access. Tracking of both teachers and students continues to happen even though there is evidence that it does not substantially benefit high achievers and puts low achieving students at a serious disadvantage; good teaching is a scarce resource must be allocated more equitably (Hannah-Jones, 2014, Darling-Hammond & Plank, 2015). When resources are limited, they generally get allocated to the students whose parents, advocates, or representatives have the most political clout (Hannah-Jones, 2014) which usually means the best teachers teach the best classes to the most advanced students. Even teachers themselves are tracked, with those judged to be the most competent, experienced, or with the highest status assigned to high achieving students in more rigorous courses such as honors or advanced placement (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Darling-Hammond & Plank, 2015).

Unequal school funding has caused disproportionate harm to minority and low socioeconomic students, perpetuating the achievement gap (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Affeldt, 2013; Stillings Candal, 2018). School boundaries, funding policies and formulas have caused high poverty and high minority concentration urban districts receive fewer dollars resulting in

fewer resources than more affluent or suburban schools and districts (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Affeldt, 2013; Stillings Candal, 2018). As school districts work to lessen the achievement and opportunity gap through changes to California's school finance laws, understanding what equity means and how it is implemented can be of value to leaders engaged in changing the landscape of academic outcomes for students.

### **Conceptions of Equity**

When considered in the context of K12 public education, the meaning of equity remains unclear. As discussed previously, equity is sometimes confused with equality and used interchangeably, even though the equality denotes similarity or sameness, and equity's definition is more about the tailored needs of a smaller group or individual. Several researchers (Guiton & Oakes, 1995; Rawls, 2009; Bulkley, 2013) have considered the ideological foundations of equity, and established three coherent, commonly ascribed to ideological positions or conceptions on equality, Libertarian, Liberal, and Democratic Liberal. Though other conceptions of equity exist such as the Transformative conception (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015) or the Retributive conception (Lamont & Favor, 2013), this paper will focus on just the three perspectives presented through the work of Guiton & Oakes (1995). Guiton & Oakes (1995) considered what standards should be used in determining whether or not equity is achieved and whether or not the primary concern should be to assess the extent to which all students have the same opportunities or should attention be paid to the nature of these opportunities. Finally, they asked if judgements should be made about whether available opportunities are adequate to accomplish various goal of the educational system.

The Libertarian conception of equity is a merit-based ideology, believing that all students have an equal opportunity to avail themselves of the same education given to all students. This

conception of equity focuses on the processes by which students attain or share educational commodities (Guiton & Oakes, 1995; Bulkley, 2013). Through this perspective, every student is entitled to equal access to an education and decisions about giving students more or less (inequitably) is decided through a process which is procedurally fair and allocated based on characteristics of the students, in a meritocratic fashion. Educational opportunities and resources may be shared amongst students inequitably based on different qualifications. In a Libertarian system, a student with higher qualifications would be given more resources or better opportunities because they are more deserving or require a better opportunity to have their needs met (Guiton & Oakes, 1995). For example, students are placed in Advanced Placement (AP) courses because they have scored higher on exams and thus have the right to access a more rigorous course, perhaps with a better qualified teacher and in a smaller group, whereas a student who scores lower does not deserve or require such a high level of rigor, nor do they need a better qualified teacher. To a Libertarian, these opportunities are the system working correctly to meet students' needs. The Libertarian view expects unequal outcomes because the system provides merit-based opportunities like talent and effort, to decide who gets goods and services (Guiton & Oakes, 1995; Allbright et al., 2018).

The Liberal conception of equity holds that each student has an equal opportunity and that access to educational opportunities and resources is based on fair competition, similar to the Libertarian conception. The difference between the Liberal and Libertarian conceptions lies in the characteristics used to evaluate need, specifically the Liberal considers race, socioeconomic status or gender valid reasons for estimating a meritocratic allocation of goods and services (Guiton & Oakes, 1995). Further, the Liberal conceptions supports, to some degree, a compensation for disadvantage, to make sure students' can compete in a fair and equal contest

however, there is still an expectation of unequal outcomes which are reflective of merit (Allbright et al., 2018). Using the same example of placement in AP courses, the Liberal would be concerned not with the placement in the courses, which is aligned with the Libertarian conception, but with the equal access to goods and services within each level of course thus a student in an AP class will have a more rigorous experience and be more prepared for college. The Liberal conception of equity would want to make sure that these goods and services, which might include teacher qualification or curriculum, are enhancing or inhibiting students' opportunity to succeed (Guiton & Oakes, 1995; Bulkley, 2013).

The Democratic Liberal conception of equity takes a more fundamental view of equality, believing that an equitable distribution of educational resources is required to affect student performance. The Democratic Liberal conception does not consider fair competition or processes for acquiring goods and services. It is about equal access to outcomes, not deciding the allocation of goods and services through a merit-based process (Bulkley, 2013). Rather, the Democratic Liberal conception "places a far greater emphasis on whether the distribution of resources and opportunities situates recipients equally to achieve the established standard" (Guiton & Oakes, 1995, p. 331). This conception considers race, gender and socioeconomic status to be characteristics that might qualify a student for additional resources or services. In comparison to the Libertarian emphasis on resources and the Liberal emphasis on equity in processes, the Democratic Liberal is focused on the resources and processes that influence student achievement.

Guiton and Oakes (1995) concluded that if these competing conceptions of equity are not acknowledged, discussed and addressed in the decision-making process, equity will not be achieved for students. Without a singular understanding of equity, organizational decision-



making processes such as the Local Control and Accountability Plan, will fail to diagnose, address, monitor or change the existing achievement and opportunity gaps that persist for students. Guiton and Oakes (1995) stated, “By keeping our conceptions of equity in the forefront of our measurement efforts, we enhance the possibility of fairly representing pluralistic interests, of recognizing and considering competing values in our decisions, and of providing tools to aid an ongoing, dynamic effort to consider what we want from our schools and to accomplish those ends” (p. 333).

Governor Brown’s efforts with the Local Control and Accountability Plan process align most closely with the Democratic Liberal conception of equity with some notable exceptions. The governor’s belief that historically underserved student groups, specifically English Learners, Foster youth, and low socioeconomic students, have greater needs and thus require additional resources is the foundation of the LCFF and the LCAP. The LCFF’s emphasis on providing differentiated funding and supplemental services is intended to promote more equitable outcomes such as higher test scores, college readiness measures, and other outcomes that are indicative of a lessening of the achievement gap in alignment with the Democratic Liberal conception (Allbright et al., 2018). The LCFF’s aim to compensate for disadvantages on the basis of socioeconomic status, however, overlaps with the Liberal conception of equity that resources should be allocated unequally. Allbright et al. (2018) concluded that a clear, strong frame for understanding equity within the context of a larger organizational plan such as the LCAP, will benefit school districts in the creation of a coherent, effective blueprint for student outcomes.

## California's Local Control Funding Formula

Upon his re-election to governor in 2010, Jerry Brown pledged to once again reform funding to California's school through a system called the Local Control Funding Formula (Brown, 2013). The LCFF purports to promote equity in that the state is distributing money to districts on the basis of student need through a formula it calls equitable and then, expects local districts to understand and respond to the unique needs of their student population in their own ways.

The LCFF distributes funding from the state to districts through three sources, called grants: the *base* grant, the *supplemental* grant, and the *concentration* grant. The base grant, which varies by grade level, is based on enrollment and Average Daily Attendance (ADA) (Brown, 2013). Supplemental and concentration grants are directed to districts with high-need students, and are intended to address with extra funding, the inequities faced by those high need student groups. The LCFF defines high need students in the following three categories: as low-income, English Learner, and/or foster care youth (Hill and Ugo, 2015; Perry 2013; Humphrey et al., 2017). Supplemental and concentration grants are developed through the use of unduplicated student counts (Hill & Ugo, 2015). School districts receive supplemental funding which is equal to 20 percent of the base grant for each high-need student. Districts receive concentration funds, equal to 50 percent of the base grant, when more than 55 percent of their students are high need. (Hill & Ugo, 2015).

The Local Control Funding Formula's (LCFF) base and supplemental funding options, intended to provide not equal but equitable funds for California's schools, are meant to simplify the state's approach to funding local education agencies (LEA's) and to give more control and flexibility to local education leaders. Researchers have pointed out the challenge of creating a

new school finance system while California is redefining the primary goal of the Common Core State Standards, that all students leave high school ready for college and career (Perry, 2013; Beach, Their, Collins Lench, & Coleman, 2015). While the LCFF gives school districts more money to support disadvantaged students, it still fails to guarantee adequate school funding or alter state limits, such as Proposition 13 limits on property taxes (Edley & Kimner, 2018, p. 6).

The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) identified eight state priorities and required all school districts to create a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) which addresses each priority. Historically, many student groups, such as those identified by the state as priority groups (low socioeconomic, English learners, and Foster youth), have been disenfranchised in public education and the LCAP methodology has targeted how to better serve those who have been traditionally left out. The LCFF, however, fails to address the multiplicity of students by using an unduplicated count. A low income, EL student does not generate twice the revenue and districts with more disadvantaged students do not automatically receive more money than those with high need students (Imazeki, 2018; Bruno, 2018). Approximately 15 percent of a district's revenue comes from local property taxes (Bruno, 2018). Added to this is the impact of aging school facilities around the state and sadly, the LCFF does not provide any funding for construction or modernization of school facilities. Low income, low property value school districts tend to have higher concentrations of disadvantaged students and are much less likely to be able to generate the revenue needed to fund their school facility needs through matching state funds (Edley & Kimner, 2018). Wealthier districts generate more revenue through higher property taxes, local bonds and developer fees from new construction projects and thus can qualify for more matching dollars from the state (Brunner & Vincent, 2018; Edley & Kimner, 2018).

The literature reveals that the Local Control Funding Formula's (LCFF) base and supplemental funding options, intended to provide not equal but equitable funds for California's schools, are meant to simplify the state's approach to funding local education agencies (LEA's) and to give more control and flexibility to local education leaders. Researchers also discuss the challenge of creating a new school finance system while California is redefining the primary goal of the Common Core State Standards, that all students leave high school ready for college and career (Perry, 2013; Beach, Their, Collins Lench, & Coleman, 2015). While the LCFF gives school districts more money to support disadvantaged students, it still fails to guarantee adequate school funding or alter state limits, such as Proposition 13 limits on property taxes (Edley & Kimner, 2018, p. 6).

#### **LCFF Accountability: The Local Control and Accountability Plan**

The LCFF transferred the decision-making power from state categorical programs and state or federal agencies to local education agencies (LEA's), counties and districts, with the expectation that LEA's know best how to serve the students in their districts. The LCFF intentionally moved to a model where LEA's can be strategic and coherent in planning and budgeting to meet the needs of each unique, local student group, based on the size and demographics of schools and districts, while maintaining a focus on improving student outcomes (Perry, 2013; Humphrey et al., 2017). The state implemented the new Local Control and Accountability Plan as its new measurement system to ensure funds were spent equitably on high need students (Hill & Ugo, 2015; Perry 2013; Humphrey et al., 2017). The LCFF also gave new oversight responsibilities to county offices of education to make sure that districts equitably distribute supplemental and concentration money for the benefit of high-need students.

The LCAP requires school districts to create a three year, overarching plan of goals, actions and interventions in response to the state's eight priority areas, and to annually report progress and expenditures to meet and match those areas (Hill & Ugo, 2015; Humphrey et al., 2017). Researchers have begun to examine the effect of community based reform, specifically the concept that local communities will better address their individual areas of inequities rather than working from a top down, from the state or federal government, mandate (Vasquez Heilig, Ward, Weisman, & Cole, 2014). School districts are required to develop the LCAP collaboratively and must engage all stakeholders in examining the equitable use of supplemental and concentration funding for high need students (Hill & Ugo, 2015; Humphrey et al., 2017).

Research points to the LCFF and the LCAP as evidence of a purposeful effort on the part of the state of California to close the achievement gap and make school finance more equitable, as well as address gaps which exist in college readiness (Sciarra & Hunter, 2015; Johnson & Tanner, 2018). Policymakers also suggest a shift in the deficit thinking model employed by districts; rather than focusing on preventing dropouts, districts should frame LCAP goals more positively, and aim for post-secondary outcomes (Edley & Kimner, 2018). While more funding seems to help raise graduation rates and academic achievement, there is not yet enough evidence that local control and less oversight from the state will reduce inequities for California's students (Johnson & Tanner, 2018). By shining the spotlight on the inequities among student groups to at the local level, the state has withdrawn from a starring role in accountability, including enforcing or monitoring progress on equity goals (Edley & Kimner, 2018). California lawmakers have taken the position of encouraging continuous improvement using the new California School Dashboard to report student outcomes to the public. To date, the state has not established goals

related to equity of outcomes for students (Edley & Kimner, 2018; Brighthouse & Mullane, 2018; garears, Hough, Park, Willis, & Krausen, 2018; Hough, Byun, & Mulfinger, 2018).

The Education Trust West's 2017 report examined the extent to which low-income students, English learners, and foster youth who were promised greater support through the LCFF and LCAP are receiving a better education and found high-poverty districts are now receiving proportionately more dollars than more affluent districts however, disparities still exist. Improvements have been identified in poorer districts with gains in better student-teacher ratios and access to student support personnel (such as counselors) has improved but are still not equitable with wealthier districts. Though individual districts write and report progress in a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), the plans are long, dense and hard to quantify. Though the Dashboard measures progress on the eight indicators, districts are not required to show how the supplemental and concentration grant funds generated by high-need students are spent. Thus, there is still work to do to effect the closing of the achievement and opportunity gaps for students through the accountability system. Allbright and Marsh (2018) concluded that the responsibility for implementing the state's new equity-centric goals relies profoundly on local stakeholders in each school district to come to a consensus about how they interpret equity and student needs.

### **Constructing and Enacting Equity through a Stakeholder Decision-making Process**

The concept of equity in education is usually discussed in the context of access of opportunities and the distribution of resources (Darling-Hammond, 2004). The LCAP process calls for the active participation of students, their parents, teachers, and others in constructing an accountability plan that allocates resources to priority students through the lens of equity. The State of California and its Department of Education have provided little to no guidance about how to engage and guide stakeholders through the process. Additionally, no policies or

procedures have been enacted to address long-existing structural inequalities and achievement gaps, institutionalized inequities by race, language and socioeconomic status, and disparate school finances and facilities (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Brunner & Vincent, 2018).

### **Equitable Decision-Making**

“More money alone will not solve issues of equity... California must also distribute education funds more rationally, transparently, and fairly among districts” (Barondess, Schroeder, & Hahnel, 2012, p. 6). The success of the LCFF will depend on school districts improving outcomes for students, especially those for whom the achievement gap persists (Hill and Ugo, 2015). Moreover, the success of the LCAP process depends on a strong, shared conception of equity to define student need and allocate resources to support one group of students more than another. The process of stakeholder engagement in the LCAP requires actors to define need, develop goals and apportion funds through the lens of the state’s accountability outcomes including academic achievement and college readiness (Allbright et al., 2018). Because low socioeconomic students, students of color, and English Learners are far more likely to not be admitted to college and are almost four times more likely to leave college after the first year than those with wealthier families or college educated parents, stakeholders must to consider ways to reduce the effect of social factors and develop more equitable plans (Frempong, Ma, & Mensah, 2012; Perry, 2013, Pérez & McDonough, 2008; Drotos & Cilesiz, 2014).

Mintrop’s (2012) study of integrity and the role it plays in school leaders’ decision- and policy-making about students and school programs as a consideration in the development of the Local Control and Accountability Plan, questions the effect of local control in individual districts. Because school leaders are responsible for the writing of the LCAP, the idea of one person’s values or the moral values of a small group of people need to be evaluated when

considering what a school or district believes to be priorities for students. In other words, the LCAP permits personal values to determine or justify funding priorities. School leaders must ensure they are seeking out multiple perspectives and interventions, with proven, data-driven foundations, for high need students. The state's intention with the Local Control Funding Formula is that local communities will better address their individual areas of inequities rather than working from the 'top down' state or federal government mandate. However, this requires school districts to confront conflicting conceptions of equity, and the effect of their policies on those students who have traditionally received inequitable educational services while tackling the underlying issues of race, class, and power that permeate the public education system (Warren & Carrillo, 2015; Loeb, Edley, Imazeki, & Stipek, 2018).

Recent research has revealed that a district's size and geographic location has an effect on stakeholder engagement (Marsh et al., 2018). In California, approximately one-third of districts are small, with fewer than 2500 students and of those, 59% of them are also considered rural (Vincent, 2018). In the nation, more than one in four schools is considered rural, which equates to approximately 18% of all students being served in rural schools (Showalter, Klein, Johnson, & Hartman, 2017). Further, about 50% of rural students are considered low income and more than 25% is a child of color (Showalter, et al., 2017). Small and rural school districts face the same fiscal and systems problems as larger districts with far fewer local resources and fewer, diverse stakeholders provide input into the plan from varying perspectives. In California's small and rural school districts, the graduation rate was 77% in 2017, more than 5% below the state average (Swaak, 2018; Showalter et al., 2017). Further, small and rural districts in California have higher percentages of rural English Learners and low income students than others in the nation, and students from small and rural schools take college readiness indicators like AP, SAT



and ACT less often and with less success when compared to urban and suburban school districts (Showalter et al., 2017).

Though all California districts report challenges with low levels of engagement in the LCAP process especially by traditionally underserved stakeholders such as parents of low income of EL students, smaller and rural school districts struggle more than larger, urban or suburban school districts (Marsh & Koppich, 2018). A 2018 study of superintendents by the Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) revealed that stakeholder engagement opportunities tend to be dominated by a few stakeholders instead of a variety of stakeholders from diverse groups (Marsh & Koppich, 2018). Fifty-five percent of superintendents in California reporting this phenomenon of engagement being dominated by a few stakeholders as a challenge in the LCAP process compared to a higher, 62% of rural or small school superintendents and a lower 48% in suburban and urban districts. Larger districts, with higher concentrations of underserved student groups were more likely to report that the LCFF has facilitated the opportunity for more frequent and robust stakeholder participation, especially by families of student groups targeted for support by the LCFF (EL, foster youth, low socio-economic) but, find it difficult to achieve robust engagement. Smaller districts and rural districts reported that participation among the parents of LCFF's target group students was more difficult than urban and suburban school districts. Small, rural districts were significantly more likely than their counterparts in suburban and urban districts to report these challenges with low-income stakeholders. Seventy-three percent of small, rural districts reported difficulties engaging LCFF targeted student and parent groups in comparison with 56% suburban or urban districts (Marsh & Koppich, 2018).

It seems logical: needier students need more; they need more support, more time to master skills, more scaffolding to build background knowledge that may not be present if they are English Learners or low income. However, the reality is that the process of making decisions at the local level by those who ostensibly have the best insight into the needs of the unique local students is still highly dependent upon local actors. Making sense of competing interests for limited resources, meritocratic philosophies and policies, misconception of equity and day to day challenges continue to pressure the development of an equitable Local Control and Accountability Plan for the benefit of California's neediest students. Furthermore, the process of making sense of these interests is interwoven with the networks and interactions of stakeholders within a district.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

As stakeholders make meaning of students' need through data, their points of view are sometimes contested or affected by social interactions with others (Schmidt & Datnow, 2005). This combination of making meaning while interacting with other stakeholders in the context of the LCAP has guided the development of a theoretical framework that blends sensemaking and social network theory.

#### **Sensemaking Theory**

Sensemaking is a theoretical approach that seeks to understand the process of organizing ideas and words into actions and systems. More precisely, sensemaking is an iterative process in the pursuit of making meaning within organizations (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). At a basic level, sensemaking is about answering the question, "What's the story here?", naming and categorizing the unknown, making meaning of things that defy normal patterns, are surprising or confusing, and creating a system, structure or policy as a result of the process. Sensemaking is

about “the continued redrafting of an emerging story so that it becomes more comprehensive, incorporates more of the observed data, and is more resilient in the face of criticism” (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 415).

Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld (2005) make the argument that sensemaking fills important gaps in organizational theory and that they are interdependent; organization emerges through sensemaking. Specifically, people organize to make sense of “inputs” and enact sense back into the world to make that world or organization more orderly. The process of developing a Local Control and Accountability Plan is meant to be iterative; district leaders present stakeholders with student data and identify areas of need. Together, the stakeholders gather input, develop goals, and then share a draft of the LCAP several times over the course of four to six months. Each time the LCAP is shared, the stakeholders make sense of the data and opinions of others, working towards a common purpose. In schools and school districts, this collective sense-making process requires clear consistent communication to create systemic coherence around the development of goals and the allocation of resources (Agullard & Goughnour, 2006).

“Organizational sensemaking is first and foremost about the question: How does something come to be an event for organizational members? Second, sensemaking is about the question: What does an event mean? In the context of everyday life, when people confront something unintelligible and ask "what's the story here?" their question has the force of bringing an event into existence” (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 410).

The process of sensemaking engages a network or group of people making sense of something new (Weick, 1995). The interaction of the people in the organization with the rules, policies, norms and institutional knowledge, shapes how a process evolves and what the outcomes may be developed collaboratively by the network of actors (Almeida, 2016). Sensemaking can be a useful framework to consider how stakeholders in a school district

understand and use student data to create an accountability plan which meets the needs of students while aligning with state mandated goals and the values of the district. The process of sensemaking can be used to mediate between a set of circumstances, like student achievement, and the actions taken by the organization, such as the allocation of goods and services to a specific group of students. The student data used in the development of the LCAP is not what causes action, it is the meanings that stakeholders form about data that determines the resulting LCAP (Weick et al., 2005; Almeida, 2016).

The ongoing, cyclical process that is sensemaking occurs in a social context with multiple actors (Almeida, 2016). A person's social interactions play a role in developing their understanding of the elements of the topic (Coburn, 2001). Although the individual actors may interpret the same information differently or may take different actions as a result of their role through the activity, they also develop new meanings and shared understandings of the ideas that emerge from their interactions with each other (Coburn, 2001; Weick, 1995; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002; Almeida, 2016). In addition to the voices of the other actors in a group, the norms, values, culture and traditions of the organization (or school) can influence individuals' interpretations of their environments and experiences. Research in education has examined how teachers and administrators collective sensemaking has influenced the implementation of policies and reforms (Coburn, 2001; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002; Allbright et al., 2018). Spillane, Reiser, and Reimer (2002) found that teachers' perceptions and understandings of policies are influenced and facilitated by administrators and resulted in differing interpretations and enactments of policies. Similarly, Allbright et al. (2018) found the collective beliefs of local stakeholders in the LCAP process may be a key factor in the success or failure of an equity-centered reform effort. The importance of how actors interact in the process of making meaning

and enacting change requires a deeper examination of social networks. While sensemaking is a useful frame to consider how local stakeholders understand and use data about student need in the allocation of goods and resources, social network theory may also support a more in depth understanding of the ways actors collaborate and make meaning for themselves and the organization.

Honig and Coburn (2008) observed that decision-making processes, like the LCAP, push stakeholders to wrestle with ambiguity or meaning around an artifact or piece of data. The contests, discussions, questions and discovery that emerge from making meaning of an unknown or ambiguous artifact make meaning within the context of the particular environment, in this case the district, and build a working knowledge and common language for stakeholders. The LCAP process required stakeholders, in this case, teachers and administrators to grapple with the ambiguous, intangible meaning of equity and socially construct meaning within the context of student need from data. Collectively, stakeholders made sense of need and interpreted the value of those needs equitably – or not – in the development of a plan that allocates money to specific goals and services for particular student groups. This process of making sense happened over time, with different stakeholders participating at fluctuating degrees, thus introducing contrasting viewpoints or varying degrees of institutional, social knowledge.

### **Social Network Theory**

Social network theory is tied to concepts of social capital development and can facilitate our understanding of human interaction by bringing to light patterns in social structures (Moolenaar, 2012). Social network theory suggests that successful change in an organization such as a school district, requires attending to the formal structures of the organization, as well as the informal social networks. These informal networks create webs of understanding, influence,

and knowledge throughout the process of change (Daly, 2015). Social network theory views individuals within an organization as interdependent not independent, because they are embedded in the social structures of the organization, namely the school (Moolenaar, 2012). In the case of schools, individual teachers belong to a curricular-centered department and/or grade level but, beyond that they have friendships and connections with other teachers, leaders, or stakeholders on the basis of other factors. What's more, research into social networks has found personal feelings play a role in the development of work relationships, more so than evaluations of competence of skill sets (Casciaro & Lobo, 2005). In the context of the formal structures of a school district, these more informal networks play a key role in the degree to which a goal or reform effort is accomplished (Casciaro & Lobo, 2005; Spillane & Kim, 2012; Datnow, 2012)

In a school social network, information or misinformation, opinions and plans are shared via these webs of relationships. Social network theory rejects the idea that information and knowledge are shared in a linear fashion through formal processes such as training or professional development. Rather, social network theory believes that in a network, one's "social structure, position, and the quality of ties has a direct influence on the types of knowledge and information an individual receives" (Daly, 2015, p. 2). The nature and quality of school social networks are linked to reform initiatives which result in improved instructional changes (Coburn, Choi, & Mata, 2015). These networks may determine how well an initiative or idea will take hold.

In education, social network theory has focused extensively on change or reform efforts and the role of the teacher collaboration in facilitating these changes (Moolenaar, 2012). Researchers have focused on the ways in which teachers' social networks affect instruction, learning, and change efforts; specifically teacher's social networks can both help or hinder a

reform effort (Moolenaar, 2012; Penuel, Sun, Frank, & Gallagher, 2012; Datnow, 2012). In addition, school leaders also plan an important role in the participative decision-making process. School and district leaders must provide instructional leadership, establish a coherent vision, and maintain a focus on equitable student outcomes (Rorrer, Skrla, and Scheurich, 2008; Datnow, 2012). In general, social networks in schools often are not reflective of traditional hierarchical structures, with a principal as the leader, the provider of information or the instigator of change. However, the relationships between leaders and teachers are essential to implementing and sustaining change and can be influenced to some degree by policy. Research suggests that district policies and leaders can structure how information and people are organized and providing a coherent of vision can impact the ties between people in social networks (Coburn, Choi, & Mata, 2015). Understanding the more informal networks can increase school leaders' ability to share information and resources in the most effective and efficient ways to increase outcomes for students (Finnigan & Daly, 2010).

In an iterative reform process, the architecture of teacher social networks may change which may shape the sensemaking process. Reform efforts and new practices are more likely to be adopted from a trusted colleague rather than from a stranger or someone who is not trusted to a high level. Social network theory also assumes that knowledge and reform efforts are socially constructed, consequently participative decision-making requires the support of existing social networks (Finnigan & Daly, 2010; Daly, 2015). Additionally, strong social networks can facilitate the sharing of information and increase problem solving, especially when school leaders create a meaningful and engaging structure for collaboration (Coburn, Choi, & Mata, 2015). Researchers have found that social networks can effect the mindset or attitude of an individual or group of teachers within a network. Information and attitudes pass from peer to

peer, and may be diminished or become less persuasive the further from the source they are (Cole & Weinbaum, 2015). Robust social networks can facilitate a diffusion of accurate information, especially when school leaders foster strong ties through effective communication and structures with the most connected teachers within a social network (Cole & Weinbaum, 2015).

The LCAP process is grounded in the requirement that stakeholders participate in the development of a plan that is best suited for the specific needs of the unique local population that a particular school district serves. The belief that local actors, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members, know and understand the needs of the students they serve and thus, know what needs to be done to close the achievement and achievement gaps for underserved students, is paramount to the decision-making process of developing goals and assigning services and funds. The idea that school districts need the freedom at the local level to enact reform strategies is appealing to legislators in part because it reaffirms a long-held notion that teachers have the agency, knowledge and capacity to improve schools (Datnow, 2012).

In a participative decision-making process like the LCAP where many stakeholders with competing interests and varying degrees of connections within the social network are competing for resources and opinions, social network theory was important to characterize the ways in which stakeholders make sense of student data and need. A careful examination of an organization's social networks was important to detect acceptance of or resistance to the ideas or changes being suggested, and may provide insight into the effectiveness of a reform initiative (Daly, 2015; Atteberry & Bryk, 2015). Further, social network theory provided insight into how the perceptions of equity held by a social network may change – or no - throughout the LCAP



development process or may be influenced to change, or resist change, by others within the network.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Social network theory enhances sensemaking theory in the context of equitable decision-making in education. Sensemaking happens both individually and collectively. Consequently, an examination of the role of social networks within a sensemaking process may enhance existing institutional knowledge and potentially provide insights into the role of stakeholders in the LCAP process. Social network theory suggests that successful change, in an organization such as a school district, requires attending to the formal structures or hierarchies of the organization as well as the informal social networks. These informal networks create webs of understanding, influence, and knowledge throughout the process of change (Daly, 2015). As it relates to this study, the LCAP's stakeholder process is about making sense of student needs in competition with individual belief systems, leadership philosophies and ingrained systems; actors in the system are tasked with making sense of information to make equitable decisions for schools and students. Organizational change is socially constructed by making meaning with data, information and the people in the network; "Who you know defines what you know" (Daly, 2015, p. 2).

This study was not grounded in a specific definition of equity rather, the intention of this study was to understand how stakeholders perceived equity, how those perceptions may be influenced when contested, and how they perceived the equity of the process of developing an LCAP. Ching (2017) observed that "Equity constructed in the field has a local character" (p.9). Thus, combining a sensemaking framework with social network theory in the context of a single case study enabled an examination of how equity is defined and implemented, and might provide

insight for other leaders into structures that support or inhibit a process like the LCAP. Together, sensemaking and social network theory were used to highlight how stakeholders' prior knowledge and social context influenced their sensemaking of the student need in the LCAP process. Jencks (1988) observed, "No one publicly defends unequal educational opportunity" however, knowing that inequities in educational outcomes persist, this study aimed to understand conceptions of equity in the LCAP stakeholder process.

### **Summary**

Linda Darling Hammond (2004) observed that a prevailing view in society is that when students fail to achieve, it is their own fault because they did not take advantage of the opportunity to better themselves through the educational system when in fact, differences in teacher quality, socioeconomic status, language, parent education levels, curriculum, services, school funding, and class sizes, are the more likely culprits. The moral imperative lies in the purpose of public education as a right for all citizens and an equal opportunity for everyone to improve or better themselves. However, equity in American educational system is better understood through a deficit lens, as it has resulted in a long history of sustained, systemic inequities for students from historically low-performing groups. Though the LCFF and the LCAP are a step in the right direction, "...the U.S. can't spend its way out of inequity..." (Stillings Candal, 2018). The process of placing the responsibility for improving educational opportunities for students through equitable funding and reform efforts lies heavily on the ways local stakeholders perceive and enact meaning of equity.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

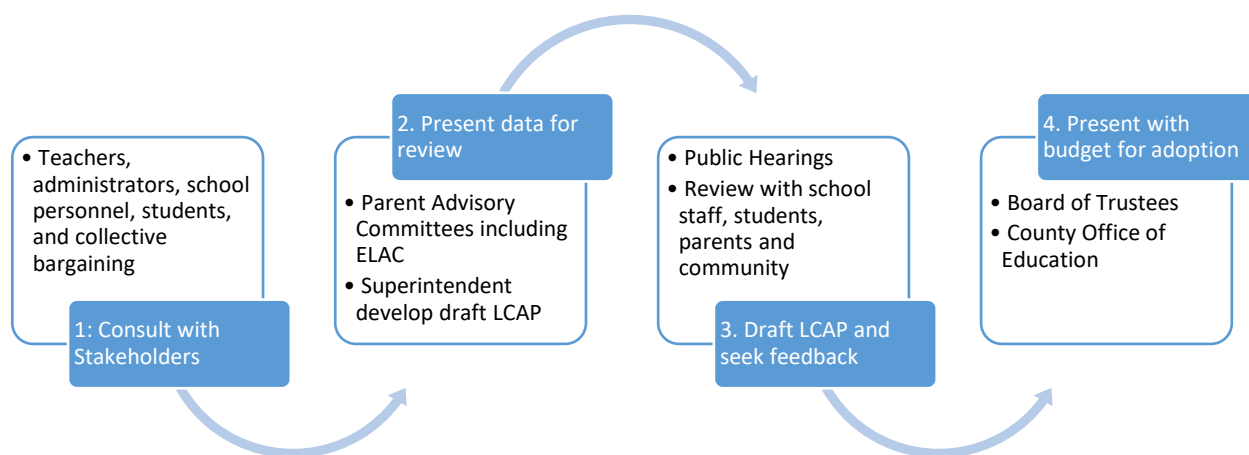
The ways in which California school districts define and implement equity through the development of a Local Control and Accountability Plan is a complex undertaking and very few researchers to date have conducted in depth studies of the actual process of developing said plan. Rather, the majority of research to date has focused on outcomes such as test scores or resource allocation, and plan development within the context of the quality and quantity of stakeholder engagement (Calefati, 2017; Marsh et al., 2018; Perry, Corpuz, Higbee, & Jaffe, 2019). Examining the process of developing an LCAP in a school district required a careful and comprehensive methodology to investigate the process within its unique local context as it unfolds over time.

All public K-12 school districts in California are required to develop a three-year Local Control and Accountability Plan which is aligned to state and local indicators and data. The process of developing this three year plan takes several months and requires an extensive analysis of school and district student needs as they develop a limited number of overarching goals with related data-driven targets, actions districts will take to achieve their goals and funds are allocated to support the action and services. District budgets must be aligned with the three-year LCAP and each school's Single Plan for Student Achievement must also align to district goals and the LCAP. Districts are required to meet with and gather input from all stakeholders. California Education Code § 52060(g) defines stakeholders as “teachers, principals, administrators, other school personnel, local bargaining units of the school district, parents, and pupils” (“Local Control and Accountability Plan,” n.d.). Districts must also describe the steps they took in their LCAP to engage parents, pupils, and the community and how this engagement

contributed to developing the LCAP (“Local Control and Accountability Plan,” n.d.). The California Department of Education provides districts with a template for writing the three-year LCAP which must be approved by the local school board by July 1 each year and is monitored and reviewed by county offices of education as well.

Once a three-year LCAP is developed and approved, districts cannot change the overarching goals until the next three-year cycle. Districts annually review progress on goals and can make small changes to the actions and services in support of their goals but, districts cannot deviate from the three-year plan. The three-year cycle of LCAP plan development and review is directed by the California Department of Education. The new three-year LCAP development cycle began in January 2020 when the state released the new LCAP template and plans were to be approved by local school boards by July 1, 2020. The annual cycle for developing an LCAP is shown below in Figure 2.

Figure 2. LCAP Development Process



*Figure 2.* The LCAP Development Process is a four phase, iterative process in which information is shared, feedback is gathered and combined, and then shared with each stakeholder group.

The 2020 LCAP process was disrupted by the COVID school closures; in the original timeline described above, the District would have held additional meetings for stakeholders to review the proposed 2020-2023 LCAP before it went to the Board of Trustees for public review and approval in June 2020. Instead, the process was delayed and all California districts will present abbreviated, short-term plans using a state's template to inform the board about a temporary LCAP from July 1 - December 2020. The state extended the timeline for plan approval to December 2020 to ensure adequate time for stakeholder engagement. The state required all districts to develop an abbreviated LCAP Operations Report by June 30, 2020 explaining the changes the district has made to support students during the COVID school closures.

Using the sensemaking framework and social network theory, a single case study of Fairweather School District (FSD) was conducted to understand how equity was defined and implemented in small and rural school districts. "Case studies illustrate a problem; indicate a means for solving a problem; and/or shed light on needed research, clinical applications, or theoretical matters" (VandenBos, 2010). The process was observed as it unfolded in a small, rural school district in southern California for the purpose of better understanding the complexity of 'local control' within the context of understanding how stakeholders define equity and create a written plan for students which is the embodiment of their beliefs on equity. Between December 2019 and May 2020, observations of a variety stakeholder meetings were conducted and two specific groups of stakeholders – teachers and administrators – were interviewed. Relevant documents such as meeting notes and agendas, student achievement data, budgets, and other district artifacts were collected and examined. Collectively, this information was used to uncover the degree to which the process of creating the goals, actions and services of the LCAP reflected the collective

conception of equity and the degree to which the stakeholders perceived the process of making sense resulted in the development of an equitable LCAP engagement process.

Conducting a case study in this manner enabled the collection of rich data in a manner consistent with sensemaking and social network theory, the theoretical frameworks employed in this study. Sensemaking is grounded in cognitive and organizational psychology and is used to examine how actors interpret and make meaning of their experiences and environments (Weick, 1995; Almeida, 2016). A qualitative methodology was used, which was compatible with the process of examining the phenomenon of defining and implementing equity. Focused on lived and situated experiences, this study examined the LCAP process with an emphasis on understanding the perspective of each group of stakeholders as they made sense of and defined equity for the district's students. A case study offered flexibility in the design of the data collection and analysis needed to describe, articulate, and present with reasonable fullness how sense is made of equity in everyday organizational life (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005; Yin, 1989; Ching 2017). One in three school districts in California are considered small and rural, with fewer than 2500 students (Vincent, 2018), making the need for understanding the challenges faced in these smaller districts with fewer voices important. Small and rural school districts experience challenges such as less tax revenue, higher levels of poverty, and limited resources for students (McColl & Malhoit, 2004). As such, small and rural school districts are an area of interest, for their unique needs, which can be examined through the lens of a qualitative case study.

### **Rationale for the Case Study Approach**

A case study is a type of ethnographic research which incorporates procedures for describing, analyzing, and interpreting the patterns of behaviors, beliefs, and language or a

particular group, over a period of time (Creswell, 2012). A case study is an in-depth investigation of a bounded system which Creswell (2012) defines as an activity, event, or process “separated out for research in terms of time, place or some other physical boundaries” (p. 465). In conducting a case study, researchers are able to develop a deep understanding of the “situation and meaning for those involved” (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). Bounded case studies like this are often found in traditional social sciences including education where there may be an exhaustive effort made to understand a phenomenon, activity or event (Rudestam & Newton, 2015).

The qualitative case study design is a form of phenomenological inquiry which attempts to describe and understand the LCAP process through the people who participate in it (Rudenstam & Newton, 2015). A phenomenology focuses on people’s ‘lived’ experiences, from their own perspective, which is gathered by a researcher first through a broad general inquiry in an effort to seek a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon being studied (Roberts, 2010). The researcher collects data through observations, interviews, document analysis and other methods which provide insight into the phenomenological experience. In contrast with quantitative studies, a qualitative case study like this one relied on data in the form of the opinions, perceptions, actions and feelings of the people involved in the process, as well as using detailed descriptions of the setting.

The LCFF and LCAP are situated in a political environment where the word equity has emerged as the purpose for decision-making related to students. This dissertation examined how stakeholders in a small, rural school district came to terms with what equity means for their local environment and what happened as stakeholders made recommendations to assign resources and services in the name of equity and closing the achievement gap through the LCAP process. Guided by a conceptual framework which blended organizational sensemaking and social

network theory, this study is presented in a narrative format based on interviews, observations and document analysis, collected over the six month period in which all school districts in California develop the new, three year accountability plans. Ching (2017), in her study of how practitioners define and enact equity in a community college posed the query, “who should be the target of equity efforts and what the focus of equity should be are as messy in practice as in research” (p. 9). Defining equity and making sense of it for the purpose of supporting students and increasing academic achievement is a messy process. This case study describes the process in which the creation of the three-year LCAP and enactment of equity developed; how equity was discussed and constructed, and ultimately how stakeholder-participants perceived the process. Though most of the data for this study was collected prior to the COVID-19 school closures, it is an unwavering snapshot of the way in the LCAP process played out in a small and rural district.

Employing a case study methodology can be used in a situation in which there is a concentrated effort to understand a single element of a more complex concept (Rudenstam & Newton, 2015). In the case of the Local Control and Accountability Plan process, there are many required processes and stakeholders involved in the development, reporting, and revising of the plan, through an iterative process over a period of time. This dissertation examined one element: stakeholder input, and focused on just the interactions between teachers and administrators within the larger process of plan development. Case studies, like this proposed study, are often used in practice-oriented disciplines like education to scrutinize the organization, event, process or program that makes up the bounded system (Rudenstam & Newton, 2015; Yin 2016).

Qualitative researchers generally begin with broad questions in which they seek to understand why something happens the way it does. Qualitative researchers look at the essential



character or nature of something, not the quantitative data, to understand the phenomenon they are studying (Roberts, 2010). Denzin and Lincoln (2002) observe that qualitative research is a situated activity that positions the researcher as an observer in a bounded space and time, with the researcher as the instrument of observation. Qualitative researchers are interested in the meanings, labels, and language people attach to the activities and events in their area of study (Roberts, 2010). They are open to watching the process unfold in front of them, in real world settings with not attempts to manipulate or experiment with the phenomenon. The development of the Local Control and Accountability Plan is such a process; district stakeholders review student achievement data and identify root causes of gaps in achievement. The state directs the process through annual measurable outcomes and requirements for districts to set goals which are concentrated on eight state priorities and targeted for specific, historically low-performing groups of students. The development of the LCAP is a prescribed, time-driven process in which stakeholders have multiple opportunities to give input into the development of the plan. Because of these structures, a case study was an ideal approach for the study of one element of the process.

### **Case Study Design**

A case study is a method of empirical inquiry that is ideal for investigating contemporary phenomenon, for examining questions of ‘how’ and ‘why’, and is particularly useful when the boundaries of a phenomenon are unclear (Yin, 1989). For the purposes of this study, the case represents one small, rural school district as its leaders worked through the process of developing a Local Control and Accountability Plan which incorporated stakeholder input into the equitable distribution of services and resources in the interests of improving outcomes of historically underserved student groups. This method was appropriate for the nature of this study in that it

has the ability to capture the complexities of the process through an examination of one element of the overall LCAP development process. Ultimately, this methodology allowed for a deep contextual analysis of how central office leaders guide stakeholders through a process that defines and implements equity for student groups whose needs may be greater than others. Further, the process of developing the LCAP and the ways in which participants navigate the process of making sense of student data and the allocation of equitable goods and services, may provide insights for other school leaders.

Under the umbrella of single case study research design, Creswell (2012) describes intrinsic case studies. In a single case study design it is implied that the data collected, - things like interviews, observations, documents - can be analyzed and he interpreted about the shared patterns of behavior or systems that emerge. Case study research reflects a deep and narrow inquiry into an event, phenomenon, program or activity involving people (Rudenstam & Newton, 2015). An intrinsic case study is used when the 'case' itself is studied. A case may represent an individual, a group, a program, events or activities. It may also represent a process that represents a sequence of activities, such as a curriculum development process.

This study used an intrinsic case study design to examine the process of involving stakeholders in the development of a three-year Local Control and Accountability Plan in the Fairweather School District, through document review, observations, and semi- structured interviews. The case study was appropriate because the phenomenon of interest, the Local Control and Accountability Plan stakeholder involvement process, had a level of complexity that required multiple data sources and methods to gain an in-depth understanding of how decisions are made when competing interests are at play (Yin, 1989; Denzin & Lincoln, 2002). The study details, in narrative form, the observations and data gathered from the phenomenon of study, the

development of the Local Control and Accountability Plan in the Fairweather School District while observing the experience of Fairweather's stakeholders as they defined what equity means for the students of the district, through their discussions and how they ultimately prioritized goals, services, and financial resources in the name of equity. The researcher selected a small number of stakeholders, teacher leaders and administrators, to participate in semi-structured interviews to gather more in-depth information about their sensemaking experiences in LCAP process, their conceptions of equity, and their connections to and how they were influenced by other stakeholders. A case study like this proposed study, is phenomenological in nature because attempted to examine how people describe the structures which are not generally visible, in this case, the development of a system that is perceived by the bounded system as equitable (Rudenstam & Newton, 2015). Phenomenology is a way for researchers to use interviews and other qualitative data collection methods to engage people in describing their lived experiences with the essential nature of an intangible, unmeasurable structure like conceptions of equity.

Creswell (2012) offers definitions of two types of observational roles relevant to this case study, as well as some judgement about their use in specific qualitative research settings. The first role is that of a participant observer, in which the researcher participates in the activity in which they are observing. As a central office administrator, the researcher was asked to participate, at times, in discussions about the development of the LCAP. The second role is a nonparticipant observer, in which the researcher simply observes and records the phenomenon of study. As a central office administrator, the researcher is a familiar face and had the agency to observe stakeholder groups without making the situation uncomfortable for colleagues or who lead these events. As a non-participant observer, the researcher was able to capture and record more of the non-verbal phenomenon or activities. Creswell (2012) cautions researchers that these

two roles can change within a situation and that engaging in both roles allows a researcher to switch between being involved subjectively in the situation and observing the situation more objectively.

The researcher included some personal experiences as a participant observer. It is important to note that the researcher was not responsible for writing the LCAP for the Fairweather School District. The researcher of this study was a district office administrator however, the areas of responsibility were only supportive of or tangential to the person who did the writing. The administrator who wrote the LCAP is in a leadership position equal to that of the researcher, and provided frequent feedback to the researcher. The administrator who wrote the LCAP met often with the researcher to debrief and converse about the various stakeholder engagement meetings and is included as a participant in this study. These conversations were recorded and transcribed, and used as data in this study. By including personal experiences as part of the study, the researcher was able to provide others with the minutiae of how equity was defined and implemented, and the effect of the more informal social network in the process of identifying student needs and allocating resources equitable. In conducting this case study, the researcher carefully attended to both roles. When situated as just a researcher or observer, the researcher attended to etic data which Creswell (2012) defines as information that is represented by the researchers interpretation of the participant's perspective. This data includes the language used by the participants to define equity or the degree of student need based on achievement data shared. When situated as a participant observer the researcher attended to emic data such as the expressions and interactions between members of the group of which she is a part (Creswell, 2012).

The close attention to how a phenomenon such as the development of a high-stakes LCAP through the lens of sensemaking and social network theory unfolds and is rendered with the various stakeholders, is the primary reason a case study was an appropriate methodology for this work. While this study was interested in how this process occurs in school districts around the state, this study is expected to be of value to (a) other small or rural school districts struggling to unify the conceptions of equity among various stakeholder groups with strong perspectives; (b) other small or rural school districts struggling to meet the needs to historically low-performing students groups with limited district fiscal resources; and (c) researchers working on stakeholder input, specifically related to equity and school finance.

### **Research Questions**

The current policies, practices, and the growing literature around the LCAP and LCFF have informed the direction of this dissertation. These factors, in tandem with the legal mandate to gather meaningful input into the needs of students in a local school district through participation of all stakeholders, have created the foundation to explore the following research questions:

1. How do stakeholders in a small, rural school district make sense of equity through their examination of student performance data and their interactions with other stakeholders within the context of the LCAP decision-making process?
2. How does this process of making sense result in an LCAP engagement process that stakeholders perceive as equitable?

At the heart of the data collection process are these two research questions. The study will use the methodology described below to answer the research questions.

## **Sample and Population**

The following section outlines how data was collected, explains the selection of a site for study and identifies the criteria for participant selection criteria. The methods used for data collection will be explained.

### **Site Selection and Access**

Fairweather School District was selected for study because it is a small, rural school district that has undergone significant changes in leadership in the past year and poised to enact a significant change effort this school year through the development of its new, three year LCAP. Fairweather has also undergone a major shift in student population size and demographics over the last decade, similar to many districts around the state, from a larger, mostly White and affluent district to a smaller ‘majority-minority’ district. District stakeholders have to balance current performance data that shows little improvement has happened, especially for historically low-performing students, over the past several years with new leadership at school sites, in the district office and on the school board. Further, stakeholders were forced to consider the district’s low-performing Differentiated Assistance status assigned by the State of California to schools which have failed to make progress in one or more of the state’s eight priority areas as well as one schools’ Comprehensive Support and Improvement status, assigned by the federal government for failure to improve graduation rates, in the development of the plan. In addition, the district was selected because it is comprised of a student population found in many schools across California. Fairweather School District serves approximately 2100 students, grades 9 – 12 and has experienced significant declining enrollment of more than one-third over the past decade. The district has one comprehensive high school, which accommodates over 90% of students in the districts, and two small alternative schools, a continuation high school and an

independent study high school. Located in southern California, Fairweather's student population is 68% Latino and 26% White, with the remaining 6% of students reported as African American (1.1%), American Indian (0.8%), Asian (1.7%), or reporting two or more races (1.9%) (CDE Dataquest, n.d.). Of the total student population 65% are classified as low socio-economic status and 15% are English Language Learners. In 2019-2020, the district's comprehensive high school was in the second year of Differentiated Assistance and facing greater sanctions from failure to meet specific California School Dashboard performance criteria under the state's Systems of Support that could result in further interventions by the county and state. The COVID-19 school closures mean that some data was not collected for the 2020 school year and meant that district's were placed 'on hold' with the systems of improvement for the 2020-2021 school year.

Several factors made Fairweather an ideal research site for investigating the sensemaking by individuals and groups around the enactment of equity. First, the state claims, for all intents and purposes, to have founded the LCFF and LCAP process on the need for equity, even if local actors have their own interpretations of student need and the meaning of equity. Second, as one of approximately 360 small and rural school districts in Southern California, Fairweather School District found itself identified for support and interventions by the state, through Differentiated Assistance, and the federal government, through Comprehensive Support and Improvement program. These systems of support and intervention have created an opportunity for school leaders to address equity and student need as a collective concern. Third, significant leadership changes in the district mean that stakeholders were lead through the LCAP process with a new leader who did not have the insider knowledge or biases that other stakeholders who have worked there for periods of time may have had. Finally, the process of developing a three-year LCAP was spread out over a four to six months, with many meetings, information gathering

sessions, trainings, and presentations. As an employee in the district, the researcher was situated to observe and participate in this lengthy process. Finally, the choice to conduct this study in the Fairweather School District was influenced by the researcher's place in the organization and the relationships with the various stakeholder groups: administrators, faculty and staff, students and parents. As a "known quantity" in the district, the researcher in this study had an established rapport with stakeholders that lessened the challenges of gaining access to a research site (Creswell, 2012). The superintendent allowed the study to be conducted in the district. Collectively, these factors made Fairweather an ideal and purposefully sampled case for the results it yielded about the equitable stakeholder decision-making process.

### **Participant Selection**

The researcher's place as an administrator in the district made it clear that a focused data collection plan was necessary given the time constraints associated with the LCAP process. Given the number of stakeholders who were involved in the LCAP process, it was neither possible methodologically nor beneficial from the perspective of time to observe, interview and collect data from all involved. For case studies, data collection serves to advance overall understanding of a case, thus, conducting interviews and observations without gaining further insight into a phenomenon suggests that these data sources have yielded what can be learned (Stake, 2000; Rudenstam & Newton, 2015). With this in mind, this study used convenience sampling to identify participants who were willing and available to be interviewed (Creswell, 2012). Adults who were invited to participate in this study participated in at least two LCAP stakeholder meetings, and included school and district administrators, classified employees and teacher leaders.



The LCAP process was led by one of three district office directors who report directly to the superintendent, two of which are certificated and the other classified management. The Director of Curriculum and Instruction led the entire LCAP process which included developing the timeline for gathering stakeholder feedback, writing the LCAP, and presenting it to the board of trustees for approval. The second director (the researcher) oversaw Special Education and Student Services and participated in the process but will be referred to as “the researcher” in this chapter. The third director oversaw the Business office and facilities. Fairweather School District has three schools with two principals, one for the 1900 student comprehensive high school and the principal other for the continuation high school and the independent study high school. Fairweather’s comprehensive high school had two assistant principals which was a reduction from the previous school year when there were three. Budget constraints necessitated the reduction from three to two assistant principals. Both assistant principals were new to their positions and both were teachers prior to the 2019-2020 school year, who had also been department chairs and held other leadership responsibilities.

Twenty-one eligible participants were invited to be interviewed based on criteria described. Six of the eligible participants were administrators, one was a classified employee and the remaining fourteen were teacher leaders. Of those twenty-one, twelve were contacted, ten responded to email invitations and eventually participated in individual interviews. The remaining two respondents were not interviewed due to scheduling conflicts. Five of the 10 participants were certificated teachers who lead a group, program or department; of the remaining five, one was a classified staff member, two were school site administrators, one was a district office administrator and one was the superintendent. Some of the remaining eligible participants were not invited to interview because they did not attend all of parts of the LCAP

engagement sessions. In the event that one of the initial twelve people contacted was unable to participate, someone else from the list would be called in no particular order.

The teachers and classified employees who made up the pool of possible participants were all leaders of a department or program; content level department chairs, AVID and IB coordinators, and leads for counseling and the college center. Per the collective bargaining agreement, teachers who have been elected department chair by their academic departments attend all LCAP sessions, monthly school site leadership meetings, serve on various district committees, participate in other compliance meetings and trainings, and attend meetings with feeder district representatives. The department chairs were responsible for taking the information communicated at the LCAP Leadership sessions back to their departments, sharing the data with those groups, collecting their feedback, and providing the director and other administrators with a summary of the feedback. For the purpose of reporting data and maintaining confidentiality, all employees who participated in the study by being interviewed are referred to as participants. Participants were numbered randomly (e.g., Participant 1) because of the small pool. When relevant, a descriptive may be used, for example, “participants 2 and 3, both teachers agreed ...” to provide additional descriptive insights into data. People referred to as ‘stakeholders’ are all others who were present at any of the meetings or events observed as part of this study. As discussed previously, this study was only conducted with stakeholders who were employees of the district thus parents, students, board members, and other community members were excluded in the interest of time and to limit the scope of the research.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

The theoretical frameworks supporting and constraining this study are integral in establishing focused and rigorous data analysis instruments. As discussed in the review of the

literature, a sensemaking framework along with social network theory are the theoretical lenses for the research. The frameworks serve as a means for analyzing the processes, actions and artefacts into a single case (Drotos & Cilesiz, 2017; Creswell, 2012). The process of making sense of the interactions between actors as they make meaning of equity in the context of student need and resource allocation help bring to light the multi-faceted nature of the stakeholder decision-making process. The people, the culture of the organization, the events, the network of actors and the physical setting are all part of the situation wherein sense is made both individually and with a group (Drotos & Cilesiz, 2017; Daly, 2015).

**Sensemaking Theory.** Sensemaking is an active, continuous process where an individual makes meaning of new information by incorporating it into their prior knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes (Weick, 1995). For both individuals and members of the larger cultural group or organization, prior knowledge, beliefs, expectations, and practices may constrain their understanding of a concept such as equity and the actions they in developing an LCAP in the name of equitable goods and services (Drotos & Cilesiz; Weick, 1995). Through sensemaking, people will consciously and unconsciously try to understand and interpret their own concepts, choosing which cues from their lived experiences and those of the others in their network, to create their own interpretation of new information and experiences (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). As stakeholders make meaning of students' need through data, their points of view are sometimes contested or affected by social interactions with others (Schmidt & Datnow, 2005). This combination of making meaning while interacting with other stakeholders in the context of the LCAP guided the development of a theoretical framework that blends sensemaking and social network theory.

**Social Network Theory.** Social network theory necessitates attending to the formal structures of the organization in addition to the informal social networks between actors, employees or others. These informal networks create webs of understanding, influence, and knowledge throughout the process of change (Daly, 2015). Social network theory views individuals within an organization as interdependent not independent, because they are embedded in the social structures of the organization, namely the school (Moolenaar, 2012). In the context of the formal structures of a school district, these more informal networks play a key role in the degree to which a goal or reform effort is accomplished (Casciaro & Lobo, 2005; Spillane & Kim, 2012; Datnow, 2012). Social network theory rejects the idea that information and knowledge are shared in a linear fashion through formal processes such as training or professional development. Rather, social network theory believes that in a network, the people you know and how well you know them characterize the knowledge and depth of understanding you have.

The ongoing, cyclical process that is sensemaking occurs in a social context with multiple actors (Almeida, 2016). Although the individual actors may interpret the same information differently or may take different actions as a result of their role through the activity, they also develop new meanings and shared understandings of the ideas that emerge from their interactions with each other (Coburn, 2001; Weick, 1995; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002; Almeida, 2016). In addition to the voices of the other actors in a group, the norms, values, culture and traditions of the organization (or school) can influence individuals' interpretations of their environments and experiences. The collective beliefs of local stakeholders in the LCAP process may be a key factor in the success or failure of an equity-centered process (Allbright, 2018). Sensemaking is a useful frame to consider how local stakeholders understand and use data

about student need in the allocation of goods and resources, and social network theory supports a more in depth understanding of the ways actors collaborated and made meaning for themselves and the organization.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected over a period between December 2019 and June 2020, the time period during which school districts developed a three year Local Control and Accountability Plan. All data gathered from participant resources were collected with explicit permission from the participants and in full compliance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. All electronic files created from the data collection process were saved on the researcher's laptop computer that is password-protected with an additional layer of encryption. All paper files created or gathered during the data collection process were securely stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home. In the sections that follow, an explanation will be provided for qualitative data collection methods used in this study. The data collection process in this study was grounded by two theoretical frameworks, sensemaking and social network theory, and incorporated a bounded case study design. The data collection process occurred in four stages (Figure 3), in tandem with the four stages of the LCAP development described in Figure 2 previously. The stakeholder participation process was disrupted by the COVID school closures; in the original timeline, the District would have held additional meetings for stakeholders to review the proposed 2020-2023 LCAP before it went to the Board of Trustees for public review and approval in June 2020. Instead, the process is delayed and all California districts presented abbreviated, short-term plans using a state's template to inform the board about a temporary LCAP from July 1 – December 2020. The state extended the timeline for plan approval to December 2020 to ensure adequate time for stakeholder engagement.

Figure 3. Data Collection Process

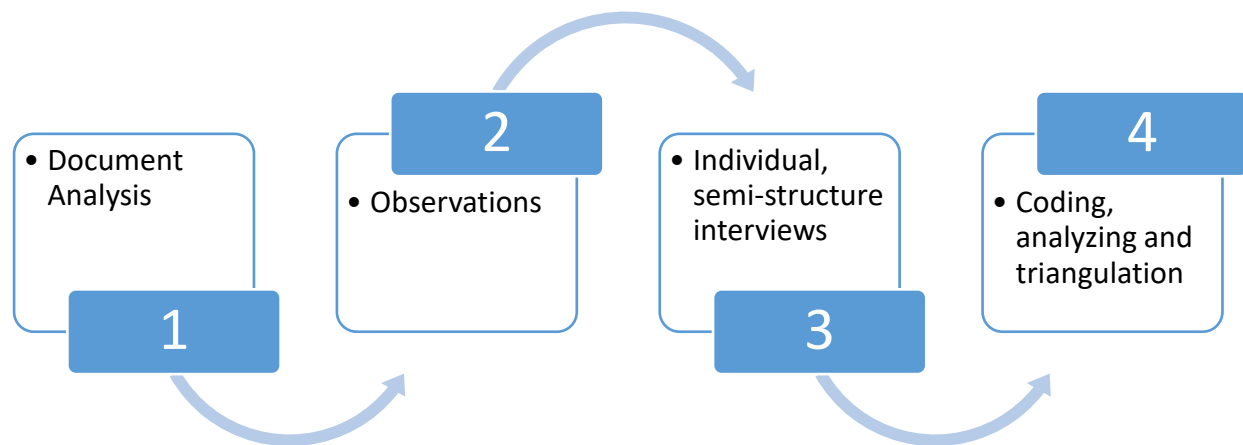


Figure 3. The four phases of the data collection process.

## Methods

Creswell (2012) identified observations, interviews and questionnaires, document analysis and audiovisual materials as categories of data collection. The data collection portion of this investigation lasted approximately six months and used three primary methods of data collection: document analysis, observations, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews. Documents such as meeting agendas and minutes, previous LCAP reports, public student performance data (containing no individual student information) were used to understand the current state of student need as stakeholders prepared to allocate resources through the LCAP based on student need. The analysis of documents also served to triangulate the data collected from interviews and observations.

**Document Collection.** The data collection process included a range of documents obtained from the school district pertaining to current student performance and need, as well as information relevant to the stakeholder decision making process. This existing, public data included, but is not limited to: student enrollment figures and demographics, program

evaluations, program specific material, previous LCAP's, school board meeting minutes and agendas, district budgets, stakeholder meeting notes, agendas, staff lists, public recordings, images, posters, teaching assignments and meeting attendance. The observational data collected included notes, emails, personal memos and jottings.

Documents are a source of valuable information in a qualitative research study and can provide information necessary to understanding the central phenomenon in question (Creswell, 2012). Documents are advantageous because they are written in the language of the participants. However, public documents may be inaccurate or incomplete because they record only words and not expressions or the emphasis used in spoken conversations (Creswell, 2012). Audiovisual materials, which in this study included audio recordings, have the potential to capture some of the nuances that cannot be attended to through observational note-taking alone. Participants consented in writing to the audio recording as well as to participation in an interview.

The focus of the extant data was to present a complete picture of how a LCAP is developed and implemented, as well as presenting a static picture of student academic performance. The extant data also provided a foundation for examining basic connections between staff members by department and room assignments, to set the stage for mapping stakeholder influence and opinions as they navigated sensemaking and the social network. Every attempt was made to extract equal and comprehensive data from each stakeholder group.

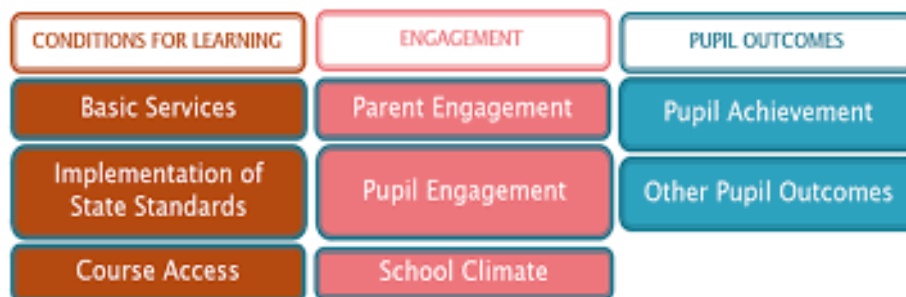
**Observations.** Observations took place during stakeholder input meetings which were part of the LCAP decision-making process. The observations occurred at various times over the course of six months, beginning in December 2019 until June 2020. Stakeholder input is gathered through meetings with administrators at the district and school site, teachers and staff, teacher leadership meetings, parent and public meetings including but not limited to School Site

Council or English Learner Advisory (ELAC), school board meetings, LCAP advisory sessions, and meetings with teacher and classified union leadership. Observations were pre-arranged with the superintendent and the Director of Curriculum and Instruction. Meeting observations focused on discussions of equity specific to identifying student need and the allocation of resources, as well as how participants interacted with others as they defined equity and made decisions in the name of equity. The researcher attended to whether or not stakeholders viewed equity as a conception or a strategy. The researcher employed an observation protocol, with information assembled from the literature review in the first stage of data collection. Observations were ongoing throughout the process of developing a three year LCAP plan for the district. Observation data was analyzed to inform questions asked during the semi-structured interviews with stakeholder participants. The researcher also shadowed the Director who led all of the stakeholder meetings and debriefed with the Director at several points during the process. Finally, the researcher wrote memos throughout the process, detailing observations and the tone of the process.

*Stakeholder engagement meetings.* Throughout the LCAP stakeholder engagement process, stakeholders were asked to examine the multitude of data points that are used to evaluate progress by districts. The LCAP is aligned to three broad categories of resources, under which the eight state priorities are organized. (See Figure 4.) The state uses a variety of data such as test scores, enrollment, grades, surveys, attendance, demographic information, and so on to evaluate progress on the California School Dashboard and local LCAP goals.



Figure 4. California's Eight State Priorities (San Juan USD, n.d.)



*Figure 4.* The State of California has eight state priorities for public school districts, grouped into three categories: Conditions for learning, engagement, and pupil outcomes.

Stakeholders were asked to “make sense” of the data, one LCAP goal at a time over a period of time. The district’s LCAP had three goals (Appendix X) with several metrics for measuring progress on the goals. Each of the metrics had measurable data points as well as budget amounts, tied to general funds, supplemental and concentration (LCAP) funds, federal funds, or grant funds. For each of the three goals, the Director of Curriculum and Instruction who oversaw the LCAP process designed a process for gathering feedback from stakeholders (timeline found in Appendix X). Goal 1 was reviewed in January, goal 2 in February, and goal 3 was scheduled to be reviewed in March but was postponed to May due to the COVID school closures, and the meeting was held virtually.

For each goal, a ‘frontloading’ session was held for administrators to familiarize themselves with the data and provide an opportunity for questions. Then, the campus leaders, including teacher representatives, classified and certificated support staff like counselors, and administrators, were gathered for a review of the goal specific data in a meeting which lasted approximately three hours. The leadership meetings were structured with an overview of the goal, time for small groups to review and discuss parts of the goal and specific data points, then a

whole group discussion. At the end of the sessions, feedback for the future LCAP was given through the process of recommending whether the district should ‘adopt, adapt, abandon or add’ a specific metric or service. Continually throughout every meeting, the Director reminded stakeholders about priority student groups, answered questions that around and gave reminders of the need to consider equitable resources and outcomes. After the teacher leader meetings, the teacher leaders took the goal-specific data to a one hour meeting with their curriculum specific department, discussed the data, actions and services, and shared the feedback in a digital document. Finally, the administrative team including the superintendent met and reviewed the feedback for that goal from all stakeholders, and then the process repeated itself for the subsequent goal.

**Interviews.** From the perspective of the qualitative researcher, there are advantages and disadvantages to conducting interviews (Creswell, 2012). Interviews can provide useful information that is not observable and gives the researcher a measure of control via the questions they ask. Interviews also can surface rich, holistic descriptions of how events or phenomenon are interpreted by actors, in this case stakeholders, within a group or system. Conversely, interviews have the disadvantage of providing a one-sided point of view from the participant (Creswell, 2012). Using the lens of sensemaking theory, an interview provides the researcher insight into how someone made sense of information on their own and, to some degree, how they were influenced by others. The researcher is not be able to probe the reciprocal effect of sensemaking in the network of the stakeholder group. Other disadvantages include the participant providing answers they think the researcher wants to hear and the possibility that the participant is not comfortable speaking freely with the researcher (Creswell, 2012).

A structured interview is very scripted and strict in the sense that there are no follow up or exploratory questions and no variations from the pre-determined questions which can be very limiting (Rudenstam & Newton, 2015). An unstructured interview is spontaneous and based on an observation in the moment. In between these two types of interviews and what was ultimately be the best fit for this study was the semi-structured interview in which the researcher follows a set of pre-determined questions but was free to probe in a different direction or ask follow up questions in pursuit of more information (Creswell, 2012).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten participants; five of the ten participants were certificated teachers who lead a group, program or department; of the remaining five, one was a classified staff member, two were school site administrators, one was a district office administrator and one was the superintendent. Additionally, the administrator in charge of all focus groups was interviewed in a debriefing format after several stakeholder engagement meetings to gather data about the process overall and to discuss the leadership perspective. Each semi-structured interview lasted approximately thirty minutes. Though the researcher believed there would have been benefit to gathering perspectives from all other stakeholder groups including students, parents, school board members and non-teaching staff, this study was limited to just those two categories of stakeholders previously identified in the interest of time.

All of the interviews used a series of guided questions informed by the literature on conceptions of equity, sensemaking and how resources were perceived as being allocated through the LCAP based on equitable student need. The list of questions employed in the s interview can be found in Appendix C. Using the questions as a starting place for further conversation, the researcher probed conceptions of equity, how teachers and administrators

perceived the equity of student need, how they perceived others' version of equity, and how they felt it was implemented in the LCAP process.

Precautions were taken to protect the privacy of interview participants, with names redacted and replaced with a numerical labeling system. The interviews were conducted in person, recorded electronically with participant permission, and the results were transcribed using Rev.com. The researcher listened to the electronic audio files and read the transcription after each interview to code emic and etic themes.

### **Data Analysis**

Once the extant data, observations, focus group notes and interview transcripts were collected the data analysis process will begin. The following section describes how each facet of the data was analyzed, in a five step process and is further detailed in Chapter 4. First, the transcripts and notes were reviewed and read over. Second, the data was hand-coded; data were first read through to identify overarching themes and equity conceptions, then re-read for more specific codes while looking for similarities and differences between interviewees (Creswell, 2012). Once the themes were identified, the third step was identifying the most frequent themes to be re-examined and analyzed more thoroughly for reporting. Efforts were made to look for coherence in the interviews to identify major and minor themes and patterns in the data related to conceptions of equity, evidence for the individual's perceptions, decisions made in the name of equity, as well as placement within the social network as it related to the specific conception of equity.

Once all data was coded, findings will be represented both visually and in narrative format in Chapter 4. The narrative discussion includes a detailed summary of findings from the data analysis (Creswell, 2012). The summary of findings includes the themes and categories

developed through the textual data analysis process (Roberts, 2010). This will include descriptive language, etic and emic codes, evidence, and the relationships between themes.

**Validity.** The fifth and final step was a review of all data for a final time to ascertain the findings were consistent with the data (Roberts, 2010). This step included a comparison of the data analysis to the literature, to validate whether the findings were consistent or inconsistent with existing scholarly knowledge. Establishing the validity of the findings included the triangulation between the research and the findings, to enhance the accuracy of the study (Creswell, 2012). Further, the results of the data analysis will be shared with the participants of the study through member checking, defined by Creswell (2012) as asking participants to check the accuracy of their accounts. Because this is a qualitative study which proposed to examine stakeholders' perceptions, it was important to validate that the themes identified are accurate and complete.

When analyzed together, these data may be used to identify the ways in which selected interviewees had influence into the LCAP decision making process. The overarching goal of this analysis is to better understand how stakeholders made sense of equitable student need and how they were influenced by or had influence within the social network, which accordingly may provide rich interpretations for other small, rural school districts.

**Positionality.** As an individual who was employed as a central office administrator in the Fairweather School District at the time of the study, the researcher was invested in the development of an LCAP that provided needier students the things they need to graduate ready for college and career, in accordance with the mandate of the Common Core and because it is what I believe to be the right thing for all students. In my role as Director of Student Services and Special Education, I did not write the LCAP for the district however, my areas of

responsibility were supportive of and tangential to the person who did the writing. The Director of Curriculum and Instruction wrote the LCAP, a leadership position equal to mine, and we both reported to the superintendent. At the time of writing this dissertation, I was no longer employed in the Fairweather School District.

This positionality serves both as a resource and limitation. Knowledge about the district, it's budget, stakeholders, population, history and culture was advantageous, provided context and enriched the study. At the same time, there were protections to abate any possible biases in the data analysis process. Accordingly, multiple sources of data were collected and reviewed with the intent of triangulating the research findings. Interview and questionnaire questions were also reviewed to assure as neutral a stance as possible (Rudenstam & Newton, 2015).

### **Study Limitations**

A qualitative research methodology, specifically a case study, is a strong choice to tackle the research questions in this study; however, this methodology has limitations. The most obvious limitation is that qualitative case study research has been criticized in the past as having limited generalizability and conceptual value (Yin, 1989; Rudestam & Newton, 2015). It was possible the study will not produce significant, generalizable results. Yin (1989) asserts that a single case study is generalizable in theory only, not to a specific population. Secondly, this study assumed that the stakeholders in question would come to the proverbial table with biases and preconceived notions of what equity means and how it should be rendered in the LCAP. While it is highly unlikely that all stakeholders would agree about these two main ideas, this study may not be able to observe the level to which these phenomenon play out. Third, this study was dependent upon the willingness of stakeholders to participate in this study and to be forthcoming with their viewpoints in their interviews. Stakeholders' willingness to share their

beliefs about equity with the researcher are a key component of this study and could limit the overall understanding of how they define and implement equity in the development of the LCAP. Fourth, this study took place within a restricted time frame of about six months and therefore, it was not possible to observe, survey or interview every stakeholder. Finally, the timeline of the study was impacted by the COVID-19 school closures. One of the stakeholder engagement meetings with teacher leaders was held virtually via Zoom. The COVID closure meant the final LCAP product was delayed to December 2020 to ensure adequate time for stakeholder engagement. These factors limit the scope of the proposed research.

### **Significance of the Study**

The design decisions and research questions guiding this dissertation were informed by the existing literature on the Local Control and Accountability Plan, school finance reform, stakeholder decision making, sense making and social networks. Though the findings of this study are limited to one setting, they provide an important glimpse into the stakeholder decision making process and how school leaders collaborated with stakeholders in the name of an equitable for all students. Within the district of which this study was situated, the results may be used to inform the collaborative nature of building common understanding of equity and student need, along with a focus on the closing of the achievement gap for district students. This study may also add increased knowledge of the topics, gained through conducting this study, to support schools and school leaders, and to initiate discussions regarding equity in resources and outcomes when the opportunity arises. By and large, this study serves to extend the focus on equity versus equality in the context of stakeholder decision making. In particular, this study provides a detailed look at the ways in which the beliefs and values of two groups of stakeholders construct and render equity for historically underserved students.

## Chapter 4: Case Study Findings

*Well, our feet are being held to the fire for test scores that are strictly connected to our subgroups that are ... the least, the last, and the lost... those are the kids we're trying to help the most. They're having the most struggle. So, when it comes to equity, I'm assuming that whatever we do for the ones who are struggling most, that's going to simply expand out.. So, everybody kind of benefits from however we go forward to make things better. Participant 2*

### Introduction

The first three chapters provided an overview of the study, reviewed the current, relevant research, and described the methodology used. In this chapter, the LCAP stakeholder process for one small, rural school district is described. The chapter begins with a description of the participants followed by an analysis of the data, presented in four segments and concludes with a summary of findings. It is important to note that Fairweather School District had undergone significant changes in leadership at all levels in the year leading up to this study. Three board members were new, the superintendent was new and the school site leadership teams were all new to their positions, in the 2019-2020 school year though some were former employees in other schools or teaching positions. Additionally, the district administrator who lead the LCAP process and was responsible for writing the LCAP was new in the position as well, having been promoted from another job and department. These changes evolved from what some participants described as a lack of faith in the previous board and administration, specifically a sense of 'top down' decision-making, with little to no collaboration or 'buy in' between the district, teachers, bargaining units, and others. In spite of all of these changes or perhaps as a result of it, many of the participants interviewed expressed negative and deficit-based viewpoints to some degree which will be reflected and discussed throughout the findings.

### Participants



Twenty-one eligible participants were invited to be interviewed based on criteria described in Chapter 3. Six of the eligible participants were administrators, one was a classified employee and the remaining fourteen were teacher leaders. Of those twenty-one, twelve were contacted after being selected randomly by choosing every other name on the sign-in sheet, ten responded to email invitations and eventually participated in individual interviews. The remaining respondents were not interviewed due to scheduling conflicts. Some of the remaining eligible participants were not invited to interview because they did not attend all of parts of the LCAP engagement sessions. Additionally, the methodology for this research indicated the need to conduct 8 to 10 interviews; in the event that one of the initial twelve people contacted was unable to participate, someone else from the list would be called in no particular order.

Five of the 10 participants were certificated teachers who lead a group, program or department; of the remaining five, one was a classified staff member, two were school site administrators, one was a district office administrator and one was the superintendent. For the purpose of reporting data and maintaining confidentiality, all employees who participated in the study are referred to as participants. Participants were numbered randomly (e.g., Participant 1) because of the small pool. When relevant, a descriptive may be used, for example, “participants 2 and 3, both teachers agreed ...” to provide additional descriptive insights into data. Furthermore for the purpose of this paper, someone is referred to as a ‘participant’ if they were interviewed by the researcher. The use of the term ‘stakeholder’ describes an employee who attended one of the LCAP engagement meetings or one of the other meetings where observations were conducted.

## **Data Collection**

Throughout the LCAP stakeholder engagement process, stakeholders were asked to examine the multitude of data points that are used to evaluate progress by districts. The LCAP is aligned to three broad categories of resources, under which the eight state priorities are organized. Stakeholders were asked to “make sense” of the data, one LCAP goal at a time over a period of time. For parents and students, all three goals were presented at once but for teachers and classified staff, the stakeholder engagement was broken into three parts for each of the district’s three LCAP goals. For each goal, a ‘frontloading’ session was held for administrators to familiarize themselves with the data and provide an opportunity for questions. At the end of the sessions, feedback for the future LCAP was given through the process of recommending whether the district should ‘adopt, adapt, abandon or add’ a specific metric or service. Continually throughout every meeting, the Director reminded stakeholders about priority student groups, answered questions that around and gave reminders of the need to consider equitable resources and outcomes. After the teacher leader meetings, the teacher leaders took the goal-specific data to a one hour meeting with their curriculum specific department, discussed the data, actions and services, and shared the feedback in a digital document. Finally, the administrative team including the superintendent met and reviewed the feedback for that goal from all stakeholders, and then the process repeated itself for the subsequent goal.

A total of 10 individual interviews were conducted, each one approximately 30 minutes long, using the pre-determined questions as a guide while also probing for further information when needed. The researcher also conducted at least six debrief sessions that served as member checking with the administrator leading the LCAP engagement process which were included in memos. The debrief sessions were often short, lasting between 10 and 20 minutes. Eight observations were conducted as well of LCAP engagement sessions, committee meetings,

department meetings, and administrative meetings, totaling approximately 20 hours. The researcher also attended three sessions for administrators engaged in LCAP stakeholder engagement and the writing of the LCAP at the county office of education.

### **Data Analysis**

Analysis of the data included coding of the interview transcripts. Initial open coding was condensed to three broad categories – understanding student data, peers and social networks, and equity – framed through the lens of the existing literature and the two research questions. During this first review of transcripts and through the researcher’s memos, several patterns were observed. Saldana (2016) observed that in qualitative research, patterns of human behavior help render research into more comprehensible measures or categories of data. Further, the data was, at times, grouped under one category not because of the commonalities but, paradoxically, because of the differences they shared, like pointing out a program as equitable or inequitable for a group of students. The transcripts, observational notes, and documents were then re-reviewed two, sometimes three, more times to filter through the information for salient data points. Additionally, member checks were conducted when patterns started to emerge or unexpected statements were made. Some member checks were done during interviews, after an observation surfaced a phenomenon and the remainder of the member checks were conducted in conversations and interviews with the administrator overseeing the LCAP stakeholder engagement process.

### **Findings**

In reviewing the data collected from observations, varied extant sources and interviews, several relevant themes evolved. Most were related to the original conceptual framework presented which included sensemaking, data-based discussions of equity, and social networks.

Through the triangulation of the data, the findings resulted in key themes and subthemes which were both expected and unexpected and will be thoroughly reviewed using the data collected. The themes did not appear in a linear fashion in the course of the case study but presented themselves and interacted to varying degrees over the course of the study. Through these themes, answers to the two research questions will be considered, with the various themes discussed throughout, as they were reflected in the interview data and confirmed by the review of relevant documents.

A starting point for the theme development was to highlight, color-code and assign excerpts to the two research questions. This allowed the researcher to broadly understand, through the excerpts, what the participants thought about each specific question. Each code was counted to evaluate the frequency of occurrence. The researcher used text searches to explore the frequency of some themes, such as “area of need”, “peers”, “bias” or mentions of specific student groups.

This section delineates the summative data collected as stakeholders evaluated district progress on the previous (2017-2020) LCAP goals. The progress on the previous years’ LCAP was used to inform the future plan, which will govern the district’s efforts for the subsequent three years, from fall 2020 through spring 2023. This section outlines how participants made sense of student achievement data, the gaps in equity they identified, and how they collaborated with other stakeholders to make sense of the data presented. This section will answer the first research question: *How do stakeholders in a small, rural school district make sense of equity through their examination of student performance data and their interactions with other stakeholders within the context of the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) decision-making process?*

## **Understanding Students' Needs within a Context of Equity**

A compelling theme across all observations and interviews was the ways in which stakeholders digested student data to evaluate needs and make recommendations about the Local Control and Accountability Plan. Several participants noted that in prior years, they were not asked to evaluate student need through data, rather were presented data as fact and not in the development of goals, actions and services. Participants felt that by “digging into” the data and discussing it with peers made them feel like true stakeholders engaged in a collaborative process. Within this larger theme, three major elements were surfaced which helped explain how stakeholders made sense of the needs of the district’s students in an equitable manner. This section is broken into three parts and tied to the research questions: 1) understanding how stakeholders perceived equity, 2) understanding how those perceptions of equity were influenced when contested by others, and 3) understanding how this yielded a snapshot of the way equity is defined and implemented in the Local Control and Accountability Plan for a small school district. In reviewing the data collected from observations, varied extant sources and interviews about how stakeholders made sense of student need, several relevant patterns emerged.

**The identified role of data in understanding student needs.** Participants used data which explicitly revealed an achievement gap or area of need for a specific group of students in their conversations. For each of the district’s three goals, a variety of data was shared with stakeholders and is described below in Table 1. The data was aligned to the actions and services identified for each of the goals, and in most cases included the cost of each action or services, along with the funding source (e.g. general fund, supplemental and concentration, Title I, etc).

Table 1. LCAP Goals and Data Metrics.

District LCAP Goal	Data Shared with Stakeholders
Goal 1: Student and Family Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Class sizes and staffing ratios</li> <li>• Guidance Counselor support data: frequency of meetings with parents and students including targeted groups</li> <li>• Local parent survey data regarding attendance at school activities and meetings with staff</li> <li>• California Healthy Kids data – Students, Parents and Staff surveys, including school connectedness data</li> <li>• Attendance, truancy and absenteeism data (by subgroup)</li> <li>• Suspension and expulsion data (by subgroup)</li> <li>• Student participation in extra-curriculars and programs (e.g. AVID), aligned to academic data</li> <li>• Graduation data (by subgroup)</li> <li>• Dropout data (by subgroup)</li> </ul>
Goal 2: College and Career Readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UC/CSU Early Acceptance Program (EAP) data for ELA and Math</li> <li>• CAASPP data for ELA, Math and Science</li> <li>• Students meeting UC and CSU minimum entrance requirements by subject area and by student group</li> <li>• CA School Dashboard College &amp; Career Readiness Indicator data including CTE, Dual Enrollment, AP exams, ROTC, Biliteracy measures, etc.</li> <li>• CTE and STEM pathway data, including concentrator and completer data</li> <li>• PSAT, SAT, ACT and AP testing data</li> <li>• Enrollment in program specific courses (e.g. AP) by targeted student groups, with grade data</li> <li>• Dual Enrollment participation and success measures</li> <li>• Special Education student participation and grade data in general education courses</li> </ul>
Goal 3: Implementation of Standards Aligned Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher credentials and assignments</li> <li>• Facilities report (safe and clean campus measures)</li> <li>• Sufficiency of Instructional Materials (Williams)</li> <li>• Teacher professional development data, including training for standards specific to English Learners, ELA, Math, NGSS</li> <li>• Student grades, by subgroup, by subject</li> </ul>

One district administrator noted that a tremendous amount of effort was dedicated to educating stakeholders in the current LCAP, providing data, making the process as transparent as possible. One participant reflected that though the amount of data used in the District’s LCAP was at times overwhelming but made them feel like they had a better understanding of how the LCAP drives the district’s work. Participant 7 noted,

I think for a lot of people it’s the very first time they’d looked at the dashboard and the dashboard indicators and ... visually seeing that disparity and actually breaking it down. I don’t know that we’ve intentionally looked at that as frequently as we have been able to this year .... But to actually break it down and look and see which students, which student groupings are in which color, and then to actually talk about what are we doing in any classroom or in the educational system sitting period that’s going to help fix that problem for a student.

Participant 7 and others noted that the state’s School Accountability Dashboard made it easy for them to get a broad understanding of student achievement. The Dashboard, shown below in Figure 5. Uses colors to indicate performance with red being the lowest performing and blue being the highest. One stakeholder noted, “the only green categories were our white students.”

Figure 5. California School Dashboard Performance Indicators (CA School Dashboard, n.d.).

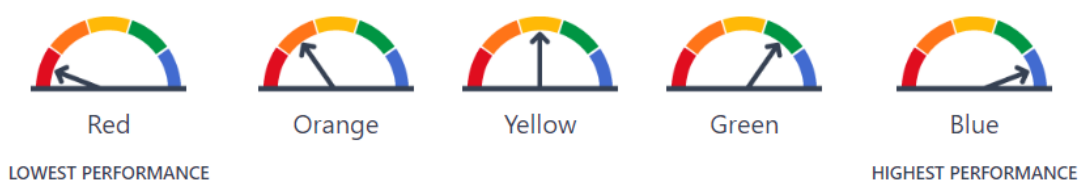


Figure 5. The five colors used to explain how schools are progressing on the State of California’s Performance Indicators, red being the lowest performing and blue being the highest.

Participant 8 observed that stakeholders have wrestled with understanding how students are underachieving on standardized tests and noted a correlation with students struggling in mathematics and in English classes, as defined by student grades. District data showed a strong

correlation between a low score on the state's CAASPP scores and low grades in courses. Students who earned a C, D, or F in a math course were unlikely to score at or above grade level on the CAASPP English and Math tests. Participant 7 posited that it was easier for stakeholders to look at suspension rates or a lot of the college and career readiness markers, instead of test scores because stakeholders had a lot of ideas about how to reduce suspensions. Participant 7 followed up saying there is a feeling amongst others that, "When we look at the test scores, it's like, I don't even care if it (the testing data) looks right" as it may not be the subject area or grade level they teach so they seemed to not want to make a specific suggestion for improving via the LCAP.

**The data challenged participants perceptions of students' needs.** Participants and stakeholders wrestled with another way the state of California calculated the data noting in a discussion about specific student groups that students were counted in multiple categories (i.e. a Hispanic student could also be counted as low SES and homeless, in multiple categories). This created some confusion about how to accurately identify student need. One stakeholder said, "that makes this even more challenging because you don't know where to focus. Your biliteracy {English Learner} kids could also be your AP kids if they're taking AP Spanish, how do you know where to focus?" This struggle resulted in stakeholders making more global recommendations about LCAP goals and services which would help all students instead of targeted ideas to support specific, smaller groups of students. "It's not resonating" observed Participant 9, expressing that stakeholder groups needed to be reminded by the administrators leading the conversations that the supplemental and concentration funds directed via the LCAP must be administered to targeted student groups. The need for redirection to a focused discussion about underserved student groups and their needs as related to supplemental and concentration



funds, goals and services happened in nearly every setting. For example, in one discussion about increasing under-represented students in Advanced Placement courses, Participant 1 stated, “We don’t focus on other students like our more advanced kids. We don’t focus on those types of students at all” and the administrator leading the discussion referred stakeholders to data for lower performing students who generate LCAP funding and asked how AP courses supported low-performing students. These interactions required the administrators leading the conversations to have a focused vision and will be discussed further in this chapter.

**Many participants cast doubt on the validity of the data.** At times, participants questioned the validity of the data, were skeptical of the source or the way in which the data was calculated, or asked administrators for different data points. In an interview, Participant 7 noted that during the frontloading sessions, stakeholders would argue with the way the state calculated the data was faulty or designed to show poor results, suggesting that the state’s standardized tests were either poorly aligned to content or a poor representation of students’ actual abilities. Several stakeholders made statements that standardized testing was not a true reflection of students’ performance or abilities. Participant 7 observed that “a couple of people {said} that the data was wrong and that if there was more data, they would better be able to maybe point out the flaw in the system.” During multiple observations of district committee meetings with a variety of stakeholders providing LCAP input through their specific committee’s lens – e.g. Curriculum and Instruction, Career Technical Education, Guidance Counseling, or College and Career Committee - this theme of doubting or questioning the data, especially standardized test scores from state content specific tests, was repeated by several individuals.

During committee discussions about the most recent CAASPP tests, several people asserted that students do not take the test seriously; one participant felt that the state of California

should make scoring at or above grade level a requirement for graduation. Participant 2 said during one committee meeting, “I think that’s California’s fault because the CAASPP is not a barrier to graduation. If it was, students would take it more seriously.” Another participant inferred that students were scoring below grade level on the tests because they don’t realize the value and importance, “they think it’s to test the school”. Several others made similar statements to the effect that students scored poorly not because of their ability or their lack of access to rigorous instruction and coursework but instead, because they did not try their best or did not see value in the test. Participant 6 said during one such observation, “They blow off the {CAASPP} test. They don’t understand what it can do for them.” Another stakeholder asked if the district could incentivize the CAASPP test by offering students elective credits for doing well, and a third stakeholder suggested that students did not try hard because they are not planning to go to college. Taken individually, these statements appear to be a way in which LCAP stakeholders make sense of student achievement but as pieces of a bigger picture, they led to the surfacing of additional common sub-themes of 1) a sense of responsibility for student achievement, 2) blaming outside factors for student performance, 3) personal viewpoints which colored participants’ views of students’ innate abilities and 4) personal agendas as they related to resource allocation and workload.

**Participants struggled with a misplaced sense of responsibility for closing the achievement gap.** Stakeholders sometimes attributed responsibility outside of themselves for existing performance instead of considering how they themselves could support a change for the better. Participant 9 observed “I can’t think of a nicer way to say this, but it’s inextricably linked to their ego.... They’re viewing the data not as something separate of them. They’re viewing it as a knock on themselves.” In several interviews, participants, including teachers,

noted that the district's teachers seemed uncomfortable examining their own practices. "If they can't say, 'what I am doing personally is not working' they can't come to the table with actual true changes for our kids" observed one district leader. In alignment with several other stakeholders observed and interviewed in this study, Participant 5, a teacher, shared the following sentiment,

I'm sometimes surprised how we as educators sometimes don't like to take responsibility for our part. When something's not working, I try to look at the reasons why something's not working that I'm a part of, because that's what I can do something about. And sometimes I'm surprised at how some of my colleagues tend to want to point fingers. I feel like that's something that is critical, and sometimes I'm surprised that people's lack of faith in our ability to change.

In three separate observations as noted in memos and observational notes, staff members made statements about the need to take responsibility for improving student achievement but their peers did not agree with them or respond in an affirmative or supportive way, rather they remained silent. During a meeting about student achievement on the state's college and career readiness indicators, Participant 5 spoke passionately about her sense of responsibility for improving student outcomes, specifically increasing the number of students meeting the UC's a-g requirements. She told the colleagues in the meeting that they should all feel responsible as she does and was met with silence when she finished. After a pause, another colleague brought up another piece of data, asking a question without acknowledging, agreeing with, or disputing what was said by Participant 5. Further, Participant 6 expressed during an interview that stakeholders who were also staff members were not always forthcoming about sharing their opinions during the LCAP engagement sessions, stating, "I think everyone went through the motions and participated, but they didn't really. I think individually you would get different answers."

Participant 6 followed this statement by observing that stakeholders may have been reluctant to

offer suggestions to adapt or abandon a specific service or goal because it could result in the elimination of the job of the person sitting next to them in the meeting. This intersects with how stakeholders reacted when their viewpoints were contested and will be discussed further in this chapter.

**Some participants blamed others for performance data.** When participants questioned the reliability of the data or requested more data, they were sometimes seeking to prove a point or disprove what the data forecasted. This seemed to be a way of diminishing their responsibility for improving student performance or to place blame for the low test scores or poor performance indicators. Participant 9 said,

They {some teachers} either ignore it, or they say this data isn't good enough I need more data, I need more detail, because it must be because of X, Y, Z reason. And again, X, Y, Z reason are usually reasons that are not their fault. And so, when they ask for all that additional data, even more nuanced data, they're hoping to uncover something that confirms their narrative.

This deflection of responsibility was called into question by some participants who expressed a sense of bewilderment that their peers did not feel responsible for improving student outcomes in the way they themselves did. Participant 8 noted, "A lot of people, they want to blame the students and they don't want to believe it's their inability to reach them or teach them." Participant 10 remarked that data was used as a tool to exclude students from programs like Advanced Placement, "I don't like only looking at the dashboard to determine student need because there are so many excuses that {people} can come up with, and they can use it as a tool." Participant 10 went on to assert that a recent proposal for several honors level classes are an effort to separate groups of students instead of providing opportunities or supports for needier student groups, and noted the lack of connection to data-identified student need in the proposal.

Participant 8 asserted in individual interview that some stakeholders “make excuses and have low expectations for the students. And it’s almost like, yes, we see the need. Yes, we see the data. However, what do you expect us to do? They don’t believe they have the ability to change” {the student outcomes}. Similarly, Participant 9 shared,

I feel like it’s a huge opportunity for teachers to say – and administrators – to say “This is what we could be doing for our students” but people are still too focused on the defensive, the dashboard, “The test doesn’t matter”. There’s still a lot of energy and emphasis being placed there instead of what we could be doing for kids and there’s a mindset piece that needs to change before they can truly and authentically engage in the LCAP process.

In an interview, Participant 10 similarly observed that LCAP stakeholders seemed less focused on addressing instructional practices and more on student deficits when analyzing LCAP data and making suggestions targeted at improving academic outcomes for under-performing students. Participant 10 stated, “I don’t think that when they {stakeholders} are looking at the data, they’re actually thinking about, ‘What are we doing, what’s wrong in the system, what can I improve in my teaching or what can we do differently to help?’”

**Participants grounded their feedback in personal experiences and agendas when making specific recommendations for the new LCAP.** Participants often drew on personal opinions, experiences or agendas when making recommendations or supporting positions in the name of equity. Whether it was because of human nature to default to their own core beliefs or the nature of the culture of a district that had gone through tremendous change due to distrust in leadership, stakeholders made observations using data but also used their own opinions which were not based in evidence to suggest services and actions. Additionally, participants made statements that, as discussed earlier, were grounded in a white, middle class, meritocratic belief system. Participant 1 discussed in the interview a belief that the district did not do enough to

support high-achieving honors students and did not offer enough rigorous STEM courses to prepare this group of students for top-tier universities. In an observation of the College and Career Readiness Committee's discussion of the percent of students meeting the UC and CSU entrance requirements, two other stakeholders made similar comments about the need to support middle class, "regular" students more instead of or in addition to supporting targeted student groups.

Sometimes the services and actions suggested by stakeholders were those which would benefit the individual making the suggestion the most. For example, Participant 8 observed,

I think what I've heard most are not student needs but teacher wants. And so, I don't know how to phrase this, but it felt like there are teachers that desire to have certain courses and offerings on our campus, not necessarily for the purpose of equity, but just for their own likes, for their own interests, for their own, they're content specialists and they want to be able to teach a certain level of students or material. So I think the conversations were mostly about what they themselves would want. I don't ever think it was ever posited as, this is what our students need or would like.

This observation was repeated by others in individual interviews. Participant 2, a teacher, said, "I think everybody still has their own personal agendas kind of coming in. They're going to use whatever is there to kind of push forward the thing that they think is most important."

Participant 10 echoed this sentiment and further observed that often in school districts there is a small group of vocal people who have an agenda to push while "The others are going to continue to meet the needs of their kids the way they best see how, but they don't get involved in the political piece of it" and that makes it difficult for district leaders to hear from all stakeholders.

Participant 9 reflected on this sentiment as well in the context of the leadership changes in the preceding school year, "I think you also have a group of teachers who are very resistant to uniting around anything except their own personal interests, which has been a problem here for a

long time and why we've had such significant leadership change because the only thing they can agree upon is what they want for themselves. Or, what they think is right, data be damned."

Participants and other stakeholders in the LCAP engagement process drew upon their prior knowledge of the district and their perception of social context the school-community.

Participant 8 observed that the district's teaching staff are mostly white and middle class while the students in the district are over 70% low socioeconomically disadvantaged and almost 65% are Hispanic or Latinx. Participant 8 said, "

I think we {school staff} very much have the middle class mentality. I think most teachers are in the middle of the road, middle-class or above, and I think talk about culture and talk about language, I think there's a disconnect there from our {student} population that's mainly Hispanic and mainly Spanish speaking, low socioeconomically disadvantaged students. And so I think that there's a discrepancy there, there's a disconnect there that causes some of this mindset of our students can't. And so we have to change that belief system.

Collectively, stakeholders relied on their own opinions, personal value systems, personal agendas, and experiences when making recommendations, which were not generally grounded in the student achievement data. Even when reflecting on student engagement data such as suspensions or attendance, stakeholders projected their personal experiences into explanations for the why behind the data rather than focusing on how to improve. Participant 9 observed the engagement meetings were set up to be data-centered and equity driven with specific, scaffolded activities and yet, felt neither data nor equity were considerations. This theme of the personal carried through the findings of this study when considering the effect of peers on data-based conversations.

**Participants collaborated with their peers and their social network to substantiate recommendations.** Participants cited their colleagues as reliable sources of information in the analysis of equitable student need in evaluating student data. Participant 3 shared, "I think

overall everyone here is trying to help students” and that when disagreements arose, the conversations were collegial but important “because it allows us to understand what each other are thinking, but also how we can better the school.” Participant 8 discussed two specific teachers who were strong, positive voices for equity of resources for targeted students saying, they were willing to speak up when colleagues felt they were being asked to do the impossible of improving academic achievement of the lowest performing students. It was interesting to note that at least three participants mentioned the same two or three staff members who they viewed as positive, strong voices of equity for underserved students, and that they saw these people as the minority voice. Participant 7 felt that those few positive staff members were valued by the larger group when they presented a student asset-based perspective however, Participant 9 stated, “what I tend to see are... voices that are positive and want to understand and move forward, you have your voices who are kind of ... neutral or just kind of waiting to see where it goes. And then you’ve got your voices who are negative and that middle ground tends to go where the dominant voice goes.” The effect of peers on the stakeholder engagement process will be discussed further in the next section which examines how perceptions of equity are defined when contested. Teachers who worked in similar programs were observed to collaborate in stakeholder meetings to support each other’s suggestions for LCAP actions and services. In three meetings observed, teachers who worked primarily with Honors students advocated for the addition of new Advanced Placement and Pre-Advanced Placement courses, and the associated costs. One participant later observed, {New AP courses} “... aren’t going to do anything to better the lot of our targeted students, but it’s what her friend wants because it’s going to allow her friend to teach these classes of these honors and special children, and further create a valley. And so she’s over there advocating for her friend quietly”.



The district administrative team reviewed the feedback gathered from the stakeholder engagement sessions and one administrator observed, “It feels like there are two schools, my school where I teach {referring to teachers of AP} and that other school, where those kids go. They are missing out on the idea of OUR school and OUR kids.” Another administrator felt the feedback was very “adult focused, not student focused”.

Participants 2, 6 and 9 individually in interviews noted that many of those they saw as the “middle” or neutral group of teachers chose to stay silent to avoid being associated with a particular clique. Participant 6 said, “No one wants to stand up for what they think is the right thing to do. They will get bullied, ... They don’t want to associate with those cliques ... they don’t want people to recognize that they’re part of the clique.” In the three observations of teacher leaders during the LCAP stakeholder meetings, the majority of the whole group discussion was done by a few individuals on the asset or deficit end of the spectrum. Those who stayed silent or neutral, generally offered no suggestions for services, actions or goals which would align one way or another with either group. Neutral participants were noted in most of the observations conducted and via member checking with the administrator leading the LCAP engagement process, were seen as an obstacle to moving the equity conversation forward with their neutrality. The administrator shared in an interview, “they didn’t have anything that they felt strongly about, like, “Wow we really should do this. This is really what’s going to help our kids.” It was kind of, it was kind of neutral.”

In addition to the limiting effect of neutral participants, after the first few interviews and observations, it was noted that there were not many teacher leaders who were strong voices for marginalized students beyond the administrators. This became part of the probing questions asked in the interview, sometimes contextualized by noting the absence of a recently retired

teacher leader who was a strong proponent for underserved students. Participants agreed that the retiree had been a strong advocate for students and acknowledged that no one else had yet taken her place. Participants felt there were a few other staff members who could fill that role but felt these people did not have the presence or respect of the majority of the staff, thus rendering their opinions or values as less important. One participant noted that the administrator leading the LCAP process and the researcher, in the role of district administrator, were the two consistent proponents of equity but that no teacher was leading the charge within the teacher networks on campus. This, along with the effect of the neutral participants, resulted in little specific feedback being generated by stakeholders. Following the collection of feedback from the teacher leaders and from the individual departments and school sites, an administrator observed the feedback was “very personal and department-focused opinions” and another expressed surprise that none of the stakeholders offered any novel suggestions for closing the achievement gap.

### **How Perceptions of Equity Were Influenced When Contested**

In an effort to understand how LCAP stakeholders in a small school district made sense of equity and made recommendations based on student need, the researcher examined how participants individually defined equity, how that developed into a local, shared definition that guided the decision-making process, what happened when the conception of equity was contested, and how school leaders and their vision impacted the process. The findings from this study show that while participants unpacked and made sense of a wide variety of student achievement data, their efforts to identify specific strategies for closing the achievement gap through the lens of equitable funding via the supplemental and concentration grants largely were grounded in their personal opinions, experiences, or agendas. The next set of themes emerged when examining how equity was defined and enacted by Fairweather’s stakeholders.

**Participants created a local definition of equity.** All participants were asked to share their definition of equity and asked what equity looked like in the Fairweather School District. Every participant started by defining equity in terms of equal access to courses and programs. Participant 1 said, “Equity would allow you to choose your course and your pathway regardless of your financial ability {or} the color of your skin. The only thing that would maybe dictate where you could go is your own personal strengths...”. Participant 2 said, “Equity, to me, is everybody has equal opportunity to enter into programs, and that the programs aren’t designed in a way to push kids away...”. Other participants made similarly broad statements which illustrated alignment with the Liberal conception of equity. Participant 3 said,

... equity to me is giving the most amount of students equal opportunities and equal access to education, resources, materials, all of those things. It’s basically leveling the playing field. Kids come here with different backgrounds, home life, perceptions, all those things and just allowing them all to succeed as much as we can is equity to me.

Collectively, these statements sounded more like equality. For example, Participant 5 said, “The way I define equity is that, in education is that we are providing the same level and same quality and quantity of services to our students regardless of all of those, race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, et cetera.” The Liberal conception of equity suggests there is a need to compensate for disadvantage to ensure fair competition. Some participants expanded on their ideas of support and the resources students might need to access equitable courses and programs in a school. Participant 4 said, “I think the underlying purpose of equity is fairness for all so that resources are allocated for all students and that everybody has a fair opportunity.” The Liberal conception of equity advises the allocation of resources to groups of individuals from the same background to level the playing field to allow for students to then use their individual merits and

effort to succeed. In this same model, all students from the same group would get the same thing, thus the idea of success is still very merit based.

The four administrators who participated in the study had some additional insights into equity in practice in the Fairweather School District, though when asked to define equity, they all began with statements about access to courses and programs. Participant 8 posited that students should have access to any course they want but added, “we also want to encourage students to go above and beyond their own limitations”. However, Participant 7 noted, “It’s more than just access, I feel it’s the tools that a student needs and providing those supports so that we’re not just opening the same thing to everyone in the same way, because then that’s just shifting the access point.”

Taken as a whole, the ten participants in this study provided a snapshot of a local definition of equity that aligns with the Liberal conception of equity, which focuses on providing supports for students to access opportunities to succeed. Only two participants discussed equity in more specific relation to measurable outcomes, in alignment with the Democratic Liberal conception of equity. Participant 9 noted that equity means students get the instruction and supports needed to score ‘ready for college’ on state assessments for English and Math. Participant 10 shared the belief that equity is giving every student what they need to be successful. A follow up question was posed about what success means, and stated, “success is that they have a choice when they graduate to pursue whatever they wish to pursue, and that those doors aren’t closed to them ... the choice is theirs and it’s not limited.” The use of the word ‘doors’ was in reference to access to college preparatory courses and programs designed to prepare students for a four-year college. The Democratic Liberal conception considers outcomes as the priority; closing the achievement gap dictates the prioritization of funding.

**Participants' definitions of equity were sometimes contested by other stakeholders.**

During observations of stakeholders and participants, at time an individual would contest the definition or example of equity being advocated for by a peer. In three instances, stakeholders engaged in conversations about the deficits a group of students had, and a single, dissenting peer would object using more asset-based language. The dissenting peer was treated with respect as no argument ensued however, they were generally met with silence or a brief acknowledgement before the conversation would return to the same deficit focused discussion. Participant 9 recollected that stakeholders who were more positive and asset-focused wanted to know more about the data and wanted to understand it better to improve their practice. Participant 9 felt there were three groups of stakeholders: a small group of two or three who were focused on student assets, a small group of four or so who were vocally deficit focused, and a larger group in the middle of about ten who either remained silent or could be swayed by the deficit group. Participant 9 recollected that stakeholders who were more positive and asset-focused wanted to know more about the data and wanted to understand it better to improve their practice. Speaking about the group in the middle, Participant 9 noted, "As soon as you had people who are really questioning the data (the deficit group), they (the middle group) just tend to jump on the bandwagon. They're not necessarily a really loud vocal group, but they're there and they're nodding." Participant 2 observed, "Everybody just wants to take care of themselves. It's a very selfish kind of, I'm not sure I necessarily see trying to do the best for kids."

Stakeholders conceptions of equity were also noted to be tied to their personal experiences or subject matter. Participant 8 noted that egos are "hindering the process of moving forward because there's a lot of almost personal work that has to be done in terms of accepting where we are as human beings in relation to the data to be able to move forward, to actually put

aside the ego and make changes.” Stakeholders would look at actions, services, and the related student data in the LCAP sessions and discuss only the context of their classroom instead of in the context of the LCAP and the district. In one such meeting, the following exchange took place during the discussion of scores on standardized tests. A group of teachers discussed the scores of AVID and Honors students when the administrator leading the meeting reminded them to consider socioeconomically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities in their consideration for resources. Participant 9 recounted, “He {a teacher} got a little bit defensive. I had to say, “I’m not blaming you, I’m not trying to chastise you. I’m just trying to draw your attention to the fact that no one has said anything about our subgroups.” At the end of the three hour LCAP stakeholder session, there were still very few recommendations that were specifically linked to closing the achievement gap for priority students. Participant 7 recounted, “I think they all recognized that {priority student groups} were a need and yet ... it didn’t come to the forefront of people’s minds when they actually had to have a conversation about our strengths and needs as a school.” Participant 10 observed, I think they’re discussing them equitably only because {The directors leading the meetings} foster it {the conversation about equity}, but I don’t think that when they are looking at the data, they’re actually thinking about, “What are we doing?” It’s more of the deficits that those students have as opposed to, what can I do to help?”

Based on the findings and themes surrounding the ways in which Fairweather’s stakeholders defined and attempted to implement equity by making recommendations for the LCAP about the use of supplemental and concentration grant funds via goals, actions and services, it is important to consider the role of leadership in the process.

**Leaders and a clear leadership vision were vital to keeping stakeholders focused on data-based students' needs** In the observations of a variety of LCAP stakeholder meetings, it was incumbent upon the person leading the discussion to keep the conversation focused on the needs of the priority student groups, especially the lowest performing students. When the person leading the meeting was a district office administrator, the needs of those student groups were the scaffold of every conversation and the leader would verbally reorient the conversation when stakeholders would discuss needs not grounded in data or issues which were more globally targeted to all students. Participant 9 remarked “without the uniformity of a vision in terms of how we’re supporting {supplemental and concentration grant targeted} students, it becomes this very unorganized.” When the information was taken by the teacher leaders to curriculum centered departments for discussion, that leadership vision and focus on targeted student groups was lost. The district administrators noted when they reviewed the feedback from the departments, that the specific recommendations were globally targeted school-wide or very generic in nature for services like maintaining the number of guidance counselors and adding more after school tutoring options. An administrator shared the sentiment that generic, school-wide suggestions generated from the department meetings, “seem very superficial, which is disappointing but can be used to our advantage.” The administrator implied that this could allow leaders to create more specific, targeted actions and services under these generic topics suggested by stakeholders. In the teacher leader and administrator sessions, the Director was intently focused on data-based needs of targeted student groups and systematically focused and refocused stakeholders on these students. This was not the case in the larger, content area department meetings led by the teacher leaders without administrative support.

In interviews with and observations of the administrator LCAP engagement sessions, the need to have a clear plan from leaders emerged as a common discussion point and as a tool for guiding conversations with stakeholders. One participant shared that it was incumbent upon administrators to “present things in such a way to manipulate people into agreeing that that is the way to go. Obviously, then it’s not authentic, but I think it’s what we have to do.” Another administrator wondered in a meeting “how do we come up with a plan here and then communicate that plan, in such a way that it makes it seem like it was their idea from the beginning? I think that’s where the key is.” Ultimately, every participant observed that, at some point, it is unavoidably incumbent upon the district’s administration, the superintendent and the board of trustees to decide how the funds were going to be spent. Participant 2 asked rhetorically, “Is it more like Star Trek where everybody gives their recommendations and ultimately the captain is going to say what’s going on?” Participant 3 expressed the idea of feeling valued for being asked to examine the data and give suggestions but felt it was the responsibility of the district’s leadership team to make the final decisions about actions, services and funding. Participant 10 shared that the burden of LCAP decision-making ultimately lies in the hands of the superintendent and the vision the superintendent presents to the district and its stakeholders.

### **How Did This Yield a Picture of the Way Equity Was Defined and Implemented?**

The LCAP engagement process compels stakeholders to wrestle with ambiguity or meaning around an artifact or piece of data. The contests, discussions, questions and discovery that emerge from making meaning of an unknown or ambiguous artifact make meaning within the context of the particular environment, in this case the district, and build a working knowledge and common language for stakeholders. The LCAP process required stakeholders, in this case,



teachers and administrators to grapple with the ambiguous, intangible meaning of equity and socially construct meaning within the context of student need from data.

This section examines how stakeholders locally defined equitable student need to make recommendations for the new, three-year LCAP. Throughout the stakeholder engagement process, stakeholders were asked by the district to make recommendations for goals and services, based on the progress made on previous LCAP goals. Stakeholders were given several opportunities to recommend the district “adopt, adapt, abandon, or add” goals and services. The locally developed collective conception of equity that emerged from the conversations and data provided insight into the motivation behind the input provided by stakeholders. The success of the LCAP process depends on a strong, shared conception of equity to define student need and allocate resources to support one group of students more than another. The process of stakeholder engagement in the LCAP requires actors to define need, develop goals and apportion funds through the lens of the state’s accountability outcomes including academic achievement and college readiness. This section takes into account the data discussed previously and endeavors to answer the second research question: *How does this process of making sense result in a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) stakeholder engagement process that stakeholders perceive as equitable?*

In several stakeholder engagement meetings, a wide range of student achievement data, aligned with the state’s priority areas was reviewed. The administrators leading those meetings told stakeholders that their role was to examine the data, understand where there were strengths and weaknesses in systems and programs, and make recommendations for the next three years. Further, in each meeting, the leading administrators reminded stakeholders about the student groups that generated the supplemental and concentration funds governed by the LCAP, and

continually reminded them that these funds are meant to be used to address inequalities and structural barriers encountered by targeted student groups. Participant 3 noted, “I think one difficulty is we try to find, in education a lot of people try to find this magic bullet thing where it’s going to take care of every single person’s problems.” Participant 1 felt the structure of the meetings was designed to encourage exploration and discovery stating, “It just seems like there’s not an agenda, a predetermined agenda. It seems more like where our needs and let’s put the money where we can get some bang for our buck. And I think that’s how it’s supposed to be.”

Throughout the meetings observed and via individual interviews, participants and stakeholders made observations about specific student groups but, often defaulted to broader, more global recommendations for LCAP goals, actions and services, which were based in personal opinions about the school or district as a whole. For example, during the first parent LCAP meeting, parents discussed the need for English Learners to have more tutorial time for academic support and made a recommendation for a support class along with a recommendation for more classroom-based tutors. Another parent noted that extra tutors in classes was something every student would benefit from that and asked the idea be expanded to provide more tutors for everyone. The administrator leading the meeting had to remind parents that the LCAP was intended for targeted students and while it’s allowable for all students to benefit, the cost to provide tutors would mean not being able to provide other actions and services to needier students. Striking a balance between benefits to some, needier students and all students played out in several settings. Participant 10 observed, “I try to keep it balanced and yes, I get that there are students who already have a lot of that support... More of the lens of, if it’s good, it’s good for all kids, but then how do we get the ones that need it the most to really participate in that?”

Participants were asked about this push-pull between equity and equality, the idea that needier students should get more and that means that not everyone gets the same. Participant 5 echoed this dilemma in an interview, when discussing how to prioritize which student groups get more resources:

We should focus on specific student groups because that's where we're going to see our bang for our buck. I mean that's the reality. But the other part of me is like, eh, they are all {needy}. It's a difficult question because we have limited resources and limited both time and money, and we need to from a practical point of view, we need to bring those {test score} numbers up in those groups.

The struggle to find balance between the needs of some students and the needs of all students was repeated in a variety of observations and discussions. Participant 4 shared, "Sometimes it seems like it's overwhelming because it's a large amount of information to discuss in the conversations." Participant 1 echoed this with a similar statement and added, "I enjoy being a part of it because it gives me a greater perspective as to what we have to deal with at a much larger level rather than just in the classroom itself." Participant 2 felt the process of sharing data through this format was transparent and inclusive however noted, "I feel like we made a lot of recommendations. I don't feel like we made a lot of decisions." These three participants also felt the district leaders did not have a preconceived plan which allowed for an honest discussion of student need.

### **Stakeholders Perceived the Process of Developing an LCAP as Equitable ... for them.**

Participants were asked in a series of open-ended questions to reflect on the entirety of the stakeholder engagement process of the Local Control and Accountability Plan. Several participants wondered how the feedback from all parties would be used and how the multitude and variety of voices would be blended together into one plan. Participant 1 observed, "...it doesn't feel like there is preconceived direction of where we want it to go. It's more like where

do we need it? It didn't seem to have a predetermined direction like it has in the past."

Participants 3 and 5 echoed this positive outlook on the process and wondered how more people could be involved, including students.

Others questioned who would have the final say, would it be made by a committee or the superintendent and the board. Three participants wondered about the degree to which the process was truly an authentic effort to gather feedback or lip service, checking a box to say the district engaged stakeholders. Participant 6 made the assertion that stakeholders' opinions really did not matter, that the district leadership would ultimately decide. Six participants felt that the act of examining the data and discussing student need in the context of equitably allocating resources to needier students was influential in the process of helping the district close the achievement gap. Participant 8 observed,

I think {the administrator} does a good job in also continuing forwarding the conversations of others into the newest articulation of the LCAP and its process or in its progress. It's hard because I think people do, I mean their voices do get captured. I don't know if it's doing the job of equity and equality. I want to say that it ultimately does because we're mandated to do so. But I think we do a good job because I think if people did have their druthers, they would have something totally different. I think {the administrator} does a great job in harnessing everybody's voices and making it balanced.

Ultimately, participants found value in the process of reviewing data and discussing it with peers and leaders, and believed the value was important to building a better understanding of the state's intention with the LCAP. However, none of the stakeholders wondered about whether or not targeted students benefitted from the process. When asked to reflect on the stakeholder engagement process overall, participants generally felt they and their colleagues benefitted from the information and decision-making activities but did not make any observations about specific student groups. Stakeholder 4 shared, "... it is good to know that what is going on, what action plans we are taking, what the school is doing in response to the

criteria and as a stakeholder what I can do to assist...”. This study ultimately was focused on the process of stakeholder engagement in consideration of equity for students and not on the final product of an LCAP. Whether or not the LCAP itself produces equitable goals, actions, and services for targeted students which result in increased opportunities and a decrease of the achievement gap could be a consideration for future researchers and will be discussed in Chapter Five.

### **Summary of Findings**

The findings of this case study represent major themes around the ways in which local educational agencies and their leaders collaborate to define and enact equity with stakeholders in the development of a Local Control and Accountability Plan focused on student needs. Through the lens of the conceptual framework of sensemaking and social network theory, several broad themes emerged from the triangulation of the data. By facilitating a process of examining student need through data and calling out gaps in achievement and opportunity for specific student groups, leaders assisted stakeholders in an active, continuous process where they made meaning of new information by incorporating it into their prior knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes. Leaders also helped negotiate conversations in which beliefs or opinions were contested and, at times, provided evidence-based information to redirect or support stakeholders in their discussions of equity and equitable student need. An unexpected theme that emerged was the ways stakeholders employed blame or a deflection of responsibility for an existing achievement gap surfaced by the data. This unexpected theme brought to light the important role of the administrator or leader in redirecting stakeholders to the state’s priorities and priority, targeted student groups. This unexpected theme also was present when contests emerged around recommendations made by stakeholders; the leader needed to provide a clear and consistent agenda of priorities for the

group to keep stakeholders focused on the task at hand. Without a focused vision by administration, stakeholders engaged in blaming other and made generic recommendations aimed at their own classes or areas of interest, or made very general, school-wide recommendations for LCAP actions and services. Additionally, participants felt that the process was inclusive and equitable for them as participants. They identified their engagement in the LCAP process as valuable to understanding the needs of Fairweather's students and a clearer understanding of the state's process for creating and implementing the plan. The findings validated the vital role of leaders and the need for a clear, collectively agreed upon definition of equity to guide the work of the district in the development of the Local Control and Accountability Plan. The LCAP process is grounded in the belief that local stakeholders know what is best for their unique, local population of students and understanding how stakeholders made sense of student need and conveyed these institutional moral beliefs through the formal and informal networks surrounding the LCAP is important. This case study has furnished a snapshot of the ways one small and rural school district engaged with stakeholders in the process of developing a plan to support increased levels of academic achievement for historically low-performing students. Providing needier students with more requires stakeholders to acknowledge disparities in student achievement, access to rigorous programs, embedded systems of meritocracy and other beliefs which may contribute the perpetuation of achievement and opportunity gaps. The collective efficacy of a unified vision that is embedded in the culture of a school community has strong implications for improved student achievement.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

After several months of planning and action, Fairweather's stakeholders engaged in a variety of activities directed at collaboratively developing a Local Control and Accountability Plan to support the district's unique local student population. Over the course of this study, data was gathered about the ways stakeholders wrestled with achievement data, with their own beliefs and priorities, and with peers to make sense of equity in the context of resources, goals, actions and services. Though the new 2020-2023 LCAP in development during this time was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this qualitative study was focused on the process of stakeholder engagement and not the final product of a completed LCAP. Findings from this qualitative study will inform school leaders and policymakers of areas they should attend to relative to the state of California's LCAP stakeholder engagement requirement.

This chapter describes an overview of the summary of findings and a discussion of the relationship between the findings and the existing research. The chapter begins with a review of the purpose of the study and the research questions, followed by a comprehensive discussion of the results in the context of the frameworks of sensemaking and social network theories. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications for policymakers, school leaders and social justice, explores the limitations of the research and opportunities for future researcher. Lastly, there is a brief summary of conclusions.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the ways in which stakeholders are making sense of equity based on student need in a small school district in the development of a three-year Local Control and Accountability Plan. This study examined the LCAP stakeholder input process through the lens of equity, connecting stakeholder engagement

efforts to the interpretation and enactment of equity in the development of LCAP goals, actions and services. The LCAP process is grounded in the belief that actors in local school districts best understand the needs of their unique students and schools. The reality, however is that decisions are sometimes made without considering equity as a result of possible competing interests for limited resources, misconceptions of equity versus equality, or existing systems and structures which are prohibitive of a philosophical mindset different from the established ethos (Unterhalter, 2009; Bulkley, 2013). Findings from this case study will contribute to the research around the process of attending to stakeholder engagement for the greater purpose of improving learning opportunities and outcomes for all students and closing opportunity gaps between privileged and historically underserved students.

### **Research Questions**

In order to better understand how equity is defined and enacted through stakeholder participation in the development of an LCAP, and how districts gather meaningful input into the needs of students in a local school district, the following research questions were presented:

1. How do stakeholders in a small, rural school district make sense of equity through their examination of student performance data and their interactions with other stakeholders within the context of the LCAP decision-making process?
2. How does this process of making sense result in an LCAP engagement process that stakeholders perceive as equitable?

### **Understanding How LCAP Stakeholders Made Sense of Equity**

This qualitative case study brought to light new knowledge about the ways in which stakeholders in a small, somewhat rural school district made sense of equitable student need in the development of a three-year Local Control and Accountability Plan. Stakeholder



participation is a requirement for all school districts and, through a review of the literature, some of the challenges for gathering authentic, meaningful input from all stakeholders was discussed. Though some of the themes that surfaced were aligned with the existing literature, some unexpected themes emerged as well. Each of these themes provides insight into a school district which had gone through significant leadership changes in the year leading up to the study. The data was organized into five overarching ideas that helped to answer the research questions, with several sub-categories to help understand the more nuanced ideas that emerged through the data collection. These ideas include how stakeholders made sense of student need, how they defined equity in through their input, how they collaborated with other stakeholders, what happened when their perceptions were contested, and how stakeholders perceived the process overall. This section endeavors to connect the findings from the first research question to the literature, and to draw broad conclusions.

### **The Use of Data to Understand Student Need**

A compelling theme across all observations and interviews was the ways in which stakeholders digested student data to evaluate needs and make recommendations about the Local Control and Accountability Plan. The LCAP's stakeholder process is about making sense of student needs in competition with individual belief systems, leadership philosophies and ingrained systems; the actors in the system are tasked with making sense of information to make equitable decisions for schools and students. Several researchers have contextualized the importance of data-based decision-making in school settings noting that data is not just collected and examined, it is also interpreted and enacted by the people in the unique school community; the ways stakeholders use data depends on the specific contexts in which they operate as well as their interactions with one another (Coburn & Turner, 2011; Park, 2018).

Stakeholders were asked to examine achievement data for targeted student groups – English learners, students with disabilities, low socioeconomic, homeless, foster youth, by ethnicity, and so on – to identify areas of success and gaps in learning. Overwhelmingly, Fairweather’s English learner students and students with disabilities scored far below the school and district averages. In 2019, 49% of Fairweather’s students met or exceeded standards in English Language arts on the state’s CAASPP tests, in comparison to just 10% of English learners and 6% of students with disabilities. The gap was even more apparent in mathematics scores with 21% of all students meeting or exceeding standards but only 2% of English Learners and 2% of students with disabilities meeting or exceeding. All of Fairweather’s students scored below the state’s average as well, indicative of a clear, ongoing achievement gap.

Viewed through the lens of sensemaking in an effort to understand equity in the LCAP is about answering the question, “What’s the story here?”, naming and categorizing the unknown, making meaning of things that interrupt normal patterns or elicit surprise and confusion, and creating a system from the process (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005; Ching, 2017). Fairweather’s stakeholders were asked to organize and make sense of “inputs” and enact sense back into the world to connect actions, services and funds equitably to targeted students for the purpose of closing the achievement gap. Stakeholders engaged in discussions about the aforementioned testing data and a multitude of other student achievement information such as grades, programmatic data, attendance, discipline, a-g readiness (minimum courses required by subject for entrance into California colleges and universities), college and career measures. In the discussions, stakeholders were quick to identify deficits in achievement but struggled to identify the ways to improve student outcomes through the LCAP, which guides specific, systematic initiatives and actions tied to supplemental and concentration grants.

The findings of this study complement the ongoing research base about the capacity of members of school communities to interpret and make sense of data for the purpose of improving student outcomes. These findings are not just specific to the LCAP process but can present some general lessons for leaders working with other types of organizational planning processes. This study found participants were willing to examine data and made meaning from it but struggled to identify specific ways to close achievement gaps. The capacity of participants was greatly dependent upon the structure of the meeting and the protocols put in place, as well as the overall strength of the administrator leading the process. Datnow and Parks (2015) noted that school leaders who implement a thoughtful process of using data will have more success leading schools that promote academic achievement but processes which employ unstructured data-based decision-making can lead to systemic tracking and a widening of the achievement gap for historically underserved student groups. Data use through the lens of equity requires thoughtful, carefully planned leadership practices that build the capacity of the school community members through an asset-focused examination of data (Park, 2018). This has specific implications for the LCAP stakeholder engagement process in which school leaders aim to meaningfully involve a variety of members of the school community; simply sharing data can lead to deficit focused conversations that do not authentically improve student outcomes.

This next section details the major overall findings for the context in which stakeholders made sense of students' needs based on inequities in a small and rural school district as they used data to make "retrospective sense of the situations in which they find themselves and their creations" (Weick, 1995, p. 15), and the ways they employed this information in the process of providing feedback on the allocation of resources, actions and services in the district's three-year

LCAP. These major themes are connected to the existing literature in most cases however, some unexpected themes emerged as well.

**Participants’ struggled with their perceptions of students’ needs and the story the data told.** Throughout the stakeholder engagement process, participants pointed to data as evidence to support an area of need, to validate the success of a particular service or goal, or to make a recommendation for the future LCAP. Stakeholders identified a specific student group as being “needier” than others and thus deserving of a more equitable share of something. There was clear evidence that stakeholders meaningfully engaged in the process of reviewing LCAP data and that they were provided the opportunity to give input into the new plan under development. The state’s intention with the Local Control Funding Formula is that local communities will better address their individual areas of inequities rather than working from the ‘top down’ state or federal government mandate. This required school leaders to present a variety of data to ‘paint a picture’ of inequity or need while tackling the underlying issues of race, class, and power that permeate the public education system (Warren & Carrillo, 2015; Loeb, Edley, Imazeki, & Stipek, 2018).

School districts are required to develop the LCAP collaboratively and must engage all stakeholders in examining the equitable use of supplemental and concentration funding for high need students (Hill & Ugo, 2015; Humphrey et al., 2017). This study found participants were sometimes challenged to make recommendations for services or actions that were tied to a specific achievement gap and instead made very global, school-wide recommendations. Stakeholders and participants were able to make general observations about the needs of targeted student groups but failed to identify meaningful ways to close the achievement gaps they saw. This left space for administrators to exert their own agenda, or to guide the development of the

LCAP towards areas they believed to be those of greatest need. Further, the findings indicated a critical need for redirection to a focused discussion about the academic performance of targeted student groups and their needs as related to supplemental and concentration funds, goals and services happened in nearly every setting. Researchers have found that leaders must have a clear vision when engaging in data inquiry to inform a course of action because without this clear vision in a process like the LCAP, data can be used to foster inequities (Datnow & Park, 2015). Data can be used to limit the opportunities afforded to students by tracking them into remedial courses or imposing other programmatic limits on them (Park, Daly, & Guerra, 2013). Decision-making processes, like the LCAP, push stakeholders to wrestle with ambiguity or meaning around an artifact or piece of data. The contests, discussions, questions and discovery that emerged from making meaning of an unknown or ambiguous artifact leads to the development of common agreements within the context of the district and build a working knowledge and common language for stakeholders, but need to be done through a specific, equity focused and asset based lens (Honig & Coburn, 2008; Datnow & Park, 2015).

Through the LCFF and LCAP, the state intentionally moved to a model where LEA's can be strategic and coherent in planning and budgeting to meet the needs of each unique, local student group, based on the size and demographics of schools and districts, while maintaining a focus on improving student outcomes (Perry, 2013; Humphrey et al., 2017). However, there was evidence that the burden of developing a plan that is truly equitable lies heavily on the small group, or in the case of Fairweather, on a single administrator writing the LCAP. This individual had to gather and sift through the feedback that, though often well-intentioned, is lacking in specifics or is globally targeted. This burden creates space for the vision of one leader to guide the LCAP process, which may or may not align with what stakeholders said or did, especially if

administrators do not provide a clear overarching plan and constantly refocus stakeholders towards that vision or plan. This study found that stakeholders could sometimes get lost in the student data and relied heavily on guidance from leadership, which will be discussed as another finding in this section.

**Participants collaborated with their peers and their social network.** The findings in this study indicate that participants viewed their colleagues as reliable sources of information in the analysis -or debunking - of equitable student need in evaluating student data. The interaction of stakeholders shaped how a process evolves and what the outcomes may be developed collaboratively by the network of actors (Almeida, 2016). The student data used in the development of the LCAP is not what causes action, it is the meanings that stakeholders formed about data that determines the resulting LCAP actions, services and goals (Weick et al., 2005; Almeida, 2016). Although the individual actors may have interpreted the same information differently or may make different recommendations as a result of their role through the activity, they developed new meanings and shared understandings of Fairweather's achievement gaps that emerge from their interactions with each other (Coburn, 2001; Weick, 1995; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002; Almeida, 2016). Strong social networks can facilitate the sharing of information and increase problem solving, especially when school leaders create a meaningful and engaging structure for collaboration (Coburn, Choi, & Mata, 2015). However weak social networks can constrain or hinder a change process like the development of a Local Control and Accountability Plan which will govern and drive the collective work of a school district to implement improvements for targeted student groups (Daly, 2015). The implications from this single case study add to the existing body of research in that school leaders must attend carefully to both the formal and informal social networks of their LCAP stakeholders when engaging them in

meaningful discussion about plan review and development. In the case of Fairweather, leaders were correct in attending to not only what stakeholders said in meetings but also observing what they did not say or instances when people did not speak up about a particular data point or discussion among peers.

### **Unexpected themes**

Creswell (2012) defined unexpected themes as ‘themes that are surprises and not expected to surface’ in the course of a study (p. 249). Four unexpected themes emerged from the findings of this study, which extend what is known about the LCAP stakeholder engagement process and connect to other, possibly overlapping areas of academic interest. When examined individually, they follow the normal trajectory of sensemaking theory wherein people make meaning both individually in their own contexts and within their larger organization but collectively, these themes surface a larger trend of deficit-thinking that seemed to be part of the culture of Fairweather’s social network. Stakeholders struggled to identify specific ways to close the achievement gap and struggled with the idea that some groups of students needed more meant others might get less or not as much. Providing needier students with more required stakeholders to acknowledge disparities in student achievement, access to rigorous programs, embedded systems of meritocracy and other beliefs which may contribute the perpetuation of achievement and opportunity gaps (Zamudio et al., 2011).

**First, participants sometimes cast doubt on the validity of the data.** At times, participants questioned the validity of the data, were skeptical of the source or the way in which the data was calculated, or asked administrators for different or contrasting data points. This finding was unexpected as there was limited scholarly literature on the theme of skepticism or disbelief relative to data. Datnow and Park (2013) found evidence of teachers lacking trust in the

data used to drive schoolwide decision-making, and noted that building trust among peers, leaders, and with the data itself was a necessary building block of effective stakeholder engagement processes for the purpose of targeted school improvement. They also found implications for the establishment of norms for asset focused data discussions and identified a basic lack of trust among teachers as a constraint. In alignment with Datnow and Park's (2013) research, Fairweather's stakeholders were mistrustful of the data, of the larger picture the data painted of students and student groups, and to some degree questioned the usefulness of the data.

**Second, participants grappled with their personal sense of responsibility for closing the achievement gap.** At times, stakeholders attributed responsibility outside of themselves for existing performance instead of considering how they themselves could support a change to for the better. Participants discussed their own or a collective sense of being responsible for student success or outcomes in their own space but would dismiss their individual ability to make a change in the overall achievement gap. In a few cases, participants did not accept a responsibility for their part in improving student outcomes at all. This correlated with a body of research in the area of data driven decision-making (DDDM). Specifically, Datnow and Park (2013) found that at times, teachers engaged in district-lead DDDM took the data very personally, even when it was framed though a school-wide, collective lens for examining ways to improve or increase achievement.

**Third, participants blamed others as a reason for an existing achievement or opportunity gap.** In several observed situations, when participants questioned the reliability of the data or requested more data, they were sometimes seeking to prove a point or disprove what the data forecasted. This seemed to be a way of diminishing their responsibility for improving student performance or to place blame for the poor test scores or poor performance indicators.



One participant noted, “A lot of people... want to blame the students and they don't want to believe it's their inability to reach them or teach them.” Finnigan and Daly (2012) noted that in challenging school networks like the one observed in this study, setting clear norms for the use of data were sometimes seen by teachers as a hinderance, rather than a support. Combating an embedded culture of deficit thinking requires more than scaffolds and strategies to mitigate the entrenched culture of ‘not my problem’. **Finally, participants applied personal opinions, their individual experiences and personal agendas as reasons for specific recommendations for allocating resources in the LCAP.** Participants often drew on these habits when making recommendations or supporting positions in the name of equity. Whether it was because of human nature to default to their own core beliefs or the nature of the culture of a district that had gone through tremendous change due to distrust in leadership, stakeholders would make observations using data but used opinions to suggest services and actions. Datnow’s (2011) examination of Andy Hargreaves’ work around teacher collaboration and contrived collegiality bears mention within the context of this study. Specifically, contrived collegiality – like the LCAP stakeholder engagement process – “is administratively regulated, implementation-oriented, fixed in time and space, and predictable. Collaboration among teachers with these characteristics does not generally lead to meaningful or sustainable change “(Datnow, 2011, p. 148). The Education Partnership (n.d.) suggested stakeholders need to have confidence in the data and the process of making sense of data, meaning they need to believe the data represents the reality of their school and their students; “Trustworthiness is a function of the way the data are collected, the integrity with which it is handled, and the reasonableness of the analysis and reduction techniques” (p. 2).

While well intentioned on the part of the stakeholders observed in this study, the idea of *local control* leaves a lot of opportunity for bias or, rather variation as a result of the leaders within local districts (Mintrop, 2012; Humphrey et al., 2017). The study noted several instances where bias, opinions or even entrenched beliefs of meritocracy crept into the conversation and stakeholders. Historically, many student groups, such as those identified by the state as priority groups (low socioeconomic, English learners, and foster youth), have been disenfranchised in public education and the LCAP methodology has targeted how to better serve those who have been traditionally left out. This study found that participants struggled to understand the origins of why inequities existed for students. Participant 8 noted, “I think we {school staff} very much have the middle-class mentality. I think most teachers are in the middle of the road, middle-class or above, and ... talking about culture and ... language, I think there's a disconnect there from our {student} population.”

The concept of meritocracy, that everyone has the same opportunities within a society which is vastly disparate and in which education is seen the great equalizer (Zamudio, et al., 2011) required district leaders to constantly reinforce the intention of the supplemental and concentration grant funds targeted for four specific student groups. Policymakers have suggested that districts shift the deficit thinking and encourage a focus on asset-based goals in the development of their LCAP. For example, districts should guide stakeholders to think not about how to prevent dropouts, and instead should frame LCAP goals more positively, like increasing the graduation rate or aiming for post-secondary outcomes (Beach, Their, Collins Lench, & Coleman, 2015; Edley & Kimner, 2018). One of the ways that Fairweather’s leaders used the process of asking stakeholders to provide input was by reviewing prior LCAP goals, actions and services and asking them to adopt the action again for continuance, adapt the action to change it,

abandon the action by removing it from the new plan, or add something. The four unexpected themes that emerged from the findings suggest that school leaders may be better served by reframing the way stakeholders give input, by scaffolding asset-based language and goals, instead of the deficit focus that emerged and permeated the process.

### **Contests Over Perceptions of Equity**

Jencks (1988) observed, “No one publicly defends unequal educational opportunity” however, knowing that inequities in educational outcomes persist, this study aims to understand how competing conceptions of equity shaped the LCAP stakeholder process. The state of California intended the LCAP stakeholder process to engage the local communities who, arguably better know the needs of their students and can address those individual areas of inequities rather than working from the ‘top down’ state or federal government mandate. In an effort to understand how LCAP stakeholders in a small school district made sense of equity and made recommendations based on student need, this study examined how participants individually defined equity, how that developed into a local, shared definition that guided the decision-making process, what happened when the conception of equity was contested, and how school leaders and their vision impacted the process.

**Locally defining equity.** All participants were asked during the interview to share their definition of equity and asked what equity looked like in the Fairweather School District. The widely used definition of equity – being equal, fair and right - incorporates the ideas of access, opportunity, and need to give all students the possibility of achieving equal outcomes (Jacobs, Beck & Crowell, 2014; Edley & Kimney, 2018). This study found that all participants began their individual characterizations of what equity was by discussing equal access to courses and programs, with only two participants adding elements of outcomes as a hallmark of equity for

students. Taken as a whole, the ten participants in this study provided a snapshot of a local definition of equity that aligns with the Liberal conception of equity, which focuses on providing supports for students to access opportunities to succeed (Guiton & Oakes, 1995).

This study found that when participants' definitions of equity were contested by other stakeholders, that hearts and minds were not changed or swayed by their peers. During observations of stakeholders and participants, at time an individual would contest the definition or example of equity being advocated for by a peer. The dissenting peer was treated with respect as no argument ensued however, they were generally met with silence or a brief acknowledgement before the conversation would return to the same deficit focused discussion. Instead, stakeholders simply carried on with their beliefs and were not moved to make a new or difference recommendation for the LCAP. Participant 10 observed that often a small or select group of stakeholders give their opinion saying, "...it's usually the ones with an agenda. The others are going to continue to meet the needs of their students the way they best see how, but they don't get involved in the political."

Organizational change is often socially constructed by making meaning with data, information and the people in the network; "Who you know defines what you know" (Daly, 2015, p. 2). Thus, the meanings that emerge from the conversations had by groups of stakeholders from a variety of roles (e.g. teachers, administrators, parents, students) can be adapted through interpretive processes such as disagreements, peer group norms and options, and other social products such as emotions (Schmidt & Datnow, 2005). In this study, the findings offer a picture of a social network of stakeholders who seemed entrenched in the status quo; school leaders worked diligently to draw stakeholders to make meaning of persistent

achievement gaps for English Learners and other students groups but struggled to engage their stakeholders in strategic actionable plans that challenge the status quo.

Thus, district leaders needed to have a clear leadership vision to support stakeholders' as they not only identified data-based student needs but also developed an actionable, asset-based LCAP that would make progress to close the achievement gap for Fairweather's students. Guiton and Oakes (1995) concluded that if these competing conceptions of equity are not acknowledged, discussed and addressed in the decision-making process, equity will not be achieved for students. Without a singular understanding of equity, organizational decision-making processes such as the Local Control and Accountability Plan, may fail to diagnose, address, monitor or change the existing achievement and opportunity gaps that persist for students. The findings of this study reinforce the belief that local actors, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members, need to know and understand the needs of the students they serve and thus, know what needs to be done to close the achievement and achievement gaps for underserved students, is paramount to the decision-making process of developing goals and assigning services and funds. Further, the school leaders must be able to clearly articulate a vision of leadership aimed at the development of a collective commitment to improving outcomes for historically low-performing student groups. The state of California's vision that school districts need the freedom at the local level to enact reform strategies reaffirms a long-held notion that teachers have the agency, knowledge and capacity to improve schools however, this study finds that an asset-centered, collective belief that all students can succeed at rigorous levels is paramount to improving outcomes. Park (2018) cautions that school leaders need to attend to the ways in which data are used to challenge deficit assumptions about students and families, which was observed to happen in this study. The tendency of stakeholders to focus on deficits instead of assets and on adult

wants instead of student needs triangulates with the established literature which points to a focus on the ways in which leadership practices enable or constrain a culture of inquiry. Using data in a process like the LCAP to focus on equity necessitates administrators to practices that build the capacity of stakeholders through a structured, asset-focused examination of the data (Park, 2018).

### **Equity Defined and Enacted**

The LCAP engagement process compelled Fairweather's stakeholders to wrestle with ambiguity and meaning from artifacts and many pieces of data. The contests, discussions, questions and discovery that emerged within the context of the district's LCAP stakeholder engagement process built a working knowledge and common language for stakeholders. In the case of Fairweather's stakeholders, collectively there was a sense that the achievement gap was vast and conversations were globally focused on deficits rather than assets. The LCAP engagement process required stakeholders to grapple with the ambiguous, intangible meaning of equity and socially construct meaning within the context of student need from data (Honig and Coburn, 2008). The effect of community based reforms like the LCAP, specifically the concept that local communities will better address their individual areas of inequities rather than working from a top down, from the state or federal government, mandate fails to take into account the existing social networks, shared belief systems and collective sense of efficacy of the local organization (Vasquez Heilig, Ward, Weisman, & Cole, 2014). In the case of Fairweather's stakeholders, it is important to acknowledge again the possible effect of the significant leadership changes that had taken place in the district prior to this study. Further investigation is merited to infer whether the collective belief system could be influenced to be more asset-centric once the

new leadership team has developed, communicated, and made actionable their vision for student achievement.

The LCFF's aim to compensate for disadvantages on the basis of socioeconomic status, however, overlaps with the Liberal conception of equity that resources should be allocated unequally. Allbright et al. (2018) concluded that a clear, strong frame for understanding equity within the context of a larger organizational plan such as the LCAP, will benefit school districts in the creation of a coherent, effective blueprint for student outcomes. This study found participants were challenged to make recommendations for services or actions that were tied to a specific achievement gap and instead made very global, school-wide recommendations. Stakeholders and participants were able to make general observations about the needs of targeted student groups but failed to identify meaningful ways to close the achievement gaps they say. Further, the general sense of the stakeholders who participated in this study was focused on the status quo or, as at least three participants noted, focused on adult wants, not student needs.

### **Equitable Engagement for Stakeholders**

This section takes into account the data discussed previously and endeavors to answer the second research question: *How does this process of making sense result in a Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) stakeholder engagement process that stakeholders perceive as equitable?* In general, participants found the process to be engaging and clear in the purpose of building a plan that would guide the district for the next three years. Participants cited the data as being helpful for them as they considered the needs of students in their unique local community. However, the success of the LCAP process depends on a strong, shared conception of equity to define student need and allocate resources to support one group of students more than another (Allbright et al., 2018). This study found the shared conception of equity was one focused on

equality in access, not equity, and failed to take into account outcomes aligned with the narrowing of the achievement gap. Further research could be undertaken to examine the product that is the LCAP document and quantitatively correlate the goals and actions with equity measures such as funding or student achievement outcomes.

Participants considered the degree to which the process was truly an authentic effort to gather feedback or just checking a box to say the district met the stakeholder requirement. None of the stakeholders wondered about whether or not targeted students benefitted from the process. Yet participants generally felt they and their colleagues benefitted from the information and decision-making activities but did not make any observations about specific student groups. Overall, participants felt the act of examining the data and discussing student need in the context of equitably allocating resources to needier students was influential in the process of helping the district close the achievement gap.

### **Implications of the Study**

At a basic level, sensemaking is about answering the question, “What’s the story here?”, naming and categorizing the unknown, making meaning of things that defy normal patterns, are surprising or confusing, and creating a system, structure or policy as a result of the process. Sensemaking is about “the continued redrafting of an emerging story so that it becomes more comprehensive, incorporates more of the observed data, and is more resilient in the face of criticism” (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 415). The process of developing a Local Control and Accountability Plan, just one of many types of accountability plans found throughout the education system, is meant to be iterative; district leaders present stakeholders with student data and identify areas of need. Together, the stakeholders must gather input, develop goals, and then share a draft of the LCAP several times over the course of four to six



months. Each time the LCAP is shared, the stakeholders make sense of the data and opinions of others, working towards a common purpose. This collective sense-making process required clear consistent communication to create systemic coherence around the development of goals and the allocation of resources (Agullard & Goughnour, 2006). In the case of this study of the Fairweather School District, the disruption caused by the COVID 19 pandemic meant a delay in the adoption of a new three-year plan to guide the district and also halted the efforts of the new leadership team to build a more asset-based collective culture focused on student outcomes.

In every educational setting, there are a variety of systems and processes designed to bring together local actors for the purpose of sensemaking around a particular element of programs, instructional practices, student achievement and so on. Leaders want to ensure these organizational planning processes are true, effective, engaging opportunities for participants within that specific system to understand and provide feedback effectively and authentically. Though California has left the door open for local districts to enact stakeholder engagement with minimal guidance, the lessons from this study have some implications that can provide insight into other education based organizational planning processes. Attending to the ways local actors interact with each other and the materials presented, building collective efficacy and implementing an asset-focused, collective vision for high levels of student achievement will result in true collaboration and not just a ‘rubberstamp’ committee that has little to no input or effectiveness to enact change.

### **Implications for Policymakers**

The interaction of the people in the organization with the rules, policies, norms and institutional knowledge, shapes how a process evolves and what the outcomes may be developed collaboratively by the network of actors (Almeida, 2016). Sensemaking can be a useful

framework to consider how stakeholders in a school district understand and use student data to create an accountability plan which meets the needs of students while aligning with state mandated goals and the values of the district. The process of sensemaking can be used to mediate between a set of circumstances, like student achievement, and the actions taken by the organization, such as the allocation of goods and services to a specific group of students. The student data used in the development of the LCAP is not what causes action, it is the meanings that stakeholders form about data that determines the resulting LCAP (Weick et al., 2005; Almeida, 2016). Although the individual actors may interpret the same information differently or may take different actions as a result of their role through the activity, they also develop new meanings and shared understandings of the ideas that emerge from their interactions with each other (Coburn, 2001; Weick, 1995; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002; Almeida, 2016). In addition to the voices of the other actors in a group, the norms, values, culture and traditions of the organization (or school) can influence individuals' interpretations of their environments and experiences (Datnow & Park, 2013).

Social network theory suggests that successful change in an organization such as a school district, requires attending to the formal structures of the organization, as well as the informal social networks. These informal networks create webs of understanding, influence, and knowledge throughout the process of change (Daly, 2015). Social network theory views individuals within an organization as interdependent not independent, because they are embedded in the social structures of the organization, namely the school (Moolenaar, 2012). School leaders play an important role in the participative decision-making process. School and district leaders must provide instructional leadership, establish a coherent vision, and maintain a focus on equitable student outcomes (Rorrer, Skrla, and Scheurich, 2008; Datnow, 2012). The

relationships between leaders and teachers are essential to implementing and sustaining change and can be influenced to some degree by policy. A careful examination of an organization's social networks is important to detect acceptance of or resistance to the ideas or changes being suggested and may provide insight into the effectiveness of a reform initiative (Daly, 2015; Atteberry & Bryk, 2015). Further, social network theory will provide insight into how the perceptions of equity held by a social network may change throughout the LCAP development process or may be influenced to change, or resist change, by others within the network.

Scholars have examined the role of bridging the divide between district offices and school site leadership teams, through a coordinated professional development model that builds a culture of collaboration focused on improved student achievement. Honig and Hatch (2004) defined coherence in a school system as a dynamic, iterative process in which a district office and school sites work together to create and continually refine through 'negotiations' the balance between external demands such as state accountability measures and the schools' own goals and strategies. The state of California through the LCAP stakeholder process has made the presumption that this coherence exists and is nourished in school districts, based on the state's belief that local actors best know the needs of their unique student population. System or policy incoherence occurs when the external demands are too great and there is a lack of leadership, trust or processes that inhibit collaboration for the benefit of improved achievement. This study found that, though local actors were able to collaborate and examine student data, there was misalignment around the central mission of the LCAP, perhaps due to the significant changes in leadership over the previous year or possibly due to an entrenched mindset or culture of meritocracy. Scholars suggest that district and school teams need specific, sustained professional development to help address the assumptions and beliefs that that make up the unique school

community culture and shape their actions that manifest in guiding documents like the LCAP (Chrispeels, Burke, Johnson, & Daly, 2008). The literature suggests that leaders need to address these contrasting mindsets or mental models to increase achievement and better meet the needs of historically low performing students. Policymakers should consider the effect of coherence on the development of the LCAP and how incoherence could sustain a culture of low expectations for students.

Further, policymakers outside of California who work with similar organizational planning processes should consider the ways they attend to the ways the formal and informal networks of actors collaborate within the existing vision and culture, as well as the language they use when discussing students. A new school leader will be best served to seek ways to interrupt the status quo way of planning when it inhibits student achievement or sustains barriers to increase achievement.

### **Implications for School Leaders**

The design decisions and research questions guiding this study have been informed by the existing literature on the Local Control and Accountability Plan, school finance reform, stakeholder decision making, sense making and social networks. Though the findings of this study are limited to one setting, it provided an important snapshot of the stakeholder decision making process and how school leaders collaborated with stakeholders to develop a guiding plan meant to close the achievement gap for students. The results may be used to inform the collaborative nature of building common understanding of equity and student need, along with a focus on the closing of the achievement gap for district students, especially in other small districts in which an entrenched, deficit-focused culture is rooted. District administrators can learn from the data gathered in this study, to support schools and school leaders, and to initiate

discussions regarding equity in resources and outcomes when the opportunity arises. By and large, this study highlighted the focus on equity versus equality in the context of stakeholder decision making. In particular, this study provided a detailed look at the ways in which the beliefs and values of two groups of stakeholders constructed and rendered equity for historically underserved students. Triangulated with the existing literature about data-based decision-making, this study highlights the importance of school leaders having an explicit vision focused on asset-based conversations about student strengths and uses data as a tool to support student learning (Park, 2018).

Understanding how the meaning of equity is developed and implemented through the LCAP process matters because it questions the state of California's assertion that local stakeholders know what is best for their unique, local population of students. Further, understanding how stakeholders make sense of student need and convey these institutional moral beliefs through the formal and informal social networks will provide insight into how local school districts create equitable systems which support increased levels of academic achievement for historically low-performing students. Findings from this study can inform school leaders on the process of attending to stakeholder engagement for the greater purpose of improving learning opportunities and outcomes for all students and closing opportunity gaps between privileged and historically underserved students. In any type of organizational planning process in California or other states, leaders have to have an explicitly communicated vision for the collective belief system around student achievement and must convey the urgency for asset-focused collaboration for improved student achievement at every opportunity. Leaders must build trust within the organization through their commitment in word and deed to equitable outcomes for students.

Strong leaders must be unwavering in their values as they build the collective efficacy of the culture of their schools and district.

Small and rural school districts face the same fiscal and systems problems as larger districts with fewer resources and fewer stakeholders to make systemic changes needed to address achievement and opportunity gaps. This study contributes to the small but growing research about the ways small and rural school districts confront the challenges of building the collective efficacy of their stakeholders as they examine and enact equity in the LCAP. Marsh et al. (2018) found districts with limited stakeholder engagement had a somewhat vague understanding of equity, which translated to equal not equitable plans and funding. These findings, combined with other recent studies of stakeholder engagement challenges especially in small and rural school districts, have framed the need to more closely examine how local actors define and implement equitable actions and services through the Local Control and Accountability Plan process or other similar types of organizational planning processes. Based on what the participants in this study said and the recommendations they made in the name of equity, school leaders need to consider how to refocus conversations to asset-based, rigorous and actionable plans, goals and services for the benefit of students. Leaders have to also walk a fine line between challenging biases and meritocratic belief systems while building trust with staff, through data-driven decision-making.

Further, as school leaders are responsible for the writing of the LCAP, the idea of one person's values or the moral values of a small group of people need to be evaluated when considering what a school or district believes to be priorities for students. In other words, the LCAP permits personal values to determine or justify funding priorities. School leaders must ensure they are seeking out multiple perspectives and interventions, with proven, data-driven

foundations, for high need students. However, the findings of this study indicate that the value system and vision for equity must be communicated by leaders as the moral compass of the district to make changes to the status quo. The absence of a strong belief system built around rigorous learning and equitable outcomes for all students allows achievement gaps to persist. Thus, leaders working with organizational decision-making processes have to be brave and diplomatic in confronting the status quo when it does not benefit increased student achievement and the collective efficacy of a school community focused on asset-based conversations about students.

### **Implications for Social Justice**

Linda Darling Hammond (2004) observed that a prevailing view in society is that when students fail to achieve, it is their own fault because they did not take advantage of the opportunity to better themselves through the educational system when in fact, differences in teacher quality, socioeconomic status, language, parent education levels, curriculum, services, school funding, and class sizes, are the more likely culprits. The moral imperative lies in the purpose of public education as a right for all citizens and an equal opportunity for everyone to improve or better themselves. However, equity in American educational system is better understood through a deficit lens, as it has resulted in a long history of sustained, systemic inequities for students from historically low-performing groups. Though the LCFF and the LCAP are a step in the right direction, "...the U.S. can't spend its way out of inequity..." (Stillings Candal, 2018). The process of placing the responsibility for improving educational opportunities for students through equitable funding and reform efforts lies heavily on the ways local stakeholders perceive and enact meaning of equity.

The LCFF and LCAP assign responsibility for improving academic outcomes for targeted student groups to local school districts however, for true substantive outcomes to change for targeted students, the quality of their learning opportunities must be improved. The responsibility for these improvements is dependent upon local stakeholders to carefully consider student needs and assign funding and services that guarantee that needier students have “high quality teaching within the context of a rich and challenging curriculum supported by personalized schools and classes”. To accomplish this, district leaders must guide stakeholders through the process of defining and implementing equity in the goals of the Local Control and Accountability Plan with a clear, consistent vision and message.

Yavuz (2016) observed, “America has often been called ‘the land of opportunity.’ In terms of the college readiness and access of underrepresented urban students, however, America has been a land of inequality (p. 2). California’s students continue to live in schools and districts segregated by race/ethnicity, ELL status, and socioeconomic status. Research shows the lack of success among underrepresented students to be one of the most prominent social justice issues and serious problems of California’s education system. The philosophic approach behind the LCFF was based on the idea that disadvantaged schools should get substantially more money to help the neediest students, not the same or equal funding for every school because, “Equal treatment for children in unequal situations is not justice” (Brown, 2013). California’s schools are tasked with the moral imperative to improve college and career readiness and graduation rates for all students to meet the demands of the fast-growing, global economy.

Finally, though the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was not a focus of this study, it certainly interrupted what would have been the normal, planned progression of the study. While the district only conducted one stakeholder engagement meeting with staff in the late spring via



Zoom, the tone was decidedly different and not as participatory as previous sessions. If the need to social distance continues for a more extended period of time, district leaders will have to consider the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement sessions, especially when trying to reach the parents of historically low-performing students. Some families lack some social capital and school-based knowledge to a degree, which can be scaffolded during more engaging, in-person meetings. They also experience challenges with access to the technology needed to engage with districts online. District leaders will also have to consider new ways to support targeted student groups with supplemental and concentration grant funds to prevent the achievement gap from widening as a result of an extended school closure. School leaders should consider how to meaningfully engage all members of their school community if the COVID pandemic continues to impact the LCAP process and the education of those students who should benefit from the LCAP's goals, actions and services.

### **Study Limitations**

A qualitative research methodology, specifically a case study, was a strong choice to tackle the research questions in this study; however, this methodology has limitations. The most obvious limitation is that qualitative case study research has been criticized in the past as having limited generalizability and conceptual value (Yin, 1989; Rudestam & Newton, 2015). This study likely did not produce significant, generalizable results. Yin (1989) asserts that a single case study is generalizable in theory only, not to a specific population. Secondly, this study assumed that the stakeholders who agreed to participate would be open and honest about their innate biases and preconceived notions of what equity means and how it should be rendered in the LCAP. This study was dependent upon the willingness of stakeholders to participate in this study and to be forthcoming with their viewpoints in their interviews. Stakeholders' willingness

to share their beliefs about equity with the researcher are a key component of this study and could limit the overall understanding of how they define and implement equity in the development of the LCAP. This study took place within a restricted time frame of about five months, making it impossible to observe, survey or interview every stakeholder. Most importantly, the LCAP process itself was drastically impacted by the COVID 19 school closures. These factors limited the scope of the proposed research.

Moving forward, research seeking to increase the depth and breadth of understanding about building meaningful stakeholder engagement around a collective belief in equity focused on closing the achievement gap would deepen the knowledge base on this topic. Researchers may also consider a more focused examination on the connection between the specific articulated vision of a district and its leaders to the collective definition and implementation of equity in the name mandates like the Local Control and Accountability Plan. The state of California's core belief that local actors best understand the needs of their unique students and thus are best equipped to make decisions about how to serve them omits the underlying collective, cultural belief system around equity and achievement. It also fails to account for deeply embedded systems of meritocracy and racism that perpetuate the achievement gap for historically low-performing students.

### **Conclusions of the Study**

This study contributes to the limited but expanding field of research about the ways California's school districts locally define equity and construct a Local Control and Accountability Plan that is the embodiment of a district's collective priorities and belief systems about closing the achievement gap and improving student academic outcomes. The findings presented here also extend the field's understanding of the necessary scaffolds and supports that

districts must consider to foster an equity focused approach to engaging stakeholders in meaningful conversations about supporting the underserved student groups targeted by the LCAP.

This study complements the existing literature on data use to make sense of equitable student need, to prove or disprove assumptions Whether or not the LCAP itself produces equitable goals, actions, and services for targeted students which result in increased opportunities and a decrease of the achievement gap also could be a consideration for future researchers. Additional research could also be conducted to encompass other stakeholders who engage in the LCAP process like students, parents and parent groups, or the members of the school board.

Mintrop's (2012) study of integrity and the role it plays in school leaders' decision- and policy-making about students and school programs as a consideration in the development of the Local Control Accountability Plan, questions the effect of local control in individual districts. Because school leaders are responsible for the writing of the LCAP, the idea of one person's values or the moral values of a small group of people need to be evaluated when considering what a school or district believes to be priorities for students. In other words, the LCAP permits personal values to determine or justify funding priorities. "Integrity in schools... hinges upon a reliable consistency between word and deed around core educational values" (p. 699). School leaders must ensure they are seeking out multiple perspectives and interventions, with proven, data-driven foundations, for high need students while maintaining a commitment to the unwavering belief in equitable outcomes and closing the achievement gap. District leaders must confront the idea of equity, and the effect of their policies on those students who have traditionally received inequitable educational services while grappling with the underlying issues of race, class, and power that permeate the public education system. In considering the moral

imperative of improving outcomes for historically under-achieving students while engaging stakeholders in the development of the Local Control and Accountability Plan, school leaders can make deeper, more meaningful changes to effectively increase the success of all students.

## **APPENDIX A**

University of California San Diego

Consent to Act as a Research Subject

Should Needier Students Get More? The Role of Equity in  
The Local Control and Accountability Plan Process  
Melissa Marovich, Doctoral Student

***Who is conducting the study, why you have been asked to participate, how you were selected, and what is the approximate number of participants in the study?***

I, Melissa Marovich, am a researcher/graduate student in the Joint Doctoral Program at the University of California San Diego (UCSD), and California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) in Educational Leadership. I am conducting research on how public school stakeholders make sense of how equity is defined and implemented in the form of actions and services, and ultimately through the allocation of resources to low performing student groups for who the achievement gap persists, through the development of the Local Control Accountability Plan. You have been asked to participate in this study because, as a teacher leader or administrator, you are a stakeholder in the \*FAIRWEATHER\* LCAP process. In this research study, four to six teachers and approximately four administrators will participate. The results will appear in my doctoral dissertation and may be discussed in presentations and research papers.

***Why is this study being done?***

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of how the meaning of equity is developed and implemented through the LCAP process. It matters because it questions the state of California's assertion that local stakeholders know what is best for their unique, local population of students. Further, understanding how stakeholders make sense of student need and convey these institutional moral beliefs through the formal and informal social networks will provide insight into how local school districts create equitable systems which support increased levels of academic achievement for historically low-performing students.

***What will happen to you in this study?***

If you agree to be in this study, the following will take place: I would like to (1) have you participate in a short focus group discussion and (2) conduct a one-on-one interview with you.

Participation in the focus group portion of this study is voluntary, and will not affect your job in any way. The observations of the focus groups are not an evaluation of your teaching, rather I am focused on how LCAP stakeholders make sense of student need through data and the LCAP development process and how they interact with each other.

You may be invited to participate in one audiotaped interview during the spring semester of 2020. This interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes and would take place either at your school site or another public location of your choosing. You will be asked questions about your own perceptions of student need through the lens of an equitable LCAP. You can refuse to answer specific questions. You can ask for certain portions to not be recorded or for certain parts of the recording to be erased. Participation in the interview portion of this study is voluntary, and will not affect your job in any way. All interviews will be taped and transcribed verbatim; you will be given the opportunity to review audio and/or transcripts if you wish to do so.

***How much time will each study procedure take, what is your total time commitment, and how long will the study last?***

The study is planned to last the spring semester 2020. Your time commitment is one 15-30 minute focus group and possibly one 30-45 minute interview.

***What risks are associated with this study?***

Participation in this study may involve some added risks or discomforts. These include the following:

1. A potential for the loss of confidentiality. All possible care will be taken to protect the confidentiality of your records including but not limited to encrypting all data and keeping data on a password-protected server and following standard UCSD security protocols to maintain confidentiality. Research records will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. Research records may be reviewed by the UCSD Institutional Review Board.
2. A potential risk of emotional discomfort. You may be asked questions about your beliefs about equity and student need. There is the possibility that this may lead some participants to feel some mild emotional discomfort or embarrassment. Please know that you don't have to discuss anything that makes you feel uncomfortable, and you can decline to answer any questions you like and still remain in the study.
- 3.. There is the possibility of frustration, fatigue, boredom, and stress. You are under no obligation to continue with the observations or the interview. Please be advised that you may stop or reschedule the observations or the interview at any time for any reason.

Under California law, I must report information about known or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, dependent adult or elder including physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse or neglect. If any investigator has or is given such information, he or she may be required to report such information to the appropriate authorities.

Because this is a research study, there may also be some unknown risks that are currently unforeseeable. You will be informed of any significant new findings.

***What are the alternatives to participating in this study?***

The alternative to participation in this study is not to participate or limited participation (e.g., decline to answer interview questions).

***What benefits can be reasonably expected?***

There will be no compensation for participants. The investigator, however, may learn more about local stakeholders perceptions of equity in the LCAP decision-making process, and society may benefit from this knowledge.

***Can you choose to not participate or withdraw from the study without penalty or loss of benefits?***

Participation in research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the focus group or the interview at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. If you decide that you no longer wish to continue in this study, you will be required to notify Melissa Marovich in an email (mmarovic@ucsd.edu) or by phone (760-505-4691).

You will be told if any important new information is found during the course of this study that may affect your wanting to continue.

***Can you be withdrawn from the study without your consent?***

The PI may remove you from the study without your consent if the PI feels it is in your best interest or the best interest of the study. You may also be withdrawn from the study if you do not follow the instructions given to you by the study personnel.

***Will you be compensated for participating in this study?***

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

***Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?***

There will be no cost to you for participating in this study

***Who can you call if you have questions?***

Melissa Marovich has explained this study to you and answered your questions. If you have other questions or research-related problems, you may reach Melissa Marovich at mmarovic@ucsd.edu or 760-505-4691, or her chair at UCSD, Dr. Alan Daly (adaly@ucsd.edu).

You may call the Human Research Protections Program Office at 858-246-HRPP (858-246-4777) to inquire about your rights as a research subject or to report research-related problems.

***Your Signature and Consent***

You have received a copy of this consent document.

You agree to participate.

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Subject's signature

---

Date

**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO**  
**AUDIO RECORDING RELEASE CONSENT FORM**

Should Needier Students Get More?

The Role of Equity in the Local Control and Accountability Plan Process

Melissa Marovich, Doctoral Student

As part of this project, an audio recording will be made of you during your participation in this research project. Please indicate below the uses of these audio recordings to which you are willing to consent. This is completely voluntary and up to you. In any use of the audio recording, your name will not be identified. You may request to stop the recording at any time or to erase any portion of your recording.

1. The audio recording can be studied by the research team for use in the research project.

\_\_\_\_\_ Initials

2. The audio recording can be used for scientific publications.

\_\_\_\_\_ Initials

You have the right to request that the recording be stopped or erased in full or in part at any time.

You have read the above description and give your consent for the use of audio recording as indicated above.

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Signature

Date

Witness

Date



## APPENDIX B

### Interview Questions

QUESTIONS	Possible follow up:
1. How many years have you worked here?	
2. How would you define equity and what do you think it looks like in our school?	Sometimes people feel like equity means one group gets less so that another gets more.... Equity implies that there are only gains, do they feel like a sacrifice was made at the expense of another group?
3. What makes something equitable?	
4. In the meeting we just had, in what ways - if any - did equity emerge as a consideration?	What student groups were discussed?
5. Did a particular piece of student achievement data discussed in the LCAP goal 1 and 2 meetings make an impression on you? What was it and why?	Probe more about data shared? How did they make sense of the information?
6. Did any of your fellow stakeholders say something or bring up a point that made an impression on you? What did they say and why did it resonate with you?	Is there one of your peers who you find particularly knowledgeable in the context of the LCAP? Is there a peer who you think is a proponent of equity?
7. What actions or services are in place in the current LCAP that promote equity?	
8. What inequities do you see in the LCAP process or in our school?	
9. In the last two LCAP meetings we had, do you feel like a particular group of students was left out or not discussed equitably?	Was a group over-represented?
10. Do you think actions and services in the LCAP should be assigned globally or to specific students for specific items?	
11. In your opinion, who are our neediest students? What makes them needy?	

12. What things could we add to the LCAP that would have the greatest impact on improved student outcomes?	For which groups?
13. Why should we care? Does the LCAP make a difference?	
14. You get the final word. What did I forget to ask or what should I know from your perspective about the LCAP stakeholder process?	

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