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School (Districts) of Democracy:
Collective Stakeholder Engagement under California's Local Control Funding Formula

By

SEAN EDWARD ARSEO
DISSERTATION

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Approved:

Jacob Hibel, Chair

Stephanie Mudge

Drew Halfmann

Julie Marsh

Committee in Charge

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Abstract

In 2013, California's Local Control Funding Formula devolved significant budget and planning control to school districts. As part of its parent involvement priority and community-centered accountability, administrators and staff must "meaningfully engage stakeholders" in district decisions and describe their processes in publicly available plans. Researchers, advocates, and policymakers agree that LCFF's stakeholder engagement mandate is "a remarkable experiment in local democracy" (Humphrey and Koppich 2014:243), but high expectations, minimal guidelines, and tight schedules left many implementers and participants across the state unclear about their responsibilities. How do administrative agents and participants collaboratively implement ambiguous participatory governance (PG) reforms? What conditions facilitate and forestall collective democratic participation in education decisions? Researchers' reliance on cross-sectional case studies leads many analysts to explain "failure" by extrapolating from "successes"; institutionalists to frequently examine reforms as time-in-point changes; and relational theorists to interpret PG as perpetually unsettled.

Treating LCFF implementation as a "process-in-the-making" (Baiocchi and Summers 2017) under circumstances not of actors' own choosing, I uncover how both institutional structures and ongoing relational struggles unevenly shaped stakeholder engagement practices over time. I leverage statewide implementation to test prior theories' generalizability using computational text analyses and longitudinally explore the causes of, changes in, and consequences from "moments of uncertainty" (Baiocchi and Summers 2017:314) in one school district. Although most school districts concentrated on state compliance, several promising practices emerged in surprising places like racially and ethnically diverse school districts with support from nearby community organizations. In an unlikely school district hailed for its early

engagement record, prior policies, democratic structures, and informal recruitment practices gradually stymied equitable participation. Moreover, competing policy approaches translated questions over authority into conflicts over technical procedures and institutional relationships that semi-formalized facilitation positions and procedures, committed institutional liaisons' heightened capacities, and selective participant withdrawal attenuated. I draw lessons for practitioners' and policymakers' considerations as they revise and implement LCFF and future PG reforms.

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Writing these acknowledgements seemed unlikely at one (read: *many*) time(s) during my graduate school journey. I spent many days and nights with one foot out the program's door with little idea where it rested. Even had I not completed this dissertation, though, I would have been mistaken to believe that I should avoid acknowledging all the people along the way who helped shape not only my scholarship but who I am eight years later.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“We are bringing government closer to the people, to the classroom where real decisions are made and directing the money where the need and the challenge is greatest. This is a good day for California, it’s a good day for school kids and it’s a good day for our future.”

– Governor Jerry Brown upon signing the Local Control and Funding Formula, 2013

In 2013, Governor Jerry Brown “revolutioniz[ed]” California’s K-12 education funding and accountability system with the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) (Office of Governor Edmund G. Brown 2013). For decades, a complex array of local, state, and federal mandates gradually centralized policymakers’ and administrators’ control over America’s schools (Tyack 1974). Charged with bureaucratic inefficiency and special interest capture that allegedly failed public schoolchildren and left the nation itself at risk (Chubb and Moe 1990; Gardner et al. 1983), policy reform movements concurrently challenged the “one best system” with proposals to restructure schooling organizations (Tyack and Cuban 1995), their governance (Mehta 2013), and oversight regulations (Ravitch 2010). After years of fiscal austerity exacerbated lackluster progress, persistent inequality, and waning enthusiasm for public education, California policymakers ushered in a (re)turn towards local education control for the first time since *Brown v. Board of Education* (Marsh and Wohlstetter 2013). With hopes that greater on-the-ground decision-making would increase efficient “investment” that closes achievement gaps (Anson 2013), LCFF devolved significant budget and planning control to local education agencies (LEAs), i.e., school districts¹. Besides collapsing several small categorical programs into large less-restricted funds, the new formula exchanged strict expenditure regulations with community-

¹ LEAs are the lowest unit of educational governance. Historically, the term has been used interchangeably with “school district.” Different organizational structures can be LEAs, however (e.g., community day schools; independent charter schools). Although my analysis only focuses on elementary and unified school districts (more below), I use “districts,” “school districts,” and “LEAs” interchangeably.

centered accountability. As part of its parent involvement priority, administrators and staff must “meaningfully engage stakeholders” in district decisions and describe their processes in publicly available Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs).

Advocates, policymakers, and researchers agree that LCFF’s stakeholder engagement mandate is “a remarkable experiment in local democracy” (Furger, Hernandez, and Darling-Hammond 2019; Humphrey and Koppich 2014:243; Marsh and Hall 2018). Few concepts are as disputed as democracy, however. Etymologically, its meaning seems straightforward: the people—*demos*—are in power or rule—*kratia*. Historically, though, democracy has meant different things in different places at different times (Taylor 2019). Despite growing global interest in participatory governance (Baiocchi and Ganuza 2017; Wampler and McNulty 2011), only a few highly motivated municipal politicians have attempted small-scale transformations in the United States (Chapin 2013; Gilman 2016; Pape and Secondo 2012). No state government had adopted such a sweeping democratic reform until LCFF (Marsh and Hall 2018), but several states have taken cues from the “California Way” (Bae and Stosich 2018; Furger et al. 2019; Stosich and Bae 2018). High expectations, minimal guidelines, and tight schedules left many implementers and prospective participants across California unclear about their responsibilities.

Education researchers have long acknowledged participation in decision-making opportunities as one avenue for parents and family and community members to actively steward children’s academic trajectories (Epstein 1987, 1995; Mapp 2003). For too long, though, their narrow focus on individualistic behaviors and impacts have obscured the collective dimensions of specific engagement forms (Lareau and Muñoz 2012; Posey-Maddox, Kimelberg, and Cucchiara 2016). Although research on shared decision-making initiatives provided important lessons, analysts lack shared theoretical frameworks to make sense of their findings. Two

primary theoretical approaches seek to explain participatory governance implementation. Whereas institutionalists contend that powerful actors and design principles primarily explain PG's fate (e.g., Fung 2006; Lee 2015), relational theorists of democracy posit that struggles between social forces pattern deliberations (Baiocchi 2005; Baiocchi, Heller, and Silva 2011). Unfortunately, researchers' reliance on cross-sectional case studies leads many analysts to explain "failure" by extrapolating from "successes" (Hanson 2018); institutionalists to frequently examine reforms as time-in-point changes; and relational theorists to interpret PG as perpetually unsettled.

In this dissertation, I investigate how school district administrators and staff in California "brought government closer to the people," and how some of those people responded to the invitation. Treating LCFF implementation as a "process-in-the-making" (Baiocchi and Summers 2017) under circumstances not of actors' own choosing, I uncover how both institutional structures and ongoing relational struggles unevenly shaped stakeholder engagement practices over time. Drawing on prior research on family and community engagement and the recent wave of participatory governance reforms across the world, I illuminate patterns in reported engagement practices by computationally analyzing administrative plans' text and trace some of their causes, changes, and consequences over time with a longitudinal case study.

1.1 – Background

1.1.1 – California's One Best Funding System

Educational governance and finance reform in California have followed a particularly tumultuous path. The new funding formulae replaced the notoriously complex and bureaucratic

revenue limit funding system. Importantly, California's citizens critically shaped both systems, including LCFF's stakeholder engagement mandate.

Grudgingly developed over decades, activists and policymakers alike intended the revenue limits system to challenge *de jure* discrimination and *de facto* educational inequality through equal school funding. Three intertwined legal cases, collectively referred to as the *Serrano v. Priest* decisions, laid the groundwork. In 1968, civil rights lawyers and other concerned citizens helped Los Angeles Unified School District parent John Serrano launch a class-action lawsuit against then-California State Treasurer Baker Priest. They charged that "substantial dependence on local property taxes" accounted for "wide disparities in school revenue" that translated into unequal educational provisions, thereby violating students' Fourteenth Amendment protections (*Serrano v. Priest* 1971). Subsequent rulings found 1) California's contemporaneous system of educational finance system unconstitutional and 2) the legislature had to devise a new system by 1980 to bring low-income districts' funding to the same levels as high-income districts (Weston 2010a).

Despite legal progress, a series of competing fiscal changes burdened policymakers to satisfactorily meet the rulings' judgments. The 1970s "tax revolt," spearheaded by Californian voters who capped property tax rates at 1% with Proposition 13, greatly limited available moneys for social services (Martin 2008; Weston 2010b). A decade later, public education advocates successfully persuaded citizens to approve Proposition 98, mandating a guaranteed minimum percentage of state funding for school spending (Hill 2005). State policymakers subsequently devised a series of complex formulae to meet these requirements. Combined, the bulk of education financial provision shifted to the state. By 2000, state funding accounted for over 60% of the average school district's funds, an over 80% increase from the year before

Proposition 13's approval (Sonstelie, Brunner, and Ardon 2000). However, local property tax revenue shouldered the bulk of the remainder. Small increases from Proposition 98 could not offset widening disparities that left many California school districts chronically underfunded. More perniciously, educational administrators argued, categorical programs restricted school district administrators' flexibility to better meet local needs. With over 30% of district revenues tied to a complex system of nearly 80 categorical programs, district administrators largely dispersed funds to programs, departments, and schools from departmental "silos" (Sonstelie et al. 2000; Humphrey and Koppich 2014). As Alan Bersin and his colleagues put it, such an approach promoted a "compliance mentality focused on accounting for inputs rather than delivery of outcomes" (Bersin, Kirst, and Liu 2008:3) that divorced accountability from measured student progress. Even more, calls for fiscal equalization did not recognize "differential student needs and educational costs" that could close achievement gaps (Bersin et al. 2008:5). Most understood that California's tenuous education finance system could not hold but believed that exogenous shocks were needed to spark the political will for bold transformations.

Dramatic austerity measures during the Great Recession prompted a major challenge in 2010. Like the origins of *Serrano v. Priest*, concerned parents and community groups worked with the American Civil Liberties Union to sue state leadership for inadequate public education provision (Dillon 2010; Weston 2010b). The plaintiffs in *Robles-Wong v. California* argued that at least 35 California school districts required students to subsidize their own education by requiring students to pay fees or buy their own textbooks and other materials necessary for course success and graduation with a high school diploma (Dillon 2010). Many school districts justified their requirements in terms of fiscal responsibility, claiming the impositions prevented deficit spending. Such decisions, the litigants argued, left many students, especially ones from

low-income families, outpriced of a public education. Unlike *Serrano v. Priest*, the litigants charged that the state failed to provide an “equal [educational] opportunity” for all students in the state, as school finance analyst Michael P. Griffith put it (as cited in Dillon 2010). And although judges ultimately ruled in the defendants’ favor, widespread antipathy at forty years of an inequitable, inadequate, and complex educational funding system exerted pressure to convert simmering reforms into codified law.

1.1.2. – The Local Control Funding Formula

LCFF remade California education funding in three important and interconnected ways. First, policymakers replaced a singular focus on student achievement as measured by standardized test scores with eight statewide education priorities, depicted in Figure 1.1. Second, state policymakers concerned themselves with distributive equity instead of equality. They replaced revenue limits and most state categorical funding programs with a weighted-pupil funding formula. Under LCFF, all school districts are awarded per-pupil, grade-specific base grants based on Average Daily Attendance (ADA). The state also provides school districts with supplemental grants (an additional 20% of grade-adjusted base grant funding) for each student who qualifies for free or reduce price meals², is identified as an English learner (EL), or is in the state’s foster care system. Although a given student may fall into multiple categories³, CDE only counts each student once as an unduplicated pupil. Additional concentration grants are awarded to districts that enrolls over 55% unduplicated pupils (Senate Bill 97).

² For simplicity, I refer to this population as “students from families with low income.”

³ For example, if a student qualifies for free or reduce price lunch and is identified as an English language learner, the district does not receive twice as much supplemental funds to educate the student than if she solely came from a family with low income or was an English language learner.

Figure 1.1: LCFF's Eight Priorities⁴



Most importantly, LCFF aims to supplant a top-down, compliance orientation with a bottom-up, community-driven approach to accountability. Premised on Governor Brown's adherence to the principle of subsidiarity⁵ (Bae and Stosich 2018; Wright 2017), LCFF designates LEAs as the primary budgetary decision-making units that must strategically plan future expenditures before receiving annual funds. School districts must identify goals, actions, services, and predicted expenditures aligned with the eight statewide priorities in Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs). District officials must write plans in a state-approved template and publish the county- and state-approved plan in a publicly accessible place, such as their districts' websites. Districts develop the core of the plans during Year 1 of a three-year cycle and annually assess progress and adjust them as needed in the interim two years. During

⁴ Source: California Department of Education. 2018. "LCFF Priorities/Whole Child Resource Map." Accessed October 29, 2018 (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/eo/in/lcff1sys-resources.asp>).

⁵ Drawn from Catholicism, subsidiarity devolves decision-making responsibility to the lowest governance units. As Wright (2017:49) explains, invoking such a principle likely comes from Governor Brown's previous career as a Catholic priest and term as a big city mayor.

the first LCFF cycle, LCAPs included three sections. Section 2, entitled “Goals and Progress Indicators”⁶, encompassed the bulk of the plan. District officials set local goals with requisite indicators against which districts could measure their progress, outlined future actions to meet them, and allocated specific dollar amounts for planned services and resources. In “Section 3: Use of Supplemental and Concentration Grant Funds and Proportionality” district officials indicated how much total funding they would receive based on their proportion of unduplicated pupils, students who fell into at least one of the three targeted categories, and the minimum necessary proportional increase of services and actions to support these student populations. They also described how the outlined service and action provisions would specifically meet these students’ needs.

Of particular interest is the LCAP’s first section, however. Distinct from prior education funding mandates, administrative agents⁷ must “engage” a variety of “stakeholders” to identify local educational priorities, including district and school administrators, teachers, staff members, local bargaining units, and students’ families (Cal. Educ. Code §52060 (g)). In “Section 1: Stakeholder Engagement,” administrative agents were required to describe their “Involvement Process” – the *how* and *who* of engagement – and these stakeholders’ “Impacts on LCAP” – the *why* or *to what end* of the process. An excerpt from a typical district’s Section 1 description can be found in Figure 1.2.

⁶ This section was retitled to “Goals, Actions, Expenditures, and Progress Indicators” during the second year’s template revise to encourage districts to detail specific steps how they would try to meet their goals.

⁷ Similar to how Malen and Ogawa (1988) use “professional” to encompass administrators and teachers who participate in site governance councils, I use “administrative agents” as a catchall for local actors that help implement shared decision-making initiatives like LCFF’s stakeholder engagement mandate.

Figure 1.2: “Section 1: Stakeholder Engagement” Example⁸

Involvement in Process	Impact on LCAP
<p>2012-13: DSUSD STRATEGIC PLAN: Strategic Planning Committee members reflected a broad stakeholder group of parents, teachers, administrators, association representatives, community leaders, and school board members. This group met throughout the year to revise all aspects of the Strategic Plan, including establishing student-centered Objectives and Strategies. These Objectives and Strategies reflect the Common Core State Standards and current needs of our student population and school communities, based on in-depth data analysis. Action teams were formed and comprised of certificated, classified, and community members. Five Action Teams, one for each of the five strategies, began to develop specific actions to accomplish the three Strategic Plan objectives. The Strategic Plan committee reconvened to evaluate and finalize the Action Plans late Spring, 2013. The Plan was presented to the Board of Education for their review and approval in July, 2013.</p> <p>MARCH-APRIL 2014 “LISTENING TO LEARN” MONTHS: March and April 2014 were designated as the window for any and all stakeholders to provide input regarding the LCAP in relation to the eight State Priorities and the three Desert Sands LCAP Goals. An overview slide show in both English and Spanish, presented by our Superintendent, was posted on the district’s website, with a link to a survey soliciting input from all stakeholders. A poster inviting all parents to participate in taking the online survey was provided for all schools, and information was shared at the District English Learning Advisory Committee (DELAC) and District Advisory Council (DAC) March and April 2014 meetings. At the meetings parents were shown how to access the survey in English and Spanish. A Board of Education Budget Study session was held on March 4, 2014 followed by a District Leadership Team meeting on March 20, 2014. All management was encouraged to not only provide input via the survey, but to also encourage their school communities and departments to do so as well. A Facilities Survey in both English and Spanish was posted on the district webpage, and input gained from the survey will be used in the District Facilities Master Plan. Additionally, district staff met several times to gather input regarding the unique needs of foster youth, meeting with a foster youth parent, Riverside County Office of Education consultant, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) volunteer, and a Child Protective Services worker.</p>	<p>2012-13: DSUSD STRATEGIC PLAN: Careful analysis of the eight STATE LCAP Priorities and our Strategic Plan demonstrate a clear alignment of expected outcomes and focus on students. In October, 2013 a LCFF/LCAP workshop was presented by John Gray, School Services of California, to our School Board members, district administration, and Strategic Plan committee, including DAC and DELAC chairs, community and association members. A LCAP Alignment Team was then formed, which began to work with consultants from West Ed. This team took an even deeper look at the LCAP guiding questions, the eight State Priorities, our Strategic Plan objectives, strategies, and actions. This process determined our three Strategic Plan Objectives would become our LCAP Goals, with the Strategic Plan Strategies and Action Steps providing guidance for specific steps and outcomes for the next three years. The Strategic Plan has been broadly published at schools, within the district, and on our website. The process and contents were presented at both DELAC and DAC meetings, with parent representatives provided time to share their experiences in the process. Background information regarding LCFF and LCAP was provided at monthly DAC and DELAC meetings throughout the 2013-2014 school year.</p> <p>MARCH – APRIL 2014 “LISTENING TO LEARN” MONTHS: The LCAP on-line survey was posted for two months. The survey asked participants to respond to questions relating to the State’s eight Priorities by indicating “what matters most” on a 10 point scale, with 10 being the highest priority. The Priorities with the highest ratings were: Access to basic core services (9.4); Increase student engagement (9.1); Ensure a positive and engaging school climate (9.1); and Ensure access to a broad course of study for all high need and exceptional students (9.0). Final survey results are posted on the district website, and results have been used by the LCAP Task Force and Alignment Teams to guide the development of our three year plan. Written comments reflected similar areas of input collected from the LCAP Community Forum and LCAP Task Force meetings, and included needs such as: Class size reduction, additional interventions for students, professional development, parent/student engagement, instructional materials, college/career readiness, safety and facility improvements. Input from individuals representing foster youth include the need to: Establish means to correctly identify foster youth; monitor academic progress, including course completion; strengthen awareness of the unique needs of our foster youth. At the May 2014 DELAC and DAC meetings, results from the surveys, Community Forums, and Task Force were reviewed and the draft LCAP template was shared. Members were provided the opportunity to give additional input prior to the LCAP being presented at the Public Hearing on June 3, 2014.</p>

Policymakers laid a floor for LCAP stakeholder engagement. Every district is required to form a parent advisory committee (PAC) with a “strong majority” of parent and student-guardian representatives dedicated to providing the district superintendent with comments and feedback on the LCAP upon review (Cal. Educ. Code 52062(a)(1)).⁹ Districts with at least 15% and 50 pupils identified as EL must also form a new or adapt an existing District English Learner Advisory Committee (DELAC) for parents, community members, and other representatives to provide the superintendent with specific LCAP feedback. LCFF also grants districts the power to form additional advisory committees, such as pupil advisory groups, that may assist in overseeing the LCAP development process (ACLU 2014). Superintendents must also host at least two LCAP-specific public hearings: one dedicated to soliciting public draft contributions and feedback and another whereby the local school board adopts a revised LCAP (Cal. Educ.

⁸ Source: Desert Sands Unified School District. 2015. *Local Control and Accountability Plan*. Author’s database.

⁹ Districts that already maintained committees which met the criteria could continue using them with added LCAP responsibilities in lieu of creating a new one (EC 52063(a)(3) & (b)(2), as cited by American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California 2014). As I show in chapter 4, the requirement was not immediately clear, leading some districts like Kingdom Unified to experiment in their engagement strategies and activities.

Code §52062 (4)(b)(1 to 2), as cited by Vasquez Heilig et al. 2014:887). County offices of education must then review and approve LCAPs.

High expectations and little time to prepare exacerbated ambiguity found in LCFF stakeholder engagement mandate's early implementation. Policymakers frequently encouraged local administrative agents to develop and deploy additional contextually appropriate means to collect feedback (Airey and Carvajal 2014; California Department of Education 2014; Marsh and Hall 2018). LCFF's passage in July 2013 meant that implementers and stakeholders had unusually little time to interpret and implement major structural changes (Hahnel 2014), including its stakeholder engagement component. Although California's rich networks of community and family engagement organizations sprang into action to train and advise implementers and participants alike (Affeldt 2015; Families In Schools 2013; Hahnel 2014; Jongco 2016; Knudson 2014; Wheatfall 2015a, 2015b), their concentration in urban centers meant that hundreds of school districts had to accumulate lessons through trial and error. In turn, early analyses reported administrative agents' confusion about the LCAPs' and stakeholder engagement's purposes (Humphrey and Koppich 2014; Koppich et al. 2015) and widespread variation in practices (Marsh, Hall, Allbright, Tobben, Mulfinger, Kennedy, and Daramola 2018).

Given these circumstances, school districts likely surface discrepancies between their engagement descriptions and actual practices. Narrow analyses of texts may miss important context if researchers exclusively stick to the written content (DiMaggio, Nag, and Blei 2013). I leverage varied data sources to account for these limitations, including insights from the secondary literature, historical accounts of the policy's rollout, and close comparisons between my case study site's practices and their descriptions, to shed light on possible contradictions.

1.2 – The Central Argument

Although state policymakers envisioned stakeholder engagement as one aspect of its parent involvement priority, analysts must break with earlier approaches to investigate participation in decision-making. Driven by normative assumptions about parents' educational roles, foundational researchers typologized practices for professionals to encourage specific individualistic behaviors (Epstein 1987, 1995; Mapp 2003). Unfortunately, “family engagement” scholars who now emphasize active relationships of mutual exchange between families, community members, and educational administrative agents (e.g., Mapp and Kuttner 2013) continue to obscure the collective dimension to specific kinds of activities. Because shared decision-making intends to satisfy large numbers of service consumers, participants ideally must learn how to effectively deliberate with one another (Marsh 2007). Moreover, family and community members' participation in decision-making may hold institutions accountable in ways that other collective forms of engagement like community organizing drives cannot (Mediratta and Fruchter 2003). Stakeholder engagement thus requires us to foreground ongoing complex exchanges between diverse sets of actors (Lareau and Muñoz 2012; Posey-Maddox, Kimelberg, and Cucchiara 2016).

Lessons from earlier waves of shared decision-making initiatives provide important insights (e.g., see Bryk et al. 1998; Comer 1987; Leithwood and Menzies 1998a, 1998b), but the research lacked an adequate theoretical framework to interpret their findings. The recent wave of participatory governance (PG) experiences across the world offered two distinct ways to explain its implementation. At its core, PG invites lay citizens to participate in governing institutions and contribute to their decisions (Wampler and McNulty 2011). Institutionalists argue that powerful actors who enact a set of conscious design principles facilitate strong democratic engagement;

conversely, unprincipled practitioners and weak designs impede transformative processes (Fung 2003, 2006a; Fung and Wright 2001). Conversely, relational theorists of democracy posit that institutions are often themselves sites of ongoing struggles through which patterned interactions between actors internal and external to institutions co-construct participatory governance and engagement practices (Baiocchi 2005; Baiocchi, Heller, and Silver 2011; Baiocchi and Summers 2017). Whereas institutionalists frequently examine PG reforms as static time-in-point changes, relational theorists often see PG as always unsettled.

I treat LCFF stakeholder engagement as a “process-in-the-making” (Baiocchi and Summers 2017) under circumstances not of actors’ own choosing to examine how both institutional structures and ongoing relational struggles unevenly shaped on-the-ground implementation. Minimal guidelines alongside high expectations echoed in statements like the epigraph invoke connotatively rich but substantively unclear terms: who would be school districts’ “stakeholders,” how would they be “engaged,” and what would make it “meaningful?” I heed recent warnings about PG’s “moments of uncertainty” (Baiocchi and Summers 2017:314) to answer: how do administrative agents and participants co-implement ambiguous participatory governance reforms? What strategies, resources, and conditions help and inhibit collective democratic engagement in education decisions? I break from earlier cross-sectional approaches (e.g., Hahnel 2014; Marsh and Hall 2018; Wright 2017) to expressly explore longitudinal changes. Contra early research documenting LCFF compliance (Fullan & Rincón-Gallardo 2017; Furger et al. 2019; Koppich, Humphrey, and Marsh 2015) and much to policymakers’ delight, I find that LCFF’s ambiguity invited significant practical experimentation across and within school districts over time. That ambiguity also invited conflict: as I recount from an in-depth case study of a large urban Northern California school district, administrative agents and

participants debated not only substantive decisions but also the purpose for, procedures of, and authority over local stakeholder engagement. Conflicts sometimes seemed to engulf deliberations but more often spurred disputants to innovate solutions that could help navigate if not entirely avoid future disputes. Unfortunately, some resolutions unintentionally spurred different conflicts and exacerbated participatory inequality many participants hoped to erode. I propose some lessons from my mixed methodological research for future practitioners and policymakers to consider as they revise LCFF or pursue other PG reforms.

1.3 – Study Approach and Data Sources

All methodologies proffer limitations and advantages. Whereas social statistics prides itself on describing representative patterns, qualitative methods exchange a pretense of representativeness to understand actors and their interactions *in situ* (Small 2009). Extended discussions with my graduate school colleagues guided me towards mixed methodological research. But just as standalone methodologies can take variegated forms, so, too, can mixed-methodological permutations.

This dissertation brings together relatively classical and recent methods to explore the implementation of a participatory governance reform. Computer-assisted text analysis began gaining ground outside of its computer science home and in the social sciences during the early 2000s (DiMaggio, Nag, and Blei 2013; Roberts et al. 2014). Case studies using ethnographic data, on the other hand, has been a mainstay of social scientific research since the discipline's birth (Ragin and Becker 1992), and as with many other academic tools has risen, fallen, and risen again as methodological pluralism has won the day. What can large-scale text analyses tell ethnographic inquirers, and ethnographic insights provide large-scale text analysts?

1.3.1 – Computational Text Analyses

Until recently, PG researchers have generated rich insights almost exclusively through in-depth case study methods. This is not entirely surprising given that governments across the world have slowly adopted PG practices in scattered locales (Baiocchi and Ganuza 2017). However, critics have charged analysts for too often selecting on the dependent variable (Baiocchi, Heller, and Silva 2011; Hanson 2018) and perhaps drawing strong lessons from “successful” cases without adequate comparisons to ostensible democratic “failures.” LCFF’s statewide implementation offers social scientists a unique opportunity to test the generalizability of earlier propositions using new methodological tools paired with growing digital text repositories of public administrative documents like LCAPs.

The primary data source for these analyses is a unique, large corpus of LCAPs manually collected between March 2016 and August 2018. Approximately 1,181 LEAs operated in California during the LCFF’s first three years of implementation. However, in Academic Year 2012-13 elementary and unified school districts accounted for approximately 84% of all California school districts and enrolled approximately 88% of all public-school students (author’s calculations using California Department of Education data). Moreover, LCFF placed different stakeholder engagement requirements on high school districts and other LEAs. Accordingly, I limited the universe of cases to all elementary and unified school districts. Thus, the CDE oversaw 871 unique elementary and unified school districts over the study’s focal period; these districts’ LCAPs were eligible for inclusion in the analysis. Through an iterative process that I detail in chapter 3¹⁰, I eventually collected and analyzed 2,356 district-year LCAPs

¹⁰ I also expound on the analytic framework and other data sources I preview in this section.

using structural topic modeling, a variant of probabilistic topic modeling (Blei 2012; Mohr and Bogdanov 2013).

Probabilistic topic modeling brings computational science and statistics to content analysis using a generative probabilistic model to analyze large document collections, or corpora, for thematic patterns that may be infeasible to find or pass unnoticed by human coders (Blei 2012). The most widely used and basic form of topic modeling is latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA; Blei, Ng, and Jordan 2003) but since its introduction computational scientists and statisticians have modified LDA by relaxing or tightening assumptions to help researchers answer evermore specific questions. More recently, structural topic modeling (STM) generalizes computational text-mining capabilities (Roberts et al. 2013; Roberts et al. 2014; Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley 2014, 2016; Roberts et al. 2016). STM assumes that a corpus's hidden structure is subdivided into two components: topic prevalence and topic content. Topic prevalence is operationalized as the relative proportion of a given topic in each document, whereas topic content is the relative proportion of a given word or set of words in a selected topic.

Additionally, STM provides the statistical basis to predict a corpus's hidden structure based on metadata, or in the language of regression analysis, covariates (Roberts et al. 2013). Compared to prior post-hoc analytic approaches, incorporating metadata in the modeling phase allows researchers to test hypotheses more rigorously about how covariates might affect the two components. For example, researchers may run an experiment to test how survey question wording prompts a subject's response to a question about immigration (Roberts et al. 2014). They may hypothesize that a subject's vocabulary—the topical content—and how often certain topics are discussed—topic prevalence—varies by political ideology and party identification.

STM models these two outcomes as a function of metadata indicating treatment by survey wording and a self-reported measure of political ideology.

To test prior PG theory's and LCFF research's predictions about how a school district's demographic, organizational, and contextual variation might affect whether administrative agents use expected and expansive forms of engagement and their changes over time, I model topic prevalence as a function of metadata collected from the California Department of Education and the National Center for Charitable Statistics.

1.3.2 – Case Study with Ethnographic Data

Drawing on PG and family and community engagement research's methodological traditions, I complement large-scale text analyses by bringing together ethnographic data, including field observations, semi-structured interviews, and extensive documentary evidence, to investigate how administrative agents and stakeholders collaborated and clashed throughout the first five years of LCFF implementation in one school district.

Ethnographic-based inquiry was not my first choice of an investigative mode. Such an admission likely grates on the seasoned analyst's ears; after all, the legitimacy of our work hinges at least in part on our ability to demonstrate we knew what we were doing all along, and hiccups in the process can be chalked up to intentions or explained away as the ever-present residual score.¹¹ Like many graduate students, I stumbled through the black box of research, groping for anything I could grasp as “doing” research and “becoming” a researcher. My analytic object—a temporal- and spatial-specific policy implementation—invited access to varied and extensive data. Given that the Local Control Funding Formula was codified and implemented in

¹¹ I thank Matt Thompson for this analogy.

2013, I knew that many relevant data could be accessed by scouring the internet. Following Richard Swedberg's (2014) advice to initially "immerse" one's self in a world for prospective exploration, I began collecting all documents about LCFF's development and implementation, including primary analyses by research teams; statewide journalistic accounts leading up to and describing the governor's codification; announcements posted on digital newspapers inviting community members to "provide feedback" for their district's educational pursuits; community groups' and organizations' press releases on the new policy; and everything in-between.

After conversations with dissertation committee members and initial immersion, I better understood why family and community engagement and PG researchers favored case studies with ethnographic data. Rich investigations invite analysts to approach our object(s) of analysis from varying perspectives, each with idiosyncratic assumptions, foci, and guiding points of interest: a veritable "Ethnografeast," as one international consortium participant reports (Wacquant 2003). Recently, ethnographers have turned their sights to specific sites of power like political arenas. Following in their footsteps, I oriented myself through this project with a political ethnographic sensibility. Political ethnography (PE) approaches politics—"the study of societal power (its distribution, reproduction, and transformation)"—at the micro-level by examining how everyday routine decisions and actions are made (Baiocchi and Connor 2008). Just as ethnography contains a multitude of forms so too do the individual methods that broadly constitute it. As one PE review posits, scholars have increased the method's gaze to cover new phenomena over the past two decades (Benezcry and Baiocchi 2017). Whereas early PEs examined individual experiences in normative political spaces, newer investigations move to the margins of political life by examining how subjects interact with political institutions or experience politics in their everyday lives (Baiocchi and Connor 2008:144-148).

To that end, Timothy Pachirat raises a poignant methodological question: “what is the meaning of the ‘political’ in political ethnography?” (2009:143). As described above, one conception contends that “political” points to the site of social relations under the microscope: the state, civil society, social movements, and the actors and institutions that encompass and bridge these spaces. But, Pachirat argues, the individual ethnographer should also understand “political” by reflecting on their location in the web(s) of power they navigate during the research process. Adherents to this second sense of “political” conclude ethnographers should actively unpack inherent power relationships and practices in their narration. Still yet, I contend, there is a third way to conceptualize the “political” in political ethnography. Beyond the individual exercise and navigation of power during data collection and analytic reflection, the individual researcher may encounter their sites as a space for contestation wherein researchers and their subjects collectively advocate for some social change program(s). Participatory-action research proposes such a prospective agenda’s basic guidelines (Shdaimah, Stahl, and Schram 2009). Undoubtedly, the politically active ethnographer must reflexively contend with their social position when advocating for a given project alongside their research subjects (political in the second sense) and consider how proposed interventions shade their analyses (political in the first sense).

I thus entered the field with a concealed political project. As I saw it, LCFF’s stakeholder engagement mandate opened an opportunity for communities across California to begin to take control of the institutions that control their lives. I hypothesized that several factors would blunt the policy’s transformative potentials, including district administration’s interpretations of its guidelines (Abers 1996, 1998, 2000; Ganuza, Baiocchi, and Summers 2016; Spillane, Reisner, and Reimer 2002) and willingness to relinquish budgetary and planning control (Auerbach 2007;

Fung 2006; Levine 2017); communities' preexisting organizational capacities to shepherd participation (Baiocchi 2003, 2005; Putnam 2000; Marsh and Hall 2018); and stakeholders' understandings of and orientations towards its mandates (Baiocchi and Summers 2017; Wilde 2017). Moreover, I hypothesized that early interactional dynamics between different social forces would profoundly shape later participatory governance structures, procedures, and practices.

Following suggestions from prior criticisms about single case studies (Baiocchi et al. 2008, 2011; Hanson 2018), I intended to comparatively study a diverse set of cases to test hypotheses and search for new ones. I set my sights on four cases that straddled two counties to minimize variation and better isolate causal effects (Wright 2017). As I quickly learned, though, qualitative research is often beholden to participants' openness to their lives, internal practices, and for PG research, political considerations. One story brilliantly captures such considerations. In the early case selection stage, I contacted administrators at one nearby school district to inquire about data collection. Located at the heart of a university town, the school district was long known for their willingness to open their doors to researchers. The district's research coordinator cheerfully took my call, excited to hear interest in LCFF rollout. Once I explained my interest in the stakeholder engagement process, though, his mood shifted. A bit sullen, the administrator confided that the district had recently changed their LCAP feedback process in part to open room for new participants by nudging long-time District Advisory Council members off committee seats. Such changes made the situation, in his words, "especially political." I pressed the administrator, noting that my presence may help lower the temperatures and ideally generate insights on how to navigate future disputes. Unfortunately, though, my tries were for naught.

Other prospective cases were less responsive. Emails and phone calls went unanswered, and I searched for entry into anywhere that would have me. Graciously, Kingdom Unified School District, a large, unified school district located in a Northern California urban center, welcomed me into their meetings, conversations, and lives. To my luck and as I explain below, Kingdom Unified was a critical case to examine LCFF implementation (Flyvbjerg 2006). I sprinkle reflections on my case selection's theoretical and political implications throughout the empirical chapters and expound on them in greater detail in the concluding chapter.

Table 1.1: Case Study Data Sources

	<i>N</i>
<u>Documents</u>	266
Board of Education	99
Community Organization	36
District English Learner Advisory Committee	18
District Office	24
English Learner Parent Advisory Committee	8
Parent Advisory Committee	74
Superintendent's Office	7
<u>Interviewees¹</u>	18
<i>LCAP Relationship</i>	
Advocate	3
Board of Education Trustee	2
District Administrator	2
District Staff Member	2
PAC Member - Former	3
PAC Member - Current	7
<i>PAC Members</i>	
Community Member	2
Community Organizer	3
Parent	9
<u>Meeting Observations</u>	22
Board of Education	3
Community Budget Forum	2
District English Learner Advisory Committee	2
Kingdom's Community Coalition	3
Kingdom's Parents United	2
Parent Advisory Committee	9
Parent Information Exchange	1

¹ Some interviewees held multiple relationships to the district (e.g., some former PAC members were later elected to the board of education) or served on the PAC in multiple capacities (e.g., some community organizers also enrolled children in the school district) over the study period. Interviewees were coded broadly. Accordingly, columns will not sum to individual interviewees.

Table 1.1 overviews data from my case study. Data was collected in stages between September 2018 and January 2021. Although California state law opens all local governance

meetings for public participation¹², I acquired Institutional Review Board and the district's approval for data collection.

I conducted field observations and interviews between October 2018 and June 2019. During that time, I attended as many local LCAP-relevant meetings as possible to observe deliberative interactions. Because of its policy importance, I prioritized attending Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) meetings. I also attended several District English Learner Advisory Committee (DELAC), board of education, and other department or committee meetings with formal LCAP agenda items. Related, one ongoing community organizing initiative continued to plan interventions in LCAP decisions that I infrequently attended. During the observation period, ongoing economic peril spurred new parent organizing initiatives and community town hall-style discussions led by school district administrators and staff. Because of their LCAP implications, I attended these meetings. The average meeting lasted about two hours but ranged anywhere between one-and-a-half to over four hours long. To avoid obtrusion during proceedings, I typically sat on the outer meeting place edges where I jotted extensive field notes. I then typed field notes with analytic reflections within one day of the observation to improve data accuracy.

Interviewees were selected using a mixture of snowball and purposive sampling. To encourage participant forthrightness about their personal LCAP experiences, I leveraged field observations to identify and develop rapport with prospective interviewees (Hammersley and Atkinson 1996). Near an interview's conclusion, I asked the interviewee if they could recommend anyone else that I should contact about local LCAP planning processes. In total, I conducted eighteen interviews. Most interviews were conducted in a public location like a coffeeshop, but some hard-to-reach participants were interviewed over the phone. Interviews

¹² Whereas the regulations eased field access, I explore in chapter 4 how they exacerbated participatory inequalities.

typically lasted one hour, although some long-time participants shared as much as two and a half hours of their time with me. I used two separate iteratively revised semi-structured interview protocols to guide my conversations with participants and implementers that can be found in Appendix C, allowing conversations to naturally unfold. I recorded all interviews and later transcribed them myself or enlisted the help of research participants¹³. I reviewed all transcripts several times for accuracy.

Documentary evidence included meeting minutes, presentation slides, and agendas; press releases and statements; media write-ups; analytic reports; digital advertisements; and other miscellaneous archival materials. Most evidence was accessed through the relevant organization's website and social media profile. I also collected handouts at meetings that I later digitally scanned in September 2019. I frequently reviewed local newspapers for coverage about the school district, relevant community organizations, and LCAP processes themselves. When used, I triangulated all information from secondary reports with primary documents to increase my analyses' validity.

To analyze data, I iteratively coded field notes, interview transcripts, and documentary evidence in NVivo 12 software using a mixture of provisional, holistic, structural, descriptive, and in vivo procedures (Saldaña 2009). Guided by questions about barriers to, supports for and interactions during collective democratic engagement and prior analysts' findings, I began with a provisional set of holistic codes to slot data into general categories. As I grew more familiar with the data, I merged, redefined, and developed new coding categories. I also kept extensive analytic memos to reflect on preliminary findings. Swedberg (2014) reminds us that conscious writing alone rarely produces insights; rather, they often seemingly "emerge" after extended

¹³ I thank Preetha Vellayapan for her immense help.

rumination. When insights “emerged,” I recorded brief voice or typed notes on a cell phone that I later copied into memos. When possible, I attempted to triangulate between at least two pieces of data either of the same or across type.

1.4 – Case Background: Kingdom Unified School District¹⁴

I had long followed Kingdom Unified School District’s political and economic turmoil and its greater social context. Located in a Northern California urban center, commentators have praised the surrounding city for its astounding racial and ethnic diversity that are reflected in the district’s demographics presented in Table 1.2. Diversity among the city’s residents and school district’s subsequent student enrollment has in part motivated longstanding disputes about school disciplinary policies and charges of racism against local education professionals, especially among community organizations like Black Youth Support Council (BYSC), a community organization dedicated to uplifting Black families’ voices and needs in the district; Supporting Southeast Asian Progress (SSAP), founded to carve political space for members from an ethnic community; and Faithful Leaders, one of the region’s oldest community-based organizations (CBO) grounded in cross-religious congregational organizing. Such charges escalated during 2011 when, in the wake of fiscal pressure from the Great Recession’s crushing austerity (Davidson and Ward 2014), district administrators proposed closing a dozen elementary schools in what local community organizers described as predominantly low-income neighborhoods of color. They marshalled hundreds of parents to fill raucous board of education meetings that rolled long into the morning’s wee hours. As Shannon, director of the district’s Family and Community Engagement department (FACE), would later recall to me, “You [Meeting

¹⁴ To preserve confidentiality, all individual and organizational names are pseudonyms.

attendees] couldn't move in there [the board of education meeting room] in meetings... [I]t was so full, standing room only, because it was a real dire and impactful situation." Even though the district ultimately shuttered seven schools, the tumult of the times was not lost on district administrators and staff. The school district cycled through three superintendents between then and the start of my fieldwork in 2018 when the district hired Antonio Ramos, an administrator known nationally for successfully turning around a struggling school district. Although Superintendent Ramos accepted community organizers' invitation to publicly discuss his policies towards their communities, many community members still turned a wary eye towards administrative agents. "The personal (...) damage done; we're still reeling from that. People still carry residue about that," Shannon despaired.

Table 1.2: Case Study Descriptive Statistics¹

	<u>Kingdom Unified School District²</u>	<u>State Total</u>
Enrollment	47,000	6,236,672
% African American	17.4	6.2
% Hispanic or Latino	37.7	53.3
% White	18.5	25
% Asian	17.3	8.7
% Other ³	9.1	6.8
% Unduplicated Pupils	75.4	63.1
% FRPL	73.2	59.4
% EL	27.1	22.7

¹ Author's calculations using California Department of Education Census Day Enrollment administrative data, Academic Year 2013-14.

² Some statistics are rounded to obscure school district identity.

³ Includes American Indian or Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, Filipino, Two or More Races, and Not Reported.

Family and community engagement and participatory governance research would anticipate if not the impossibility, then the grave improbability of collective democratic participation in Kingdom Unified School District. Simmering distrust between family and community members and school district administrative agents would leave no one open to institutional decision-making processes (Bryk and Schneider 2002; Johnson and Pajares 1996;

Marsh and Hall 2018; Putnam 2000), especially when exacerbated by seeming ambivalence about education decision's racialized impacts (Bryk et al. 1998; Noguera 2001). Moreover, large organizations like Kingdom Unified that educates over 47,000 students would lack the familiarity to encourage widespread participation in decision-making (Mansbridge 1983). Leaders and members from community organizations like BYSC, SSPA, and Faithful Leaders might help the school district facilitate tough conversations (Baiocchi 2003; Ishimaru 2014; Stone 2001) or outreach to oft-marginalized parents and community members (Marsh and Hall 2018; Marsh et al. 2018; Pape and Lim 2019), but they might just as easily become default leaders (Marwell 2004; Levine 2016) whose conflicts with school district administrators and staff impinges collaboration (Ganuza, Nez, and Morales 2014; Baiocchi 2005).

It is especially surprising, then, to learn that commentators across the state lavished Kingdom Unified with early praise for their LCFF stakeholder engagement implementation. Participants' feedback culminated in small LCAP changes, including shifts in funding for school resource officers and plans for an ethnic studies curriculum. Moreover, the district deployed innovative practices like a stakeholder-driven Public Engagement Volunteer (PEV) process that drew on personal social networks to solicit survey responses. Even more, district LCAP processes attracted community organizations that eventually formed Kingdom's Community Coalition (KCC) to actively influence district priorities and expenditures. Kingdom Unified quickly became a regional stakeholder engagement leader; it was, as one county official put it, the "Cadillac of stakeholder engagement."

Kingdom Unified is what Bent Flyvbjerg would call a "critical case," an instance of a social phenomenon that "ha[s] strategic importance in relation to the general problem" (2006:229). Critical cases can shed light on similar instances given a select set of criteria,

especially when theory predicts a particular outcome is especially likely or unlikely to occur (Flyvbjerg 2006:231). Given its prior conditions and early LCFF outcomes, we can think of Kingdom Unified as a “least likely case” in which, for all the reasons listed, we would expect especially weak democratic engagement. That early practices were especially robust and by evaluators’, implementers’, and participants’ judgements “successful” would by itself be surprising. Even more interesting may be that engagement practices transformed over time.

Although cross-section analyses can excellently describe point-in-time patterns, they make tracking change over time impossible (Hanson 2018:161; Marsh and Hall 2018; Marsh et al. 2018). As I show in chapters 4 and 5, Kingdom Unified’s early innovation did not last forever; instead, administrative agents and participants slowly erected democratic structures that would ensure “consistent,” but, as I argue, inequitable feedback. Such changes also brought benefits: early conflicts over technical procedures and institutional relationships subsided, allowing participants to narrowly focus on producing a set of priorities and avoid potentially important political questions, namely over who defines and what constitutes “control” under local control.

LCFF opened new avenues for scrutiny about local education decisions; Kingdom Unified illustrates what it takes to initiate deep engagement processes, exemplifies how competing factors may shift engagement’s tide as it unrolls, and points towards why similarly situated school districts may have initially floundered.

1.5 – Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into five remaining chapters. In chapter 2, I develop key arguments about the current state of the family and community engagement and participatory governance literatures outlined above to preview how my key findings fill some gaps. I then test

some of the previous analysts' propositions and present my findings in chapter 3's computational text analyses. Although most school districts concentrated on state compliance, several promising practices emerged in surprising places like racially and ethnically diverse school districts with support from nearby community organizations.

I unpack these findings in the following two chapters with insights from my case study of Kingdom Unified School District. Throughout the analyses, I illustrate how different groups' interpretations of and approaches to LCFF's ambiguity greatly affected who would become active participants, the opportunities they could access for influence, and how discussions unfolded in participatory structures. An unlikely school district hailed for its early engagement record after years of distrust and discontent, prior policies, democratic structures, and informal recruitment practices gradually stymied equitable participation. Moreover, disagreements about the boundaries of stakeholder engagement translated questions about authority into conflicts over technical procedures and institutional relationships. Conflict was not an inevitable fact of stakeholder engagement; over time, semi-formalized facilitation positions and procedures, committed administrative liaisons' heightened capacities, and selective participant withdrawal attenuated their frequency and intensity.

I conclude with some reflections for policymakers and practitioners to consider as they develop and implement LCFF revisions and future participatory governance reforms, respectively.

Chapter 2: Collective Stakeholder Engagement through Participatory Governance

Sociologists of education have long acknowledged the importance of families' and communities' relationship to schooling institutions and their agents. Whereas Willard Waller naturalized the supposed enmity between teachers and their students' families (1932, as cited in Ishimaru and Takahashi 2017), John Dewey proclaimed schools could be the centers of community life (1902, as cited in Stefanski, Valli, and Jacobson 2016). However, researchers have only recently begun to systematically analyze and isolate the effects of family and community participation in education. When families and community members are active stewards of their students' education, local administrators can gain support in implementing reforms that improve student outcomes (Bryk and Schneider 2002; Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton 2010; Cunningham 2002); teachers can rely on parents to support students' academic success (Mapp 2003) and monitor peers' behaviors (Coleman and Hoffer 1987); and parents, especially socially advantaged ones, can leverage dense networks to marshal educational privileges, resources, and opportunities for their children (Horvat, Weinenger, and Lareau 2003) and, in some instances, their disadvantaged counterparts (Posey-Maddox, Kimelberg, and Cucchiara 2014, 2016).

Motivated by these findings, federal and state policymakers integrated parent involvement recommendations into recent legislation. Nationally, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) hinged Title I funds on state, district, and school administrators' equitable and active parent involvement in schooling (Epstein 2005). NCLB's successor, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), expanded the mandate to include federal funds for all public school districts (Henderson 2015). Several states have adapted similar requirements for their unique education systems, including California (Bae and Stosich 2018; Stosich and Bae 2018).

As one of the state’s eight educational priorities, school districts must set, strive towards, and assess their progress in meeting annual goals that increase parent and family engagement in students’ academic careers.¹⁵ Policymakers split the priority into two major facets. Practitioners and analysts frequently focus on parent involvement wherein school districts are expected to describe how they promote participation in programs like Family Back to School Nights, Coffee with the Principal, parent training institutes, and other school and district community-building functions. Such programs may provide opportunities to learn about students’ education, communicate with teachers, staff, and administrators, and ideally build long-lasting relationships (Families In Schools 2013; Mapp and Kuttner 2013). The other facet of parent involvement is participation in decision-making, better known as stakeholder engagement. LCFF’s stakeholder engagement mandate requires LEA administrative agents to collect feedback from parents, other family members, and community members that guides local educational and budgetary priorities.

The mandate thus includes many important features characteristic of earlier shared decision-making initiatives in education and ongoing participatory governance reforms ostensibly designed to expand public control over institutions. Drawing on several bodies of work, I review early experiments in shared decision-making like site-based management to situate my research in the renewed turn towards analyzing collective engagement. I then link lessons from rich investigations into share decision-making initiatives with insights about participatory governance reforms to ground my forthcoming analyses. Along the way, I preview how my methodological approach and theoretical orientation reveal underexplored dynamics in a specific collective engagement process.

¹⁵ LCFF originally allowed school districts to assess whether they met the standard using self-selected metrics. In 2020, the California Department of Education proposed a Family Engagement Tool to standardize administrators’ self-assessments. Results from its pilot year can be found at Chrispeels, Gonzales, Long, and Transformative Inquiry Designs for Effective Schools (2020).

2.1 – From Individual Involvement to Collectively Managing Educational Institutions

Over its development, research on family and community participation in schooling has oscillated between individual involvement and collective engagement. Joyce Epstein’s insights quickly eclipsed the subfield. In her view, “parental involvement” typically meant expert professionals directing parents how to support children’s schooling (Schutz 2006). Her descriptive analyses subsequently slotted techniques like parent-teacher conversations, at-home student support, and participation in formal decision-making bodies like Parent Teacher Associations, Parent Teacher Groups, and governance councils into classificatory typologies from which practitioners could draw (Epstein 1987, 1995). Critics gradually challenged the dominant approach for its normative visions of passive, individualized participation (Schutz 2006; Shirley 1997) thinly shrouded in assumptions about historically marginalized communities’ cultural deficits (Ishimaru 2014, 2019). Although subsequent analyses redirected the focus from professionals to parents, it often continued to center the formers’ roles as change agents (Mapp 2003). In turn, scholars have conceptualized “engagement” as active relationships of mutual exchange between families, community members, and educational administrative agents. Such profound theoretical breakthroughs now found the influential dual capacity-building framework trumpeted by policymakers (Mapp and Kuttner 2013).

Although associated approaches continue to emphasize interactions between individual professionals and family and community members, researchers have increasingly examined collective engagement initiatives. Whereas earlier parental involvement research identified moments of temporary collective action, like middle-class network mobilization (Coleman and Hoffer 1987; Horvat et al. 2003), analyses of collective engagement foreground ongoing complex exchanges between diverse sets of actors (Lareau and Muñoz 2012; Posey-Maddox,

Kimelberg, and Cucchiara 2016). Frequently focused on “collective, ‘out-of-school’, neighborhood-based engagement” (Posey-Maddox 2014:39), many researchers endeavor to understand how community organizers deploy strategies and repertoires to redistribute resources, gain formal recognition, and other broader policy changes (Mediratta, Fruchter, and Lewis 2002; Oakes, Rogers, and Lipton 2006; Warren 2005; Warren, Hong, Rubin, and Uy 2009; Warren, Mapp, and the Community Organizing and School Reform Project 2011). Some analyses highlight how initiatives emanating from outside institutions cross into institutional activity (see Ishimaru 2014). Still, few analyses examine ongoing exchanges within institutions.

Another avenue of collective engagement is shared decision-making. Experiments in shared decision-making originated in the 1960s. During that time, revolts against ineffective and stifling bureaucracies spread to all American institutions, including education (more below). Critics also emphasized how hierarchical bureaucracy exacerbated racial inequality and class inopportunity. Against this backdrop, psychiatrist James Comer birthed perhaps the most innovative project in reimagining schools. In New Haven, Connecticut Comer’s team molded the first “community schools” replete with mental health services and teams steeped in principles of child developmental psychology. Alongside pedagogical transformations, the New Haven Schools broke new organizational ground by adopting shared management between “all the adults in the building” wherein the principal led a team of teachers, parents, and social workers to collaboratively diagnose program problems and resolutions (Comer 1987:15). Similar concerns about bureaucratic corruption, mistrust, and administrative bloat during the 1980s and 1990s intensified calls for new management and governing practices. In 1988, Chicago’s Public Act 85-1418 opened schools’ doors to would-be participants and soon thereafter researchers to analyze site-based management experiments. PA 85-1418 replaced top-down administrative

control with “democratic localism” (Bryk et al. 1998). Like the New Haven Schools’ management team, Chicago Public Schools placed parents, teachers, and administrators on local school councils (LSCs). However, CPS authorized LSCs to decide important personnel and budgetary matters, including whether to hire or fire school administrators like principals.¹⁶ Similar experiments spread so quickly that by 1993 nearly all other states included at least some districts that experimented with its possibilities (Leithwood and Menzies 1998b). Indeed, many insights about shared decision-making come from places as far apart as Salt Lake City, Utah (Malen and Ogawa 1988), states in the American south (Johnson and Pajares 1996), and California (Marsh, Strunk, Bush-Mecenas, and Huguet 2015).

Although shared decision-making initiatives do not appear to directly impact student outcomes (Leithwood and Menzies 1998b), considering family and community members’ feedback in educational governance decisions may have other important effects. Participatory structures may hold institutions accountable in ways that external counterweights like community organizing drives cannot (Mediratta and Fruchter 2003). Because shared decision-making intends to satisfy large numbers of service consumers, participants ideally must learn how to effectively deliberate with one another (Marsh 2007). In turn, shared decision-making can also help (re)vitalize the trust needed to implement education reforms (Bryk and Schneider 2002; Bryk et al. 1998; Bryk et al. 2010).

However, implementing shared decision-making rarely takes shape overnight. Although analysts identify several factors that may assist its smooth rollout, they raise just as many impediments. To better make sense of how administrative agents implement and would-be

¹⁶ Later changes to the law largely restored administrative control (Bryk et al. 1998).

participants respond to shared decision-making initiatives like LCFF's stakeholder engagement mandate, I turn to participatory governance theory.

2.2 – LCFF as Participatory Governance Reform

Researchers, policymakers, and advocates alike have described LCFF's stakeholder engagement mandate as “a remarkable experiment in local democracy” (Furger, Hernandez, and Darling-Hammond 2019; Humphrey and Koppich 2014: 243; Marsh and Hall 2018). Like earlier shared decision-making initiatives, LCFF's transformative possibilities reside with its potential for expanding participatory governance (PG). At its core, PG invites lay citizens to participate in governing institutions and contribute to their decisions (Wampler and McNulty 2011). Heeding widespread rejections of expert-driven bureaucracy during the 1960s (e.g., Students for a Democratic Society 1964), governmental agencies beckoned a “Participatory Age” that redirected citizen discontent into top-down participatory processes (Bherer, Dufour, and Montambeault 2016; Walker, McQuarrie, and Lee 2015). PG reforms at minimum require administrative agents to publicize information about public expenditures, policy alterations, and other governing decisions; at maximum, they vest citizens with mechanisms for institutional authority and control (Fung 2006b).

According to advocates, PG reforms proffer several complementary benefits to normative, expert-driven bureaucratic governance. First, PG promises more effective and efficient governance. Experts can ostensibly better target future public investments when they draw upon citizens' rich experiential knowledge (Fung 2006a; 2006b:66). Even more, well-designed processes enacted by conscious practitioners solicit contributions from and participation among members of historically marginalized communities, thereby minimizing civic inequality (Fung 2006b; Pape and Lerner 2016; Wampler 2012). At its most empowering

end, PG reforms promise to expand lay citizens' and contract experts' governance authority and influence (Fung 2015). Finally, PG can strengthen institutional legitimacy as participants claim greater ownership of decisions they help make (Baiocchi 2001; Fung 2015; Wampler 2012).

Despite PG's noble goals, empirical research paints a mixed picture of its impacts. "Schools of democracy" like municipal PB's deliberative fora that foster unlikely conversations between stakeholders can encourage previously unorganized participants to accrue political and technical knowledge (Nez 2016), learn "civic skills" such as collective-minded, reasoned compromise (Talpin 2011), and incubate new bonds and subjectivities (Ganuza et al. 2014). Although targeted outreach appears to mitigate racial and class participatory inequalities (Baiocchi 2001; Su 2017), democratic experiments often attract participants who share similar levels of prior political and civic activity and accumulate its benefits (Malen, Ogawa, and Kranz 1990; Nylen 2002; Pape and Lim 2019). Comparative analyses document uneven regional democratization when subnational governance structures implement national PG reforms (Baiocchi, Heller, and Silva 2011; Montambeault 2015).

What explains PG reforms' divergent outcomes? Institutionalists argue that powerful actors who enact a set of conscious design principles facilitate strong democratic engagement; conversely, unprincipled practitioners and weak designs impede transformative processes (Fung 2003, 2006a; Fung and Wright 2001). In their leading light's view, institutions that deploy an "accountable autonomy" deep structure with mechanisms to support participants' deliberation and ultimately enforce their policy decisions are best suited to spread democratic engagement, investment, and legitimacy (Fung 2001, 2006a). Institutional behaviors and decisions thus primarily determine the contours of engagement. To be certain, a cottage industry of public engagement organizations often supports administrators to implement PG reforms (Baiocchi and

Ganuza 2017; Lee 2015; Lerner 2014; Lerner and Secondo 2012). When elite-sponsored forums designed to “preserv[e] the fragile health of the institutions publics depend on, which have routinely betrayed this trust” (Lee 2015: 28) fail to translate participants’ feedback into actionable policy, administrative agents can reinforce active and would-be participants’ frustration, skepticism, and distrust (Fernández-Martínez, García-Espín, and Jiménez-Sánchez 2020; García-Espín and Ganuza 2017; Hanson 2018), and thus forestall democratic expansion.

However, institutionalists often assume point-in-time reforms, missing how ambiguity and contestation may shape implementation. Conversely, relational theorists of democracy posit that institutions are often themselves sites of ongoing struggles through which patterned interactions between actors internal and external to institutions co-construct participatory governance and engagement practices (Baiocchi 2005; Baiocchi, Heller, and Silver 2011; Baiocchi and Summers 2017). For example, PG implementers in Latin America faced “critical resistance and inertia” as they tried to break or moderate the region’s political clientelism and civic opposition (Bherer, Fernández-Martínez, García Espín, and Jiménez Sánchez 2016). Similarly, Boston public officials and urban developers subtly weaponized cultural categories like “the community” to (re)exert their legitimate control over deliberations by simultaneously allowing institutionally-disempowered constituents’ participation while restricting their influence (Levine 2017). PG participants and facilitators can extend such struggles to (re)defining and enacting each other’s respective roles. For example, Chicago PB participants explicitly debated what constituted “participation” itself (Ganuza, Baiocchi, and Summers 2016). Core neighborhood assembly participants ultimately reasserted officials’ and activists’ claims to local expertise when they contested PB leadership’s role and selection process (Baiocchi and Summers 2017). Even when confronted, therefore, ambiguous democratic reforms may propel PG

participants and facilitators to default to historic receiver, patron, and bystander roles (Baiocchi and Summers 2017; Bherer et al. 2016).

Accordingly, PG implementation analysts must heed “moments of uncertainty” (Baiocchi and Summers 2017:314); such moments are often crystallized in conflicts over a range of issues outside substantive decisions, including technical procedures and questions of authority and control. Doing so will allow practice-minded analysts to identify mechanisms that may facilitate collective democratic engagement.

2.2.1 – Schoolyard Spats: Examining Participatory Conflicts

Family and community engagement and PG scholarship significantly differ in their approach to conflict. Whereas the former often sidesteps conflicts among administrative agents, families, and communities altogether (Lareau and Muñoz 2012:202), the latter illuminates how conflicts often riddle democratic engagement. Conflict in and of itself does not inherently obstruct democratic engagement; to the contrary, many scholars assert that conflict predicates processual and substantive transformation (Mansbridge 2012; Rancière 2001). Following this logic, stultifying conflict submerges perhaps insurmountable differences and inhibits authentic engagement that could transform participants and engagement processes; at worst, unitary democracy at all costs may freeze further engagement altogether (Mansbridge 1983).

Previous research identifies conditions and mechanisms associated with variation in the intensity and frequency of deliberative conflict. Sociologists of education often reduce conflicts in collective engagement to intermittent interpersonal spats (Epstein 1990; Weiss, Cambone, and Wyeth 1992) or cultural clashes between low-income parents of color and white, Middle-class teachers and administrators (Noguera 2001; Horvat et al. 2003; Ishimaru and Takahashi 2017). To be certain, demographic composition appears to consistently predict conflict. Stakeholders in

racially heterogeneous schools and school districts are more likely to face extended conflict as they vie for access to and distribution of limited resources (Bryk et al. 1998; Marsh and Hall 2018); middle-class parents may similarly exacerbate tensions in urban schools with concentrated low-income student populations (Posey-Maddox 2013; Posey-Maddox et al. 2016). Conversely, participant social homogeneity appears to minimize conflict during deliberative processes (Mansbridge 1983). “Local associational contexts” can also impact PG processes (Baiocchi 2003, 2005). When pairing four comparable neighborhoods that did and did not implement PB, the presence of civil society organizations (CSOs)¹⁷ deepened democratic engagement in Brazil (Baiocchi, Heller, and Silva 2008, 2011). In many cases, backgrounded civic networks (Putnam 1995) of experienced technologists, like social movement activists, guided participants through contention to avoid extended deliberative stalls (Baiocchi 2003: 54). Moreover, CSOs creatively recruit historically marginalized communities for participation (Marsh and Hall 2018; Marsh et al. 2018; Pape and Lim 2019). Interpersonal support may come with political tradeoffs, though. PB opened “more meaningful points” for some, especially weak (Abers 1998), CSOs to interact with the local state and wrest gains for their constituencies (Baiocchi et al. 2008; Wampler 2012) while strong CSOs fought to maintain their influence on local civic life (Baiocchi 2005). Baiocchi concludes that “the absence of organized opposition is even more important” to productive democratic engagement (Baiocchi 2005:91). Finally, Lareau and Muñoz’s (2012) genre-defying case study reveals how structural relationships between school leadership, like principals, and Parent Teacher Association volunteers routinely placed the groups at odds over a school’s priorities and control.

¹⁷ Although researchers often interchange CSOs with other concepts like “community-based organizations (CBOs)” and community organizations (e.g., McQuarrie 2013; Warren et al. 2011), I distinguish the latter as primarily nonprofit service providers (Marwell 2004) and the former as organizations oriented towards building community trust and relational power (Baiocchi 2003; Warren 2009).

In my analyses, I look for evidence of changing composition, CSO participation, and structural characteristics that may explain the emergence and contraction of conflicts in Kingdom Unified over time.

2.3 – Looking Forward

As I have shown above, research on family and community engagement has expanded its purview in recent years. Once beholden to individualized and normative orientations, analysts have set their sights on understanding collective forms of engagement that may bring in historically marginalized families and communities. Earlier findings from shared decision-making initiatives laid much of the groundwork for understanding newer iterations, but the work has needed significant theoretical clarification. Reframed through the lens of participatory governance, scholars have equipped their colleagues with analytical toolboxes to make sense of the new reforms' trajectories.

Following Baiocchi and Summers (2017), I explore LCFF stakeholder engagement implementation in Kingdom Unified School District as a “process-in-the-making” that did not follow a straight path over the LCFF's first five years. Throughout my case study analyses, I pay careful attention to how both institutional designs and ongoing relational struggles unevenly shaped the district's stakeholder engagement implementation. As I demonstrate in chapters 4 and 5, participants and administrative agents co-constructed local engagement practices often predicated on different interpretations of LCFF's ambiguous stakeholder engagement mandates. Against many PG theorists' predictions (Bryk and Schneider 2002; Fung 2006a) and prior LCFF analysts' findings (Marsh et al. 2018; Wright 2017) that strong institutional designs and prior climates of trust facilitate democratic policy implementation, I demonstrate in chapter 4 that LCFF's ambiguous policy initially suppressed simmering distrust in Kingdom Unified by

enabling administrative agents and community organizers to frame their practices in ways that mutually reinforced each other's respective efforts to outreach beyond usual participants. As policymakers clarified engagement requirements, administrative agents gradually reduced investments in input collection and returned to prior informal recruitment practices that predominantly drew in the usual shared decision-making base: highly educated participants rich with free time. Even when the district recruited historically marginalized participants like working parents into LCAP decision-making bodies, policies, procedures, and provisions designed to enhance their deep engagement unintentionally exacerbated burdens.

I also explore how ambiguity sparked and clarification mitigated participatory conflicts centered around the technical practices of shared decision-making and how administrative agents and participants would relate to each other. In chapter 5, I document how structural relationships between administrative agents, parents, and community organizers in Kingdom Unified mediated both conflicts in vertical struggles for power a la Lareau and Muñoz (2012) and complimentary dynamics horizontally among ostensible participatory equals. To resolve disputes, different factions collaboratively generated temporary solutions that over time crystallized in formal structures and informal practices. I thus explain how several mechanisms found in the literature like formalized positions and procedures (Johnson and Pajares 1996), community organizers' exit (Baiocchi 2005), and committed administrative agents' expanding facilitative capacities (Marsh et al. 2015) moderated some while catalyzing new conflicts over time that often exacerbated the participatory inequality many longed to shrink. I consider some possible policy and practical remedies in this dissertation's concluding chapter.

Although both approaches to PG have illuminated important dimensions of implementing reforms, analysts have critiqued the subfield on methodological grounds. As suggested above,

much of the work has relied upon case studies of experiments throughout the world. Such approaches have lent themselves to selection on the dependent variable (Baiocchi et al. 2011; Hanson 2018), leading researchers to draw conclusions from “successes” without thoroughly investigating democratic “failures.” In the next chapter, I go beyond the methodology *de rigueur* to rigorously test some of its propositions using a unique database of administrative plans and cutting-edge computational text analyses to answer how administrative agents responded to LCFF’s stakeholder engagement mandate and the conditions that mediated its implementation.

Chapter 3: Tracking Trends on Collecting Stakeholder Feedback

Despite policymakers' aspirations to "revolutionize" local administrative practices, ambiguity in democratic reforms fosters varied implementation. Even though LCFF identifies several stakeholder groups that school districts must engage, concepts like "the people" found in the dissertation's epigraph suggest a wide array of potential constituencies that may help set local priorities. Indeed, LCFF does not explicitly prohibit administrative agents from, and in some cases encourages them to, recruit other stakeholders (ACLU 2014). For example, policymakers encouraged administrative agents to consider appointing "community members" to LCAP-specific Parent Advisory Committees (PACs). Organized interest groups could also suggest LCAP recommendations (Marsh and Hall 2018). Moreover, LCFF advises administrative agents to pursue "meaningful" stakeholder engagement, a connotatively rich but substantively unclear term. Thus, implementers must grapple with two central questions: who will they include in decision-making processes and how will they gather input?

PG scholars have explored both questions and their interrelations. Most notable are the innovative Brazilian experiences with and subsequent global diffusion of participatory budgeting (PB) (Abers 1998; Ackerman 2004; Baiocchi 2003, 2005; Baiocchi, Heller, and Silva 2008; Baiocchi and Ganuza 2016; Goldfrank 2007; Su 2017; Wampler 2012), but Chicago's experiments in community-based school governance demonstrate how bottom-up reforms can transform existing institutions (Bryk et al. 1998; Fung 2001, 2004). Scholars have documented wide between- and within-country variation in state-civil society interactions where similar policies are implemented (Baiocchi 2005; Baiocchi et al. 2011; Montambeault 2015), finding evidence that although heterogeneous populations face more, and homogeneous less, barriers to deliberations (Bryk et al. 1998; Mansbridge 1983; Marsh and Hall 2018), civil societal capacity

can encourage democratic innovation, facilitate deliberations, and incorporate historically marginalized participants (Baiocchi 2003; Marsh and Hall 2018). PG theorists thus conceptualize democratization as a spectrum ranging between what I term expected and expansive engagement. Administrative agents who pursue *expected engagement* strategies meet mandated engagement requirements, often to comply with the letter of PG law. On the other hand, administrative agents who pursue *expansive engagement* adopt additional, alternative, and/or often unrequired techniques to include stakeholders in shared decision-making processes. Taken together, contextual variation restricts some administrative agents to strictly meet the letter of PG engagement requirements while others encourage administrative agents to pursue expansive engagement strategies.

LCFF's passage is the first time that a PG reform at such a scale was implemented in the United States (Marsh and Hall 2018), and the requirement that districts annually document their stakeholder engagement process offers an important opportunity to test theories' generalizability. In this chapter, I use structural topic modeling to analyze how all California elementary and unified school districts' LCAPs described engaging stakeholders during the first three years of policy implementation (AY 2014-15 to 2016-17). I find that school districts often emphasized two *expected* engagement strategies: soliciting feedback at regular board of education meetings and presenting an LCAP draft at mandated public meetings. Although not required, many districts also surveyed different constituencies about local priorities. Some districts also relied on school- and district-based institutional channels of stakeholder engagement; districts placed even less emphasis on strategic planning sessions. I also test how administrative agents' emphases on expected and expansive engagement techniques varies by district demographic, organizational, and contextual characteristics. Surprisingly, predicted barriers to engagement like racial-ethnic

diversity are associated with administrative use of expansive engagement techniques. Moreover, greater organizational capacity may especially help diverse districts target LCFF-identified students and their communities for engagement. However, districts with greater student need especially emphasize expected engagement techniques. These results suggest that although most school districts concentrated on meeting stakeholder engagement compliance requirements, several promising practices emerged during early LCFF stakeholder engagement implementation in unlikely places.

The chapter proceeds as follows. I first review early LCFF research to identify testable hypotheses that may explain variation in administrative agents' strategic stakeholder engagement emphases. After that, I detail the analytic strategy used for this analysis, including data and methods. From there I present my results. I conclude with some implications suggested by these findings and situate them relative to this dissertation's case study findings.

3.1 – LCFF Research

LCFF analysts' early findings suggest that administrative agents approached their engagement duties, and especially LCAP completion, with a "compliance orientation." The previous revenue limits system of school finance perpetuated a "culture of compliance" whereby district administrators largely assembled budgets in bureaucratic "silos" according to state-mandated categorical program requirements (Furger et al. 2019; Koppich et al. 2015). Longstanding "bureaucratic habits" coupled with hastened implementation timelines challenged administrators to quickly learn how to collectively set priorities and plan expenditures with stakeholders (Fullan and Rincón-Gallardo 2017). Subsequently, administrative agents across the state often utilized preexisting "institutionalized channels" like District English Learner Advisory Councils (DELACs) and District Advisory Councils (DACs) and/or informal networks

to solicit stakeholder feedback and engagement that may or may not contain parents (Fuller and Tobben 2014:10; Marsh and Hall 2018: 260). Although recommended by advocates but not required by law (ACLU 2014), superintendents overwhelmingly reported that surveys were among the most widely reported and useful forms of engagement; conversely, public meetings of all kinds inefficiently collected feedback (Marsh and Koppich 2018:21). In turn, administrative agents later scaled back their stakeholder engagement initiatives as they clarified LCAP engagement requirements (Koppich et al. 2015).

Who, then, participated in early stakeholder engagement processes? Although LCFF encourages all school districts to especially engage historically marginalized families and communities, participant composition often reflected longstanding school and district engagement patterns. Specifically, parents with the historically “loudest voices”—“parents advocating for the needs of advanced or gifted students”—dominated early engagement processes (Koppich et al. 2015:8). School districts robust with parent-teacher organizations (PTOs) like nationally-affiliated Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), booster clubs, and other formal parent networks may draw from readymade pools of predominantly middle-class participants that narrowly engage homogenous communities while crowding out the disempowered poor and working-class parents LCFF was designed to support (Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau 2003; Posey-Maddox, Kimelberg, and Cucchiara 2016).¹⁸ Networks may especially form in high-enrollment schools, and by extension districts, with more parents available for participation (Murray, Domina, Renzulli, and Boylan 2019). In the long run, this may exacerbate participatory inequalities that LCFF was designed to address.

¹⁸ See also chapter 4 for similar findings, along with a discussion of several mechanisms that help explain these patterns.

To be certain, some school districts sought participation among “nontraditional parents and CBOs” (Marsh & Hall 2018; Wright 2017). What explains the variation? Like formal networks, social capital theorists and PG analysts detail how reform implementation hinges on local capacity. An organized civil society equipped with CBOs and/or CSOs may be especially important. Marsh and Hall highlight how school districts leaned on CBOs to help engage historically marginalized stakeholders by publicizing LCAP proceedings, recruiting advisory committee members, coordinating rides to meetings, and even leading community engagement meetings (2018:263, 271-272).

Moreover, local capacity may be an especially salient factor associated with expansive engagement in demographically heterogeneous contexts. Prior research documents fierce conflicts in heterogeneous schools as racial groups compete with one another for limited resources (Bryk et al. 1998). LCFF similarly raised the ire of concerned community groups and citizens who criticized the policy for not targeting additional resources at other historically marginalized student groups like African Americans (Community Rights Campaign of the Labor/Community Strategy Center and Black Organizing Project 2014). State policymakers retorted that LCFF’s three targeted student groups would encompass these students and the policy did not prohibit districts from supporting additional student groups. Accordingly, several school districts found ways to accommodate the reported increase in “interest group activity” during Year 2 (Koppich et al. 2015:7-8). For example, West Contra Costa Unified School District invited members of civil rights organizations and community groups including the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People chapter and the student health and education advocacy group Building Blocks for Kids to appoint representatives to sit on their PAC (Wheatfall 2015b:2). To ensure representation, community organizations may especially

encourage school districts to establish additional mechanisms to solicit feedback from historically marginalized parents and community members.

3.2 –Study Aims & Hypotheses

Statewide LCFF implementation offers a unique opportunity to systematically test several hypotheses about stakeholder engagement implementation raised from extensive qualitative literature.

If the inertia of the prior “compliance orientation” persists into LCFF implementation, including stakeholder engagement, we should find:

- 1a) Expected engagement techniques highly prevalent in LCAPs.
- 1b) Expansive engagement techniques rarely prevalent in LCAPs.
- 2) No significant differences in prevalence between demographically, organizationally, and contextually different school districts’ descriptions of using expected techniques.

However, if relational theorists’ findings about homogeneity and heterogeneity hold true, we should find:

- 3) Racially and ethnically diverse school districts more prevalently describe using expected engagement techniques.

Moreover, if organized networks influence school district administrative agents’ engagement practices, we should find:

- 4) School districts with greater organizational capacity more prevalently describe using expansive engagement techniques.

Finally, if organizational networks ameliorate participatory inequity, we should find:

- 5a) High-needs school districts with greater capacity more prevalently describe using expansive engagement techniques.

5b) Heterogeneous school districts with greater capacity more prevalently describe using expansive engagement techniques, especially support for historically marginalized families.

3.3 – Data & Methods

3.3.1 – Measuring Expected & Expansive Engagement

The primary data source for these analyses is a unique, large corpus of LCAPs manually collected over two years. Data collection began in March 2016 and concluded in August 2018. To track collection, I began by accessing the most recently available California Department of Education (CDE) dataset that includes administrative information for all county offices of education (COEs), LEAs, and schools that have ever operated in the state. Approximately 1,181 LEAs operated in California during the LCFF’s first year of implementation. Because LCFF requires district officials to incorporate high school students in their LCAP planning process and high school districts account for only 7.41% of all school districts, I limited the universe of cases to all elementary and unified school districts.¹⁹ Additionally, one elementary school district merged with a high school district to become a unified school district during the study’s three-year period. Thus, the CDE oversaw 871 unique elementary and unified school districts over the study’s focal period; these districts’ LCAPs were eligible for inclusion in the analysis.

I then manually gathered LCAPs. Because the reform decentralizes budget oversight and requires school districts to make county- and CDE-approved LCAPs readily available to the public, I first visited each unique school district’s website to download plans. During early data

¹⁹ The CDE also governs other LEA types like State Board of Education- and County Office of Education-sponsored charter schools and common administration districts that account for 7.99% of all LEAs. Because there are different operational guidelines and governance oversight for these organizations, they were also excluded from data collection and subsequent analyses.

collection, I found a digital repository of publicly available LCAPs maintained by the CDE (California Department of Education 2018a). A repository maintained by The Education Trust-West, an educational civic watchdog organization that has helped CDE implement LCFF, as part of their larger oversight project was also discovered and used for data collection. Collecting data from these multiple sources helped me verify that I collected the most recent and up-to-date version of the LCAP for a given district-year to ensure complete and accurate data collection.

Table 3.1: Corpus Description

	<i>N</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>Proportion</i>
Documents			
Total	2,356		1
Year			
2014-15	752		.32
2015-16	804		.34***a
2016-17	800		.34***a
Tokens			
Total	1,536,622		1
Year			
2014-15	320,871		.21
2015-16	566,469		.37
2016-17	649,282		.42
Average Tokens			
Total	652.22	476.58	
Year			
2014-15	426.69	305.77***a	
2015-16	704.56	473.68***a,b	
2016-17	811.60	592.15	

**** <.001; *** 0.01; ** 0.05

a: Significant difference compared to Academic Year 2014-15.
b: Significant difference compared to Academic Year 2015-16.

Table 3.1 outlines these data. I acquired 2,587 district-year LCAPs, or between 98.7% and 99.2% of possible plans for a given year. There were no significant differences in missing LCAPs between each year. Most districts submitted their LCAPs formatted in the Portable

Document Format (PDF); however, seven and five LCAPs were formatted as Microsoft Word documents in AY 2014-15 and 2015-16, respectively. Many of R's text mining packages require documents in a plain text file format for processing, including the widely used **tm** package (Feinerer 2018; Feinerer, Hornik, and Meyer 2008). The **tm** package also includes the *readPDF* function for users to convert PDF files into a different format using a preferred PDF engine (Ford 2016) like *Xpdf* (XpdfReader 2017) to generate analyzable data. Using these tools, I first converted the PDF files into the .txt format. As discussed above, LCAPs contain three sections: an outline of a district's yearly engagement efforts with annual updates after the first year of implementation; detailed budgeted expenditures and actions to support targeted student groups and/or all students meet LEA goals based on the state's eight priorities; and an overview of all supplemental dollars and necessary proportionate increase in services to meet their goals. Because I examine the implementation of LCFF's stakeholder engagement component, I analyze the language used in the templated "Section 1: Stakeholder Engagement" tables. Accordingly, I defined this section using the table's first column title ("Involvement Process") and the second section's header²⁰ to copy each LCAPs' "Section 1: Stakeholder Engagement" and paste them into new, unique files using the *pdftotext* function from *Xpdf*. Not all PDF files were properly formatted for these tools to process them, preventing format conversion and section extraction. Three primary issues were identified: a number of districts submitted scanned-image copies without Optical Character Recognized (OCR) content²¹; one district digitally secured one LCAP, locking out tools from accessing its content; and a portion of extracted LCAPs suffered formatting problems during conversion, rendering the code to delimit and extract Section 1

²⁰ For the first year of implementation, this was defined as "Section 2: Goals and Progress Indicators." In year 2 this was revised to "Section 2: Goals, Actions, Expenditures, and Progress Indicators."

²¹ The *Xpdf* engine requires PDF files to be either directly converted from a word-processing software into the format or a scanned image with OCR for the function to process them.

unusable. The digitally secured LCAP was omitted from the corpus. To recover additional data, I developed a second stage extraction process. After generating lists of empty Section 1 .txt files returned from the first-stage extraction process²² I manually reviewed complete .txt versions of converted LCAPs from which I visually identified then copied-and-pasted Section 1 contents by hand. Of the 342 .txt files missing Section 1 contents, I recovered approximately 55% (188) of these missing data through this process, including from the twelve LCAPs formatted as Microsoft Word documents. Further inspection found three .txt files converted from OCR-scanned PDF incomprehensible and were subsequently removed from the corpus. Finally, Roberts et al.'s **stm** function cannot process document-term matrices with incomplete data. In total, 192 district-year cases were missing text data, metadata, or some combination of the two; only 11 cases (5.7%) contained usable text with missing metadata. All these cases were dropped from the corpus. Additionally, I omit two influential points: Los Angeles Unified and San Diego Unified School Districts.²³ As detailed in Table 1, AY 2014-15 LCAPs were significantly more likely to be missing from the corpus compared to both AY 2015-16 and 2016-17 LCAPs, and there were no significant differences in missing data between the latter.

Data was cleaned using the **tm** package. Cleaning is an integral phase for preparing a corpus for analysis. During this stage, all words were lowercased, and numbers, punctuation, and stop words²⁴ were removed. Topic modeling is especially sensitive to frequently and infrequently

²² If the *readPDF* function encounters a non-OCR PDF file, it returns a .txt file with either no contents or this (♀) repeated symbol.

²³ Several reasons underlie this decision. LAUSD and SDUSD are among the largest school districts in the country. Their scores on several covariates greatly inflate the given measures' mean values. Moreover, in some instances their scores lie over fifteen standard deviations from the mean. I conducted several analyses to assess how these school districts affect results, including iterative structural topic modeling procedures that included and excluded these cases. Taken together, I concluded that their inclusion significantly affected results. Results including these cases are available upon request.

²⁴ Stop words are very frequent words that add little context to a given text and corpus. For example, "the" and "and" proliferate through most communication but do not offer much insight into content of communication. Accordingly, most computer-assisted content analyses, and especially topic models, exclude these sets of words. R's

used terms: if a term is found in every, and inversely only one, document in a corpus, it likely tells us little about the corpus's overall themes or topics. Consequently, iterative corpus review identified very frequent terms with little substantive meaning that were removed, including a column header entitled "Impact on LCAPs" and several highly probable terms like "lcap," "district," "school." Custom stop words are listed in Appendix B. Additional custom functions were written to remove website and email addresses. Because topic modeling uses word frequency to predict a corpus's hidden structure, it differentiates between words that represent the same concept but are spelled slightly differently. For example, the words "teacher," "teachers," and "teaching" would all be considered unique tokens, greatly inflating the matrix's dimensions that requires more processing power without providing a more rigorous analysis. Accordingly, analysts recommend using less-intensive lemmatization procedures like stemming to reduce the matrix's dimensions. This process reduces "teacher," "teachers," and "teaching" to the token *teach*. Remaining tokens were stemmed using **tm**'s *stemDocument* function. The Volatile Corpus object was then transformed into a tidy sparse matrix to retain metadata during conversion to an STM-ready object. Then the **stm** package's *textProcessor* function was used to transform the tidy sparse matrix for structural topic modeling, removing unique tokens that appear in less than 1.5% of the documents.²⁵ In total, 2,356 district-year LCAPs with 1,618 types²⁶ and 1,536,622 total tokens in the corpus were analyzed.

tm package draws its stop word list from the SMART information retrieval system (Lewis, Yang, Rose, and Li 2004).

²⁵ Similar to other decisions, several procedures were implemented to assess how different sparsity levels affected results. Given the corpus's longitudinal structure, no sparsity alterations would retain a given term that appears in a school district's annual LCAP without appearing in another school districts' LCAP. To reduce infrequent terms, I opted to include terms that appeared in more than one school district. Because a school district with complete cases over the three-year analytic period encompassed 1.27% of the corpus, the sparsity level had to be higher. I ran analyses at both 1.5% and 2% sparsity. Corpuses with 2% sparsity omitted several important terms, whereas corpuses with 1.5% sparsity retained several important terms and captured key topics described across LCAPs.

²⁶ In the literature, types are defined as unique tokens (Richards 1987).

Table 3.2: Characteristics of California School Districts

	All Years	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Demographic predictors				
District Need	0.59 (0.26)	0.59 (0.26)	0.60 (0.26)	0.59 (0.26)
Hispanic	0.44 (0.28)	0.43 (0.28)	0.43 (0.28)	0.44 (0.28)
White	0.40 (0.26)	0.41 (0.27)	0.40 (0.26)	0.39 (0.26)
African American	0.03 (0.05)	0.03 (0.04)	0.03 (0.05)	0.03 (0.05)
Organizational predictors				
Size (Count)	5,412.16 (9,287.66)	5,515.81 (9,346.79)	5,404.59 (9,304.92)	5,322.32 (9,224.98)
Contextual predictors				
Organizational capacity (Count)	8.80 (12.89)	8.60 (12.61)	8.89 (13.03)	8.88 (13.02)
Racial-ethnic diversity	0.46 (0.17)	0.46 (0.17)	0.46 (0.17)	0.47 (0.17)

Source: Author's calculations based on California Department of Education district administrative data and National Center for Charitable Statistics Core and Business Master Files.

Note: Numeric variables include the standard deviation in parentheses underneath the mean.

3.3.2 – Independent Variables

STM allows analysts to incorporate covariates in its generative modeling framework to test hypotheses about topical prevalence and content (more on this below). Because I am interested in the changing importance of different engagement techniques as measured by the predicted topic proportion of a given document, I allow the topical prevalence to vary by several covariates. Covariate descriptive statistics are presented in Table 3.2. Unless otherwise indicated, all numeric data are measured by proportion.

Demographic Characteristics. The California Department of Education (CDE) publishes rich school and district data, including demographic makeup information. Under LCFF, CDE allocates supplemental and concentration grant funding to school districts based on the number and proportion of unduplicated pupils.²⁷ Although CDE collects unduplicated pupil group counts, these measures are highly correlated with race and ethnicity control variables. I divide the district's UPC by its number of total enrollees to measure student need. Most California school districts are eligible for LCFF concentration grants: nearly sixty percent of students in the average school district are foster or homeless youth, ELs, or students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

CDE also collects student race and ethnicity data. These data are published in disaggregated counts by race, gender, and grade level. Ed-Data publishes aggregated district-level student racial and ethnic percentages that I use for these analyses.²⁸ Following Murray et al. (2019) I include the three predominant racial-ethnic groups in multivariate analyses: Hispanic, white, and African American. Because district Hispanic proportion is highly correlated with several measures, I exclude it as the baseline category in multivariate analyses. On average, a student in California attends a school district with roughly equal proportions White and Hispanic students—40% and 44%, respectively—and few African American students relative to other racial-ethnic groups.

Following Murray et al. (2019), I also use these data to calculate each school district's Blau index. The Blau index measures racial diversity using the following equation:

$$\lambda = 1 - (Pr^2_{hispanic} + Pr^2_{white} + Pr^2_{african-american} + Pr^2_{other}).$$

²⁷ See chapter 1, pp. 6 for an overview of allocation criteria.

²⁸ Customizable data sets can be found at <https://www.ed-data.org/Comparisons?compType=districts>.

As explained by Murray and her colleagues (2019:46), “The resulting measure ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 represents a perfectly homogenous group and increases as the group becomes more diverse. The resulting proportion represents the probability that an individual in the school [or, in this case, district] is from a certain racial-ethnic group.” The average California student is about as likely to enroll in a public school district where they are a member of the majority racial-ethnic group as they are not.

Size. CDE also publishes school and district enrollment data. I use reported total enrollment to measure district size. The average school district educates approximately 5,400 students, and 95% of all school districts enroll between one and nearly 24,000 students. A large standard deviation suggests that the distribution of district size remains severely right-skewed even after eliminating two of the country’s largest school districts from the sample: several school districts provide education to well over 24,000 students.

Organizational Capacity. Finally, I test several hypotheses about the influence of school districts’ organizational capacity on their prevalence of stakeholder engagement techniques. The National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS) publishes comprehensive datasets of organizations that file for tax-free benefits. These data include organizations’ filing names, central office addresses, and other basic tax information. NCCS also categorizes each organization according to one of 26 general foci, including education, and its specific purpose.²⁹ To measure school districts’ organizational capacity, I summed counts of two Education organizational types—Parent and Teacher Groups and Single-Issue Organizations associated

²⁹ Full descriptions of each category can be found at www.nccs.urban.org/publication/irs-activity-codes.

with school or district fundraising³⁰—across each district’s 5-digit ZIP Code range³¹. I henceforth refer to this collective measure as a school district’s capacity.

Nearly nine parent-teacher organizations operate in the average California school district. Like district size, a standard deviation larger than the mean suggests a right-skewed distribution. Although no organizations operated within most districts’ boundaries, some locales had access to robust organizational capacity: between zero and about thirty-five organizations operate within 95% of school districts’ boundaries.

3.3.3 –*Topic Modeling: Latent Dirichlet Allocation and Structural*

Innovative methodological tools paired with growing access to digital text repositories offer social scientists’ new ways to test participatory governance theories. One leading methodological innovation is probabilistic topic modeling (Blei 2012; Mohr and Bogdanov 2013). Topic modeling brings computational science and statistics to content analysis using a generative probabilistic model to analyze large document collections, or corpora, for thematic patterns that may be infeasible to find or pass unnoticed by human coders (Blei 2012). The most widely used and basic form of topic modeling is latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA; Blei, Ng, and Jordan 2003). LDA assumes each document, d , is composed from different proportions of latent variables or topics, k , that are themselves probability distributions over words. To infer a

³⁰ These organizations’ names often follow conventional patterns by containing at least one of two terms (Murray et al. 2019): “booster” (e.g. “Parent Booster USA Inc.,” individual fundraising booster clubs associated with a nonprofit legal support network; “Orville Wright Booster Club,” a fundraising organization for Orville Wright Middle School) or “friends” (e.g. “Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays Inc.,” a national legal network that helps local communities create fundraising organizations; “Friends of Rowland Unified Schools Foundation,” a fundraising foundation located in Los Angeles County’s Rowland Unified School District). I subsequently limit Single Issue Organizations to these organizations using **dplyr**’s *filter* command.

³¹ CDE data identifies school district offices in their Master Data file. However, school districts can operate schools across several ZIP codes. I use these latter geographical boundaries as the range for inclusion in a given school district’s organizational count.

corpus's hidden thematic structure, the model begins by drawing a distribution over distributions of topics, β_k , from a Dirichlet prior distribution. Then, for each document, d , the model draws Θ_d , a conditional distribution measuring the topic mixture proportion, from which each word, $W_{d,n}$, is drawn from a selected topic distribution, $Z_{d,n}$.³²

Since LDA's introduction, computational scientists and statisticians have modified the basic model by relaxing or tightening assumptions to help researchers answer evermore specific questions. Correlated topic models (CTM) substitute the Dirichlet prior distribution with a logistic normal prior to examine how topics relate to each other (Blei and Lafferty 2006a, 2007); topic evolution over time can be modeled with dynamic topic models (Blei and Lafferty 2006b); and hierarchical Dirichlet processes seek to statistically model the similarities among grouped data points (Teh et al. 2005). More recently, structural topic modeling (STM) generalizes computational text-mining capabilities (Roberts et al. 2013; Roberts et al. 2014; Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley 2014, 2016; Roberts et al. 2016). STM provides the statistical basis for metadata's analytical incorporation to predict a corpus's hidden structure by "altering the prior distributions to partially pool information amongst similar documents" (Roberts et al. 2013). Incorporating metadata in the modeling phase provides a more rigorous fit than post-hoc analysis and, of central importance to the present study, allows researchers to test hypotheses about how metadata affects two components of a document's hidden structure: topic prevalence and topic content. Topic prevalence is conceptualized as the relative proportion of a given topic in each document, whereas topic content is the relative proportion of a given word or set of words in a given topic.

³² See Blei (2012) for a useful graphical illustration of the model.

For example, researchers may run an experiment testing how survey question wording prompts a subject's response to a question about immigration (Roberts et al. 2014). They may hypothesize that a subject's vocabulary—the topical content—and how often certain topics are discussed—topic prevalence—varies by political ideology and party identification. STM models these two outcomes as a function of metadata indicating treatment by survey wording and a self-reported measure of political ideology.

For the purposes of my study, I incorporate a range of metadata, including demographic, organizational, and contextual variables, to test earlier researchers' and theorists' hypotheses about how administrative agents respond to ambiguous PG reforms. To select a model for interpretation, analysts suggest moving between modeled topic outputs, “representative” documents of a given topic, and the relationships among topics to assess the model's fit. I iteratively reviewed several possible models but ultimately found that model using $K = 24$ topics best represents the corpus.³³ All results are interpreted using FREX-weighted topic vocabulary.³⁴

3.4 –Results

3.4.1 – Describing the Engagement Process

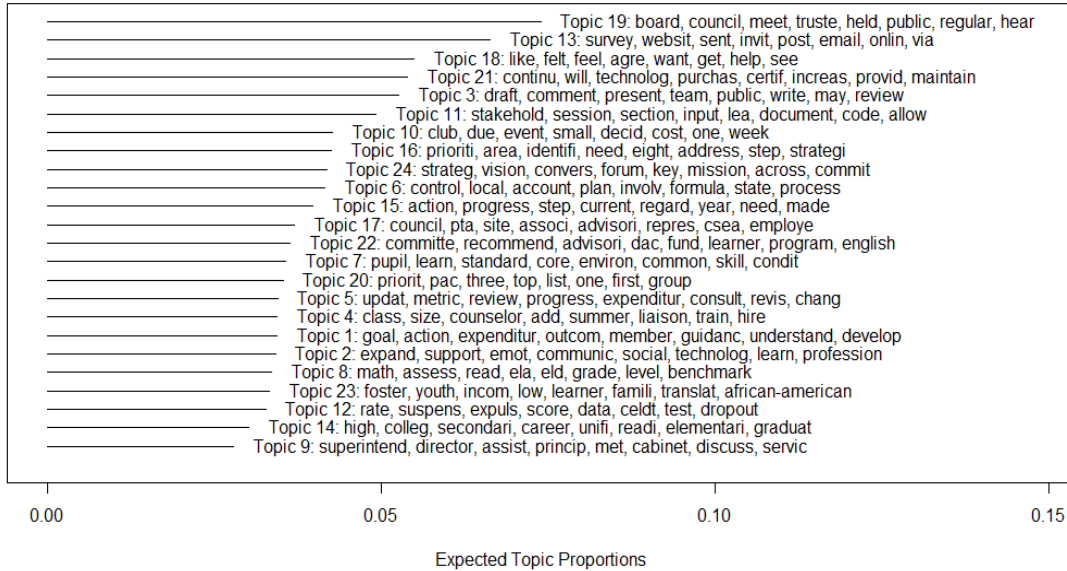
Figure 3.1 presents the proportion of each topic expected to be found in the corpus's average document and each topic's eight most frequent words. This figure should be interpreted in two ways: examine individual topics to get a sense of what themes are used to construct documents in the corpus and analyze their overall distribution throughout the corpus (Blei 2012).

³³ For a detailed discussion of my selection process, see the Methodological Appendix in Appendix A.

³⁴ Frequent and Exclusivity weighting ranks a given word according to their frequency in and exclusivity to a given topic. FREX scores range from 0 to 1, with increasing weights associated with a word's greater exclusivity to a given topic (Bischof and Airolid 2012). A heuristic threshold used for FREX weighting is 0.7 (Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley 2014); I use this weight in the presentation of my analyses.

To interpret a topic, analysts should move between each topic’s mixtures of tokens like the eight presented tokens, longer lists of associated words, and representative documents.

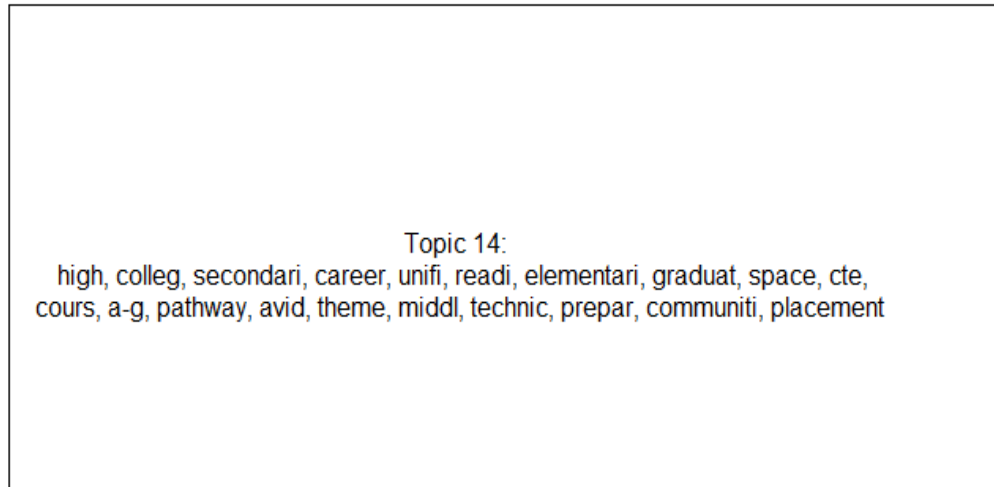
Figure 3.1: Distribution of Topics in Corpus with Top 8 Words, Frex-weighted



For example, Topic 14’s top eight words—*high, colleg*³⁵, *secondari, career, unifi, elementari, readi, and graduat*—suggest a theme about schooling’s purpose to cultivate “college” and/or “career-ready” students. Figure 3.2, Topic 14’s top 20 tokens, further evidences this interpretation: California’s “A-G” high school “graduation” requirements include several “courses” for students to complete. High school students not bound for college can complete several alternative “pathways,” including *cte*, or Career and Technical Education, programs and other career-readiness course like Advancement Via Individual Development, or *avid*.

³⁵ Because I stemmed the corpus’s vocabulary during the cleaning stage (see discussion above), tokens approximate but are not quite formal English words. In this case, *colleg* is the result of stemming “college” and any other suffixed version of it (e.g. the plural “colleges”). For clarity, I *italicize* tokens and place their referent words in “quotation marks.”

Figure 3.2: Vocabulary Associated with Topic 14



Topics that describe how district officials engaged stakeholders are evident from my review of extant literature, LCAPs, and extensive subject knowledge. Two sets of topics describing stakeholder engagement techniques are identifiable. Five topics encompass a set of expected forms of engagement, including draft presentation meetings (Topic 3), LCFF advisory committees (Topics 22 and 20), regular board of education meetings (Topic 19), and continued decision-making by educational leaders (Topic 9). Figure 3.3 displays lists of each topics' twenty most probable words.

Figure 3.3: Vocabulary Associated with Topics 3, 22, 20, 19, and 9

<p>Topic 3: draft, comment, present, team, public, write, may, review, hear, june, leadership, superintend, approv, budget, final, templat, discuss, board, submit, town</p>
<p>Topic 22: committe, recommend, advisori, dac, fund, learner, program, english, special, supplement, budget, employe, gate, educ, delac, concentr, grant, servic, propos, manag</p>
<p>Topic 20: priorit, pac, three, top, list, one, first, group, facilit, idea, tabl, ask, initi, committe, purpos, five, two, task, rank, section</p>
<p>Topic 19: board, council, meet, truste, held, public, regular, hear, schedul, approv, month, june, site, attend, input, govern, staff, counti, agenda, discuss</p>
<p>Topic 9: superintend, director, assist, princip, met, cabinet, discuss, servic, busi, steer, administr, offic, overview, execut, propos, present, certif, elig, provid, requir</p>

As explained in chapter 3, LCFF requires districts to provide all stakeholders an opportunity to publicly *review* and *comment* on the LCAP prior to school board adoption. Draft LCAPs are typically presented at a school board meeting near the end of the school year, as evidenced by the inclusion of *may* among its top tokens. To promote public accountability, each school *board* must publicly approve the *final* draft at a later meeting; this meeting usually occurs in *june*. Given LCFF’s mandates, Topic 3 is unsurprisingly among the most highly prevalent in the corpus: the average school district dedicates around 6% of their Section 1 stakeholder engagement description to it.

However, the most prevalent expected engagement technique is also the most prevalent topic found in Section 1. Topic 19 is primarily associated with routine meetings, highlighting their centrality to school district’s first cycle’s LCAP planning process. Many school districts leveraged their state-mandated³⁶ *regular* bimonthly *board* of education updates in their stakeholder engagement processes, despite generally yielding underwhelming public turnouts.

³⁶ More on the Ralph M. Brown Act’s regulations and its implications for LCFF implementation in chapter 4.

Some school districts also regularly briefed employees at *staff* “meetings” about the LCAP. For example, Shasta County’s Black Butte Union Elementary School District explains how they included an LCAP *agenda* item on its regular meetings with both constituencies.

LCFF also mandates all districts to organize a District Parent Advisory Committee (PAC; Topic 20) and, for those districts with at least 15% and 50 pupils identified as English language learners, an English Learner Advisory Committee (DELAC/ELAC; Topic 22). School districts that emphasized these themes presented dramatically varying content. Peculiarly, several districts across the state use nearly identical language to describe how “facilitators” reviewed the LCAP’s “three” sections and the state’s *eight* educational “priorities” with committees. Local administrative agents may use key phrases to communicate their mandated compliance to county reviewers (Knudson 2016). Related, Sonoma County’s Alexander Valley Union School District exemplifies another familiar pattern: many districts list each committee’s individual meetings, increasing the topic’s prevalence. Other districts substantially detail their advisory committees’ tasks. Siskiyou County’s Scott Valley Unified School District, for example, invited their LCAP Advisory Committee to synthesize other stakeholders’ input and their own “recommendations” into districtwide actionable goals aligned with the aforementioned *eight* “priorities.” Still others like Los Angeles County’s Burbank Unified School District elaborate how advisory groups and committees aligned “supplemental” and “concentration” *grants* with the district’s priorities.

Finally, some school districts described educational leadership’s participation in developing LCAPs. Importantly, Topic 9 is the least prevalent theme in the corpus: the average district is expected to allocate just over 3% to it. This finding is somewhat counterintuitive: I later detail in case study findings how superintendents and other administrative agents critically oversaw and crafted LCAPs. Further investigation reveals that, when emphasized, repeated use

of organizational titles accounts for Topic 9’s prevalence. For example, the superintendent of El Dorado County’s Buckeye Union Elementary School District met with and presented overviews to various stakeholders and committees during LCFF’s inaugural year. Fresno County’s Kerman Unified School District similarly assembled an “Executive” LCAP Committee comprised exclusively of administrators to present LCAP information and collect feedback. Thus, Topic 9’s emphasis may highlight administrative agents’ technical work and not substantive contributions.

Figure 3.4: Vocabulary Associated with Topics 13, 17, 23, and 24

<p>Topic 13: survey, websit, sent, invit, post, email, onlin, via, communiti, inform, avail, spanish, particip, regard, copi, held, home, given, respons, forum</p>
<p>Topic 17: council, pta, site, associ, advisori, repres, csea, employe, spsa, presid, ssc, princip, feedback, elac, learner, english, administr, plan, middl, singl</p>
<p>Topic 23: foster, youth, incom, low, learner, famili, translat, african-american, english, homeless, pac, hispan, spanish, liaison, subgroup, repres, disabl, target, intern, specif</p>
<p>Topic 24: strateg, vision, convers, forum, key, mission, across, commit, engag, effort, object, ensur, communiti, leader, initi, align, invest, valu, build, partner</p>

A second set of topics might be broadly interpreted as expansive forms of engagement, presented in Figure 3.4. Districts are not legally required to use these techniques, but policy experts may recommend districts to deploy those (Perry, Corpuz, Higbee, Jaffe, and Kanga 2019). Topic 13 captures how districts solicited public feedback through surveys. This theme is among the corpus’s three most prevalent topics, suggesting that many districts especially emphasize this stakeholder engagement technique. Along with typical pen-and-paper surveys sent *home* with students for their families to complete, districts may also collect feedback on LCAP goals and priorities “digitally” by directing stakeholders to “websites.” San Bernardino

County's Etiwanda Elementary School District's initial LCAP exemplifies these behaviors. After distributing over 13,000 flyers promoting a digital survey with an access code for parents to securely contribute feedback, district officials were dismayed to find low response rates during the first data collection wave. Reassessing their protocol, they discovered the digital access codes to be a barrier to providing feedback, so they stripped this requirement and extended the feedback window. Other districts, like Alpine County Unified School District, linked a survey portal to the district's website for potential stakeholders to independently find and complete. Importantly, many districts offered "opportunities" for stakeholders to provide feedback in their preferred languages, most prominently "Spanish" but also other languages like Hmong in Yuba County's Marysville Joint Unified School District. Providing stakeholders with materials in their preferred languages not only helps administrative agents "reach the unreached"—groups of stakeholders that may not otherwise contribute to the LCAP planning process (Partners for Each and Every Child 2016)—but also signals to these communities that their input is valued.

Indeed, another topic associated with expansive engagement is primarily associated with capturing feedback from targeted student groups and their families and communities (Topic 23). In part this meant providing "translation" services and resources, especially in "Spanish." Some school districts like El Dorado County's Gold Trail Union Elementary School District even conducted meetings with English Learners primarily in the participants' primary language. Advisory committees like "PACs" may include stakeholders to "represent" various LCFF-targeted student groups like *foster* and *homeless youth* and students from families with "low-income" as well as student groups not targeted by LCFF like "African American" students and students with "disabilities." In some instances, like the school district in which I conducted case study research, boards of education institutionalized quota systems to ensure formal

representation.³⁷ Other districts like San Francisco Unified School District established committees to represent specific student populations such as African American Parent Advisory Councils and Indian Education Parent Advisory Councils. And still other districts established and deepened partnerships with local community-based organizations: whereas Fresno Unified School District collaborated with immigrant-focused The Center for New Americans to host workshops in Hmong for families, San Bernardino’s Snowline Joint Unified established Action Teams for Partnership to connect school sites with local resources to support ongoing work. School districts that emphasize targeted stakeholder engagement signal a serious commitment to the spirit of LCFF: deep engagement with a district’s local community through creative institutional and informal mechanisms.

Topic 24 describes how some school districts incorporated previous and/or ongoing strategic planning processes into LCFF stakeholder engagement. Strategic planning processes often include “forums” wherein district administrative agents invite stakeholders and other “community partners” to collaboratively chart a *vision* and *mission* for schooling, along with “strategies” to meet their objectives. Some school districts like Santa Clara County’s San Jose Unified School District presented recently developed robust strategic plans as part of other LCAP engagement opportunities like community meetings. Siskiyou County’s Montague Elementary School District and Mono County’s Eastern Sierra Unified School District, like many districts across the state, counted their Strategic Planning Sessions towards their LCAP engagement, in some cases using prior strategic planning committees as their source for LCFF engagement. At their best, such practices seamlessly integrate overlapping bureaucratic processes across multiple organizational layers that ensures widespread alignment.

³⁷ See pp. 90 in chapter 4.

Finally, some engagement experts highlight tensions between policymakers’ requests for stakeholders to address district progress when they may feel most comfortable reflecting on site-level conditions and needs. Vocabulary in Topic 17 highlights how some school districts emphasized site-level engagement efforts in three distinct and often co-occurring ways. Some districts adapted holdover institutional oversight mechanisms like “schoolsite councils (SSCs)”³⁸ and site-level “ELACs”³⁹ for LCAP engagement. Other districts also engaged semi-institutional affiliates like “PTAs” and other parent-teacher groups. Lastly, local collective bargaining units like California School Employee Association (*csea*) were notably incorporated in LCAP planning. District leadership across the state disputed the extent of teacher and employee LCAP participation (Marsh et al. 2018). Formal leadership like “presidents” were especially important resources: not only did they provide substantial LCAP feedback but as local nodes they could leverage their informal networks to promote widespread participation, as Los Angeles County’s Bonita Unified School District saw with great success. In some instances, like San Mateo County’s Las Lomas Elementary School District, school districts assembled Coordinating Councils or PACs that included representatives from all three organizational types. Necessarily, site-level engagement efforts encourage representative participation across a given districts’ diverse schools. As I discuss further below and in my case study findings, however, crossover organizational affiliation may cement a narrow, select group of participants as key but perhaps unrepresentative LCAP decision-making voices.

³⁸ Under the prior revenue-limits system, SSCs equally comprised of family and community members, and site employees and school administrators like “principals” outlined state categorical funding expenditures in annual School Plans for Student Achievement (“SPSAs”) (California Department of Education 2018c). Even though LCFF dissolved substantial programs into district’s base and supplemental and concentration grants, remaining state categorical programs remained under SSCs’ purview.

³⁹ Like SSCs, ELACs oversee site plans akin to SPSAs focused specifically on EL progress. Schools with more than 21 EL students are required to establish ELACs, and equal community and organizational representation is required. Individual ELACs can also send a representative to a District ELAC (DELACs) to oversee districtwide plan development and EL progress (California Department of Education 2019b, 2019c).

3.4.2 –*Corpus Prevalence*

Beyond topic descriptions, analysts should examine how often themes are discussed relative to one another. If writers include words in their documents based on importance, comparing relative proportions of topics in the corpus suggests greater emphasis on their content. In terms of LCAP Section 1 responses, greater topical prevalence may suggest more dedicated institutional effort to specific stakeholder engagement techniques. Three takeaways from the distribution of topics in Figure 3.1 are noteworthy. First, two of the three most prevalent engagement techniques in the corpus—Topics 19 and 3—are associated with expected forms: regular board of education updates and public LCAP draft and adoption meetings. Second and perhaps surprisingly, vocabulary associated with collecting surveys is the corpus’s second most prevalent theme. Even though school districts are not required to survey constituencies, the LCAP template indicates their potential utility, especially as a means to monitor school climate. Many districts found such a low-cost feedback solicitation technique especially necessary during the first year of LCFF implementation after delaying community engagement until well into the school year (Humphrey and Koppich 2014). In later years, superintendents resoundingly reported that surveys were one of the most fruitful engagement techniques (Marsh and Koppich 2018).

The importance districts attributed to other engagement techniques is a bit more mixed. Even though LCFF requires superintendents to consult with new or preexisting advisory committees about LCAP decisions, topics associated with these requirements fall squarely in the middle of the topical distribution with each accounting for approximately four percent of the average school district’s LCAP. Even more, the average school district emphasizes site-level engagement and strategic planning over these required techniques. However, targeted LCAP engagement efforts with specific student groups and educational leaders are rarely discussed in

the corpus. Although the former is troubling in light of LCFF's equity imperative, the latter suggests at least nominal steps away from the purely bureaucratic decision-making processes that characterized the revenue-limits system.

Taken together, these findings substantially evidence an orientation to efficient legal compliance over meaningful, expansive engagement, albeit with some important caveats. Emphasizing routine and low-cost engagement efforts like regular board of education updates, public LCAP draft and adoption meetings, and surveys allowed school districts to meet LCFF stakeholder engagement requirements. Surprisingly, though, the average school district emphasized several expansive engagement techniques like site-level efforts and strategic planning over expected techniques like district LCAP advisory committee, suggesting school districts may have seen requirements are as a floor and in many instances reached for an engagement ceiling. Whereas the above descriptions and topical distribution tell us what topics and their associated tokens prevail throughout the corpus, these results do not tell us about variation attributed to contextual, organizational, and demographic characteristics.

3.4.3 – Testing Administrative Agents' Technical Emphases

If administrative agents accurately detail their engagement activities in LCAP Section 1, differences in topical prevalence suggest variation in district officials' technical engagement emphases. Below I present results from multivariate regression analyses to test hypotheses about variation in topical prevalence. I mean-standardized all numeric variables for ease of interpretation; each coefficient reflects the estimated percentage point increase in a given topic's proportion of Section 1 associated with a standard deviation increase in a given covariate. Moreover, estimated effects associated with changes in racial-ethnic composition should be interpreted relative to the average California school districts' proportion of Hispanic students.

Table 3.3 displays predicted changes in expected engagement techniques' topical prevalence. Language associated with routine board of education updates and specific LCAP draft and adoption meetings far and away surpassed other expected engagement techniques in prevalence: respectively, about 7.1% (Models 10-12) and 6.6% (Models 1-3) of the average school district's inaugural LCAP, or just over one-seventh of stakeholder engagement descriptions, are associated with these two topics. However, LCAP-specific meetings encompass smaller proportions over time: by the second year, the average school district's LCAP reduced its prevalence by one-third. Topic 3's sharp decline in prevalence emblemizes a similar pattern for nearly all engagement techniques decline in prevalence over time even if the changes are not statistically significant. Lengthening stakeholder engagement descriptions may partially explain this pattern. As discussed above and indicated in Table 3.1, the average district used significantly more unique tokens over time, growing by nearly 70% between AY 2014-15 and 2016-17. During those years, many school districts increasingly detailed how stakeholders' preferred actions and goals influenced budgetary decisions in "Impacts on LCAP." If texts grow over time while the number of tokens associated with a given topic remains constant, said topic's relative proportion will decrease. I return to these concerns in the conclusion.

Table 3.3: Predictors of Expected Engagement Topic Proportions

	Topic 3			Topic 22			Topic 20			Topic 19			Topic 9		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)
(Intercept)	0.066*** (0.003)	0.066*** (0.003)	0.066*** (0.003)	0.036*** (0.002)	0.037*** (0.002)	0.036*** (0.002)	0.046*** (0.003)	0.046*** (0.003)	0.046*** (0.003)	0.071*** (0.003)	0.071*** (0.003)	0.071*** (0.003)	0.032*** (0.002)	0.032*** (0.002)	0.032*** (0.002)
District Need (std)	0.004 (0.002)	0.003 (0.002)	0.004 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.0004 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.0004 (0.002)	0.007*** (0.002)	0.007** (0.002)	0.007** (0.003)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.002)
White (std)	0.004 (0.002)	0.003 (0.002)	0.003 (0.002)	-0.006*** (0.002)	-0.006*** (0.002)	-0.006*** (0.002)	-0.004 (0.002)	-0.005 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.002)	0.024*** (0.002)	0.023*** (0.002)	0.023*** (0.002)	-0.004* (0.002)	-0.004 (0.002)	-0.004* (0.002)
African American (std)	0.002 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.004* (0.002)	0.004** (0.002)	0.004* (0.002)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	0.0003 (0.002)
Size (std)	-0.005 (0.003)	-0.005 (0.003)	-0.005* (0.003)	0.001 (0.002)	0.0003 (0.003)	0.002 (0.003)	0.005 (0.003)	0.006 (0.004)	0.006 (0.003)	-0.011*** (0.003)	-0.012*** (0.003)	-0.012*** (0.003)	0.007* (0.003)	0.007* (0.003)	0.006* (0.003)
Capacity (std)	0.002 (0.003)	0.002 (0.003)	0.002 (0.003)	0.006* (0.003)	0.007** (0.003)	0.006* (0.003)	-0.005 (0.003)	-0.005 (0.003)	-0.005 (0.003)	-0.005 (0.003)	-0.005 (0.003)	-0.005 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.003)
Racial-ethnic diversity (std)	0.002 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.003 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)	0.004 (0.002)	0.003 (0.002)	0.003 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)
Capacity*Diversity		-0.001 (0.002)			-0.001 (0.002)			-0.001 (0.002)			0.001 (0.002)			-0.003 (0.002)	
Capacity*Need			0.001 (0.002)			0.001 (0.002)			0.0003 (0.002)			0.003 (0.002)			-0.00002 (0.002)
2015-16	-0.02*** (0.004)	-0.019*** (0.004)	-0.019*** (0.004)	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.01** (0.004)	-0.01* (0.004)	-0.01* (0.004)	-0.005 (0.005)	-0.005 (0.004)	-0.006 (0.004)	-0.005 (0.003)	-0.005 (0.003)	-0.005 (0.003)
2016-17	-0.027*** (0.004)	-0.027*** (0.004)	-0.027*** (0.004)	0.001 (0.003)	0.001 (0.003)	0.0003 (0.003)	-0.015*** (0.004)	-0.015*** (0.004)	-0.015*** (0.004)	-0.006 (0.006)	-0.006 (0.004)	-0.006 (0.004)	-0.002 (0.003)	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.003)

**** <.001; *** 0.01; * 0.05

Table 3.4: Predictors of Expansive Engagement Topic Proportions

	<i>Topic 13</i>			<i>Topic 17</i>			<i>Topic 23</i>			<i>Topic 24</i>		
	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)	(20)	(21)	(22)	(23)	(24)	(25)	(26)	(27)
(Intercept)	0.076*** (0.003)	0.076*** (0.003)	0.076*** (0.003)	0.047*** (0.003)	0.048*** (0.003)	0.047*** (0.003)	0.036*** (0.003)	0.035*** (0.003)	0.036*** (0.002)	0.048*** (0.003)	0.047*** (0.003)	0.049*** (0.004)
District Need (std)	-0.003 (0.002)	-0.004 (0.002)	-0.003 (0.002)	-0.018*** (0.002)	-0.018*** (0.002)	-0.019*** (0.002)	0.0002 (0.002)	0.0002 (0.002)	0.0001 (0.002)	-0.016*** (0.003)	-0.015*** (0.003)	-0.015*** (0.003)
White (std)	-0.004 (0.002)	-0.005 (0.002)	-0.004 (0.002)	-0.013*** (0.002)	-0.013*** (0.002)	-0.013*** (0.002)	-0.006** (0.002)	-0.006*** (0.002)	-0.006*** (0.002)	-0.006* (0.003)	-0.006* (0.003)	-0.007* (0.003)
African American (std)	0.003 (0.002)	0.004 (0.002)	0.004 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)	0.006** (0.002)	0.005** (0.002)	0.004* (0.002)	0.004 (0.002)	0.004 (0.003)	0.003 (0.002)
Size (std)	-0.004 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.003)	-0.005 (0.003)	-0.005 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.003)	0.01** (0.003)	0.01** (0.003)	0.011** (0.004)	0.023*** (0.004)	0.023*** (0.005)	0.022*** (0.004)
Capacity (std)	0.0002 (0.003)	-0.0001 (0.003)	0.0003 (0.003)	0.009** (0.003)	0.009*** (0.003)	0.008** (0.003)	0.002 (0.003)	0.0005 (0.003)	0.001 (0.003)	-0.005 (0.004)	-0.005 (0.004)	-0.005 (0.004)
Racial-ethnic diversity (std)	-0.004* (0.002)	-0.004* (0.002)	-0.005* (0.002)	0.005** (0.002)	0.005** (0.002)	0.005** (0.002)	0.004* (0.002)	0.004** (0.002)	0.004* (0.002)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)
Capacity*Diversity		0.001 (0.002)			-0.001 (0.002)			0.004* (0.002)			0.001 (0.002)	
Capacity*Need			-0.001 (0.002)			-0.005** (0.002)			0.001 (0.002)			0.006* (0.002)
2015-16	-0.02*** (0.004)	-0.02*** (0.004)	-0.02*** (0.004)	-0.009* (0.004)	-0.01* (0.004)	-0.01** (0.004)	-0.002 (0.004)	-0.002 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.004)	-0.004 (0.005)	-0.003 (0.005)	-0.005 (0.005)
2016-17	-0.024*** (0.004)	-0.024*** (0.004)	-0.025*** (0.004)	-0.016*** (0.004)	-0.016*** (0.004)	-0.016*** (0.004)	-0.001 (0.004)	-0.002 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.004)	-0.005 (0.005)	-0.006 (0.005)	-0.006 (0.005)

**** <.001; *** .01; ** .05

As predicted by compliance orientation theory, emphasis of expected engagement techniques generally does not vary by compositional and organizational characteristics. Similarly, heterogeneous school districts and districts with greater organizational capacity emphasize expected engagement techniques to roughly the same extent as homogenous and less organizationally supported districts.

However, I also find some evidence that support relational theorists' predictions. School districts with greater capacity more extensively describe district advisory committees' LCAP engagement than school districts with fewer PTOs (Models 4-6). To be certain, these differences are substantively small: compared to a school district with only nine operational PTOs, a school district with about twenty-one operating PTOs is predicted to relatively increase these descriptions by less than one percentage point. But the differences are in line with previous research that shows how administrative agents utilized these networks to recruit participants.⁴⁰

Predicted changes in expansive engagement techniques are presented in Table 4.4. These findings paint a mixed picture about how administrative agents approached early stakeholder engagement. Even though LCFF's equity imperative might especially encourage high-needs school districts to adopt expansive engagement techniques, I find just the opposite. High-needs school districts describe school-based engagement efforts (Model 19-21) and parallel strategic planning (Model 25-27) at a significantly lower proportion than similar districts with smaller proportions of LCFF student groups. Moreover, district need is not significantly associated with targeted LCFF engagement (Model 22-24). Significantly greater proportions of high-needs school districts' stakeholder engagement descriptions are associated with routine board of education updates, though (Model 10-12). These findings support previous researchers'

⁴⁰ I present related findings from my case study research in chapter 4.

conclusions that districts with greater need face significant hurdles involving their communities in decision-making processes. In some instances, organizational capacity may help these school districts overcome some of these hurdles. High-needs, high-capacity school districts significantly emphasize strategic planning processes (Model 27). Like other findings, these differences are substantively small: a school district with 85% UPC but thirteen more PTOs is predicted to increase Topic 24's prevalence by just over half of a percentage point.

Unfortunately, more available organizations for implementation support are not a failsafe solution to expanding engagement efforts. As Model 21 shows, high-needs, high-capacity school districts describe school-based engagement at a significantly lower proportion than high-needs, low-capacity districts. Even more, greater capacity is significantly associated with only one expansive engagement technique. High-capacity school districts emphasize school-based engagement (Topic 17). This is not entirely surprising considering that the theme's penultimate probable token is *pta* and one might expect administrative agents to emphasize their supportive organizations.

Most surprisingly, racial-ethnic diversity is significantly associated with several expansive engagement techniques. Although heterogeneous districts may not emphasize survey collection (Model 16-18), they significantly emphasize site-based and targeted LCFF engagement compared to their homogeneous counterparts. Even more, heterogeneous, high-capacity school districts especially describe targeted LCFF engagement (Model 23). Thus, rather than exacerbating districtwide racial tensions (Posey-Maddox 2013), PTOs may ensure that different student communities are intentionally recruited for participation.

3.5 – Discussion

As shown above, administrative agents tended towards compliance with the letter of PG law in its early implementation stages. Analysts would be naïve to expect transformational changes almost literally overnight in how large organizations like school districts set priorities, and we would be remiss to ignore several promising practices. First, while the average school district often emphasized some combination of routine board of education updates, mandatory LCAP draft and adoption meetings, and surveys to collect stakeholder feedback, it just as often described using other expected and expansive engagement techniques. Even more, possible barriers to expansive engagement like racial conflict appeared to encourage some administrative agents to meet stakeholders on more familiar terrain like their affiliated school sites and target LCFF’s intended student communities for engagement. Diverse districts may especially benefit from PTOs that help reach varied racial and ethnic communities.

More worrying, districts with significant student need paid especially little attention to several expansive engagement techniques while using routine board of education updates to engage stakeholders. If these families and community members are already less likely to participate in routine local governance opportunities like school board elections (Kogan, Lavertu, and Peskowitz 2021; Resnick and Bryant 2010), how can we expect administrative agents to uphold the spirit of the law by fully incorporating their feedback into LCFF decisions? Although practitioners might hope to rely on PTOs for support, greater organizational capacity may in some cases be associated with hindering expansive engagement, like site-based efforts. I explore some possible explanations for these contradictory findings in later chapters and propose some possible solutions in the conclusion.

Readers should consider these findings alongside important limitations. Parsing the LCAP Stakeholder Engagement template into its two component parts— “Involvement Descriptions” and “Impacts on LCAP”—proved especially difficult. Future analysts should consider using other text structures like XML that more precisely delimit texts. Critics might also quibble with my measurement instrument’s validity: although proportions of a given document might measure the prevalence of a given engagement technique, does it necessarily capture its importance to a given organization’s engagement strategy? Might administrative agents “weight” feedback from expansive engagement more heavily than routine participation when making administrative decisions? Relatedly, I was not able to measure several qualities associated with greater democratic engagement, like climates of (dis)trust and political-institutional norms (Marsh and Hall 2018; Marsh et al. 2018). Thus, the above analyses do not assess the quality of engagement achieved through these techniques.

To be certain, expected engagement techniques may in some instances breathe life into a district’s ability to meet the spirit of PG reforms, and expansive techniques may curtail substantive engagement among different constituencies. That is, bureaucratic documents like LCAPs provide little information about how district engagement processes unfold—who participates, how do discussions unfold, and what complications might administrative agents and stakeholders face? Analyses of administrative self-reports do not and cannot replace the in-depth qualitative research that has been the family and community engagement and PG literatures’ bread-and-butter. Following in their footsteps, I detail my longitudinal case study findings in the next two chapters to illuminate some of the hurdles and ladders to success that one large, diverse, and high-needs urban school district, Kingdom Unified School District, encountered.

Chapter 4: Works-In-Process: The Challenges of Implementing Authentic and Representative Engagement

Ambiguity initially marred LCFF's stakeholder engagement requirements as policy advocates sought to expand its participatory horizons throughout its development. Even though policymakers eventually conceded to incorporate some legal accountability measures like mandatory advisory committee oversight and public draft presentation & approval meetings, they did not guarantee that practitioners were fully prepared to implement nor understood them. Unlike other PG reforms like PB, local administrative agents were not necessarily equipped with toolkits or guidebooks to encourage widespread participation (Baiocchi and Ganuza 2015; Wampler and McNulty 2011). Throughout the state, school district administrators' understandings of engagement requirements varied greatly (Marsh and Hall 2018). For both statutory and practical reasons, who, how, and to what ends identified stakeholders would help plan LCAPs beckoned responses. Kingdom Unified was no different.

In a diverse school district that enrolled nearly 50,000 students in over 70 schools with persistent "needs that outweigh their resources," administrative agents at Kingdom Unified wondered how they could efficiently identify and solicit LCAP feedback from stakeholders. More importantly, the school district long confronted tense and often racialized relations with local community organizers that stretched to their limits with a spate of proposed school closures immediately preceding LCFF adoption. Despite these concerns, it quickly became a regional stakeholder engagement leader early into implementation; it was, as one county official put it, the "Cadillac of stakeholder engagement." Their practices stood out for many reasons. School district staff deployed "multiple approaches simultaneously" to "ensure broad and representative feedback"; they allocated extensive resources at many organizational levels to support their

efforts; and they consistently revised their process with numerous stakeholders' feedback. Over time, however, the school district gradually shed some of its defining engagement practices as it began to rely on formalized structures like advisory committees for plan oversight.

How, then, was Kingdom Unified's stakeholder engagement process transformed? This chapter answers that and several related questions. What conditions support the creation of representative and authentic local stakeholder engagement practices? How might the institutional and organizational structures intended to reinforce the practices subvert them over time? LCFF's early ambiguity empowered administrative agents and community organizers to mutually support widespread involvement by instrumentally framing engagement around their respective goals. Motivated to lift a longstanding climate of racialized distrust, district staff initially invested substantial resources and leveraged community organizing initiatives like Kingdom's Community Coalition (KCC) to collect feedback and encourage participation beyond the district's usual contributors. As self-styled community representatives, KCC members tepidly welcomed district invitations to ostensibly influence school district expenditures and engagement practices. As policymakers clarified LCFF, local administrative agents and community organizers agreed to meet the policy's minimum mandates in lieu of its substantive, expansive starts. Board trustee's tacit appointment criteria, informal recruitment mechanisms, and formal strictures swirled with prior governance regulations to exacerbate participatory inequity by inviting civic-minded, highly available, and more "organic" (i.e., authentic) participants in LCAP proceedings, like middle-class parents and community members, at the expense of earlier and more representative cohorts. Unlike previous findings that administrators and staff closely adhered to legal mandates from LCFF's outset and gradually expanded engagement practices (Families In Schools 2016; Jongco 2016; Marsh and Hall 2018; Marsh et al. 2018), Kingdom

Unified's transformations suggest how in some instances structured deliberative processes (Fung 2004) paired with inequitable informal recruitment practices can supplant substantively representative and authentic practices.

4.1 – Dynamic Beginnings

4.1.1 – “A Whole New Idea”

Distrust towards Kingdom Unified permeated among community organizers, particularly of color. For many, district leadership and teaching staff had repeatedly proved itself antagonistic to or uncaring for their communities. When one of the oldest regional community-based organizations (CBO), Faithful Leaders, began outreach to parents of low-income and English-language learner (ELL) students about their troubling academic performance, they found that parents and teachers largely distrusted each other. Lead organizer Dolores described how “[Faithful Leaders’ organizers] heard from the parents that one of the biggest issues was that they had no connections to the teachers. And so their students were, um, not doing well but they felt like they weren't really listened to by the teachers. Then the teachers felt like the parents didn't care about, ya know, weren't getting involved, et cetera.” Similarly, Malcolm was moved to cofound Black Youth Support Council (BYSC), a community organization dedicated to uplifting Black families’ voices and needs in the district, after his and fellow organizers’ investigations into Black students’ academic performances. When statewide accountability metrics showed signs of faltering outcomes among Black students in the mid-2000s, they collected survey information, conducted focus groups, and analyzed administrative data to extensively detail these troubling trends’ causes, consequences, and possible solutions. Upon sharing their findings at community meetings, community organizers found parents clamoring

for representation and responsiveness to their needs. According to Malcolm, “A lot of parents came up—mostly parents came up and said, ‘Hey, you know why I don’t go to a board meeting? I get two minutes to speak. You know, um, I can’t tell my story about my child in two minutes and no one looks at me and no one follows up with me.’” Like many other community organizers, Malcolm shared his community’s suspicions of the school district.

Longstanding concerns came to a head when, less than a year before LCFF’s passage, statewide education funding cuts and declining enrollments forced the board of education to consider closing a dozen, but ultimately shuttering seven, schools. During that time, community organizers recruited hundreds of people to publicly denounce these proposals at board of education meetings that often extended well into the next morning’s early hours. Director of the district’s Family and Community Engagement department (FACE) Shannon recalled how “You [Meeting attendees] couldn’t move in there [the district office’s meeting room] in meetings... [I]t was so full, standing room only, because it was a real dire and impactful situation.”

Community organizers highlighted two motivating concerns. First, they contended that closed schools were primarily located in and served low-income communities of color. Some CBOs and organizers went so far as to condemn the proposed closures as intentional assaults. For example, Supporting Southeast Asian Progress (SSAP) alleged that they found “empirical data and comprehensive evidence demonstrating [Kingdom Unified School District’s] *plan to deliberately* close seven elementary schools in predominately low-income and racial minority neighborhoods” where district leadership “*willingly* sold out our children’s future” (author’s emphases). Table 4.1 shows that their concerns were not entirely misplaced: compared to elementary schools safe from termination, schools facing closure on average enrolled greater percentages of Hispanic and low-income students. Even though school district administrators’

claims about declining enrollments rang true—schools proposed for closure enrolled significantly fewer students and witnessed significant decline in enrollments over five years—community activists contended that the former’s decisions flouted aggrieved parents’ and community members’ demands, essentially undermining local control. SSAP continued that the school disclosure decision “upholds a process that ignored parents.” Not only did the district close schools in the face of resentful parents and community members, but it also seemingly flouted a special committees’ proposals to determine what to do with the empty school facilities.

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics by Proposed School Closure Status¹

	<u>Safe</u> (N=44)	<u>Proposed Closure</u> (N=12) ³	<u>Total</u> (N=56)
Hispanic or Latina/o	36.23 (13.68)	49.42* (16.73)	39.06 (15.23)
African American or Black	17.49 (10.62)	14.93 (7.51)	16.94 (10.03)
White, not Hispanic or Latina/o	20.67 (18.86)	11.19 (10.67)	18.63 (17.78)
Asian	16.55 (12.97)	17.31 (16.05)	16.71 (13.53)
Pacific Islander	1.96 (1.87)	1.40 (1.04)	1.84 (1.73)
Filipina/o	1.16 (0.79)	0.92 (0.92)	1.11 (0.81)
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.79 (0.55)	0.65 (0.49)	0.76 (0.54)
Two or More Races	5.10 (2.87)	4.14 (2.65)	4.90 (2.83)
Free or Reduce Price Lunch	72.75 (29.67)	92.75* (11.61)	77.04 (28.00)
Enrollment ²	489.00 (131.11)	351.92*** (78.90)	459.62 (133.82)
% Enrollment Change, 2006-07 - 2011-12	6.19 (20.95)	-11.81*** (11.19)	2.33 (20.59)

Source: California Department of Education for Academic Year 2011-12.

¹ All results are presented in percentages unless otherwise noted. Results include the mean and (standard deviation).

² Total number of students.

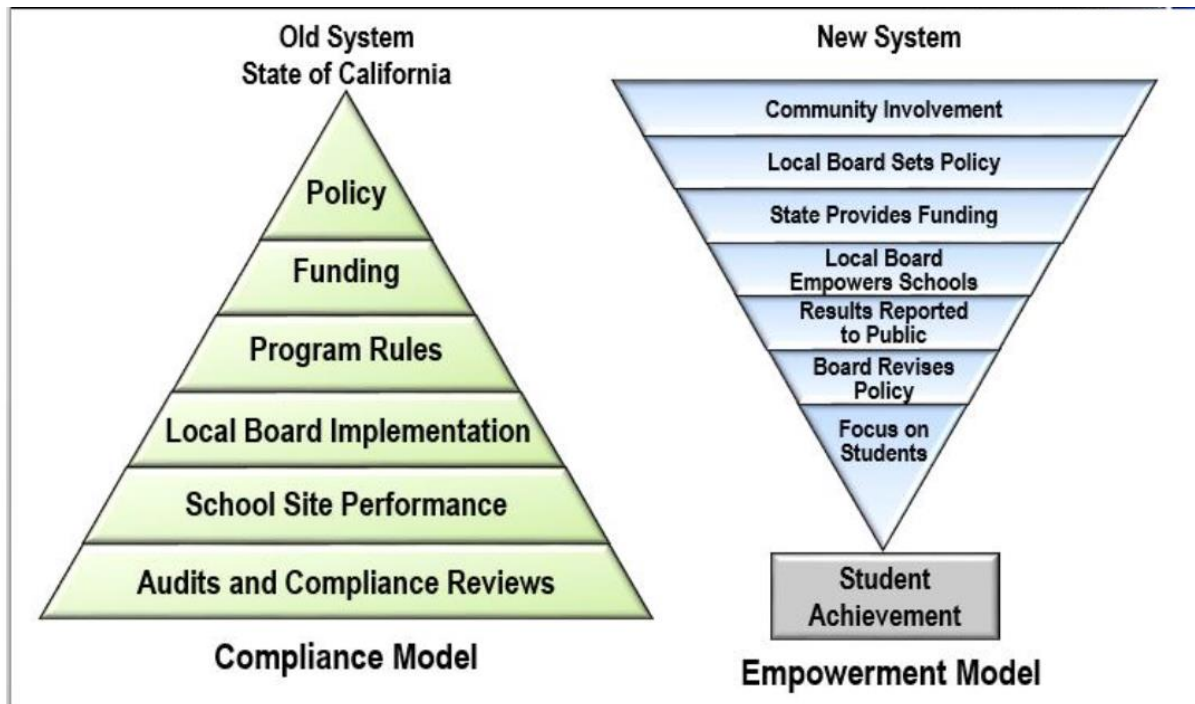
³ Wilcoxon rank sum test tests difference with Safe schools’ mean. ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01, **** p < 0.001.

The tumult of the times was not lost on district staff. Perhaps because the district confronted another budgetary crisis and similar upheavals⁴¹ or the cloud of distrust hung heavy, district leadership and staff frequently reflected on the consequences. In our conversation,

⁴¹ More on this in chapter 5.

Shannon despaired how “The personal (...) damage done, we're still reeling from that. People still carry residue about that.”

Figure 4.1: Education Accountability Models



Despite trying circumstances, administrative agents at Kingdom Unified enthusiastically welcomed LCAP engagement. District staff juxtaposed the previous revenue-limit system’s Compliance Model of accountability with the new system’s Empowerment Model as opposed ideal-typical pyramids, displayed in Figure 4.1. As the former’s moniker suggested, school districts strove to adhere to the system’s design: Audit and Compliance Reviews formed the foundation of all other governance practices, all of which served “Policy” with no clear goal(s). LCFF’s Empowerment Model, however, inverted the pyramid and situated “Community Involvement” at its foundation with “Student Achievement” as its goal. By engaging local stakeholders around their educational needs and priorities, so the policy’s underlying theory of action asserts, boards of education could better target resources to close achievement gaps and

raise all students' learning (Vasquez-Heilig et al. 2014). Importantly, state policymakers envisioned a central role for targeted student groups' parents, community members, and other representatives in decision-making processes, and understood that district leadership would need wide latitude to experiment with how to effectively incorporate those constituencies. At Kingdom Unified, ambiguous legal mandates initially propelled district staff to inform and solicit feedback from their families and communities using extensive resources, variegated processes, and collaboration with unlikely partners to repair damaged trust.

Distinguishing itself from similar school districts, Kingdom Unified's staff and administrators partnered with an educational consultancy firm to develop and execute a Community Planning Process modeled on "grassroots organizing." From November 2013 to April 2014 district administrators hosted large community meetings as the "primary entry point" for stakeholders to voice their local concerns and priorities around the state's eight priority areas.⁴² This began as a multi-departmental collaborative project: whereas Shannon's department was "charged with logistics and recruitment for the community meetings so that we could get voice around priorities," the communications department oversaw the overall strategy. Shannon recalled how "we [the school district] had community meetings because it was a whole new idea, and to even get the, um, the buckets that you wanted to concentrate on, we had to have community input." To include all voices, especially what Shannon described as "the parents that need to be heard," FACE hosted community meetings at school sites throughout the district. Meeting attendance unexpectedly varied widely: between 60 and 165 people attended any one of these forums. According to the district's eventual LCAP Coordinator, Paula, "Some of them were a hundred people 'cause LCAP was new and, um, nobody knew what, y'know, what were

⁴² Board of Education. April 23, 2015. "LCAP Engagement Plan Update."

we getting into.” On-the-ground bureaucrats like Shannon and Paula had to make sense of written guidelines and their local situation (Spillane et al. 2002), and with outside support implemented a dynamic process.

Community meetings’ dynamic proceedings reflected district staff’s uncertainty about the mandates but willingness to adapt to stakeholders’ requests. At the outset, district staff envisioned community meetings as opportunities to “inform and educate stakeholders about the new LCAP law and its fundamental components.”⁴³ Accordingly, district staff and a WestEd representative didactically presented LCFF and LCAP information at the inaugural November meeting with little time to receive attendees’ feedback about district priorities. Adjusting for these criticisms, staff divided subsequent meetings between “formal informational presentations” and opportunities for staff and attendees to discuss priorities with each other. Undirected focus on all eight state priorities at the following meeting still left many attendees frustrated with time allocation. District staff further refined their format, dividing the state’s eight priorities into two groups of four for separate discussion at meetings in January and February. By the final meeting in February 2014, district staff perfected their activities: they eschewed the formal budget presentation entirely and replaced it with structured small-group facilitation for the 60 attendees to discuss each other’s concerns and priorities. District staff received overwhelmingly positive feedback for its responsiveness, including from repeat attendees: put concisely in one staff-selected quote, “It was much better. Thank you!”

Community meetings were not the only avenue to solicit feedback nor did they serve this singular purpose. District staff leveraged community meetings to recruit and train Public Engagement Volunteers (PEVs) to administer district priority surveys to at least ten people in

⁴³ Board of Education. January 19, 2014. “LCAP Planning Process Presentation.”

their informal “personal and professional networks.” Such a strategy was so new to most administrative agents that its implementation did not come easy, and they relied on several other agents for support. Consultants helped district staff train and mobilize no fewer than 115 PEVs.⁴⁴ Administrative agents also drew PEVs from numerous “community partner” organizations like BYSC, Faithful Leaders, SSAP, and non-profit service providers. With roots in their communities, community partners could be expected to “authentically engage” their constituencies. Relatedly, many were recruited to target language minority groups. To lower one potential barrier to EL engagement (Marsh 2007) and ensure diverse representation, volunteers were encouraged to discuss the priorities in and translate the survey into their contacts’ shared language as needed. Furthermore, district staff and consultants closely monitored data collection to ensure representativeness; as they identified underrepresented or missing populations from their sample, they worked with the relevant volunteers to recruit these missing voices. Although time and resource intensive, the PEV strategy proved quite fruitful. At the first cycle’s close, district staff reported collecting nearly 1,300 verified survey responses. On top of this sizable sample, the district prided itself on representativeness: respondents from nearly every school contributed feedback, and although White respondents were slightly overrepresented and Hispanic or Latino respondents were slightly underrepresented in the sample, its racial and ethnic composition nearly mirrored the district’s student population. In turn, district staff fondly heralded it as “the most authentic” engagement strategy and envisioned their hard work as an investment they would leverage in future years.

Alongside a districtwide strategy, district staff conscientiously targeted other organizational levels to expand engagement initiatives’ reach and quality. Specifically, they

⁴⁴ District accounts of volunteer numbers vary between reports, with some reports as high as 135 PEVs.

identified school sites as a key source for “authentic community engagement.” To share the labor, district staff trained principals similar to PEVs: armed with a facilitation toolkit, principals collected survey responses at meetings with committees like SSCs and ELACs; extracurricular organizations like PTOs; and staff. Both to encourage parent participation and ensure “compliance with their parent engagement and inclusion” state mandates, Shannon’s team introduced an LCAP component into their School Site Council training materials. In sum, the district collected robust feedback from several constituencies, an undoubted feat considering its tremendous hurdles.

District efforts did not only benefit administrators and staff, however. Unexpectedly, innovative engagement practices helped launch a decisive community organizing initiative in Kingdom Unified. After community organizers unsuccessfully challenged school closures less than a year earlier, many of them realized their shared goals to collectively defend multiple student groups hinged on their capacity to collectively challenge the district (Stone 2001); in effect, they needed to organize together. To consolidate their efforts, policy advocacy organizations successfully galvanized BYSC, Faithful Leaders, SSAP, and other CBOs to collaboratively host an LCFF publicity meeting that brought together parents, community members, and district administrators. With great acclaim from this meeting, Malcolm worried about losing momentum and asserted “we need a coalition to keep this thing goin’ [*sic*].” To do this, BYSC began regularly strategizing with other participating organizations about how to leverage new institutional channels for influence in the district. These conversations birthed Kingdom’s Community Coalition (KCC) whose stated purpose “is to educate and engage the community (students, parents, teachers and community members) in the [Kingdom Unified] School District’s Local Control Accountability Plan and process.” Early on, KCC’s parallel

Community Engagement Process collected a range of data about their constituencies' priorities. Beyond collecting substantive feedback, they fortified collaborative relationships they would eventually mobilize to advocate for several demands.

LCFF thus engendered enthusiasm among district administrative agents and community organizers alike to solidify new relationships and repair damaged trust. Even more, enthusiasm stretched beyond niceties and phrases. Administrative agents diligently outreached to some of the most disaffected constituencies through multiple avenues—the PEV process, site-based engagement, and support from community organizers—to forge the trust that founds successful democratic participation (Almond and Verba 1963; Putnam 2000; Putnam and Leonardi 1993) and education reform (Bryk and Schneider 2002). For their part, community organizers tepidly accepted administrative agents' olive branch and supported engagement efforts. But community organizers also seized the moment to fortify their budding relationships to later leverage for greater influence, including in shaping institutionalized engagement outlets like the Parent Advisory Committee.

4.1.2 – “An Opportunity to Build Trust”

Despite widespread engagement efforts, concerns about regulatory compliance slowly bubbled to the surface. Although staff hosted LCFF/LCAP workshops with existing district advisory groups, no standalone committee reviewed the plan. However, LCFF requires school districts to maintain two committees that advise the board of education's LCAP decisions: a Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) comprised of a “representative” body of district parents, and a District English Learner Advisory Committee (DELAC) dedicated for parents of ELs. An early draft of the district's first LCAP described these meetings as simply “Advisory Committee” meetings; by the final district- and county-approved LCAP, though, they had morphed into

“Parent Advisory Committee meetings.” This subtle shift in verbiage ensured that the district met the letter of the law: as Paula recounted, “the district wasn't sure about what the Parent Advisory Council [*sic*] meant, and so every community meeting that they had was open to the public and they just said those were our Parent Advisory Committee meetings.” But many first-year participants, including several community organizers, remained dissatisfied with the process, and they reiterated a “need for a smaller working group that can provide detailed and thorough analysis and reflection throughout the development of the LCAP.”⁴⁵ Even more, nearby legislative advocates who successfully lobbied for LCFF accountability requirements obliged themselves to locally enforce them: law firms warned nearby districts about legal action if they did not meet LCFF’s minimal requirements, and especially active advocates pressed Kingdom Unified’s administrative agents to avoid similar penalties. Under the pressures of policy and persuasion, district staff conceded at the start of the 2014-15 school year that “[s]tate law requires districts to convene a group of stakeholders to provide feedback and input into the development of their LCAP.” They began weighing their options to meet this requirement.

As at many other school districts throughout the state, Kingdom Unified’s staff initially considered transforming their Title I-mandated District Advisory Council (DAC) into their PAC. This made sense: LCFF provisioned that DACs could become de-facto PACs in large part because they already performed many similar functions. To promote low-income parent involvement in education, federal law required school districts to recruit one representative from each SSC that would oversee similar district-level activities, including some measures of LEA Plan review and budget oversight. Be it an act of good faith or a symbol of compliance, Kingdom Unified often requested DAC presidents to sign documents indicating that they

⁴⁵ Board of Education. October 16, 2014. “LCAP Engagement Plan Update.”

reviewed these plans. Although these reviews were little more than “dotting the Is,” as longtime DAC and eventual PAC member Hank recalled, some DAC members relished the committee’s seemingly formal approval powers. Numerous issues left the council less than “highly functional,” however. Formally, many school sites lacked a nominal, let alone operational, SSC that could send a representative. Furthermore, as former district staff explained to Paula, the DAC’s formal structure with “government rules, bylaws, [and] elected officers ... created like a status thing where certain parents thought that they had more rights to information than other parents.” As Paula and other administrative agents saw it, formal procedures and roles fortified long-time active DAC members’ sense of authority over district procedures that could at times be interpreted as rivaling the elected board of trustees. In turn, “there was some perception of ... being adversaries of the district.” Long-time legal advocate Alejandra echoed these criticisms: “The people on them thought like, you know, they had certain responsibilities and roles and nobody else could do them. And... I think they weren't seen as being very cooperative.” Taken together, Kingdom Unified’s DAC like so many others had become, as Alejandra put it, “really politicized.” When district administrators learned they could “start fresh,” they readily opted to do so: at the start of LCFF’s second year of implementation, they disbanded the DAC and began forming a new PAC.

District staff initially proposed establishing a new working committee comprised of “invitees” from preexisting institutionalized channels including “district advisory committees, labor partners, school administrators and parent leaders.” Importantly, KCC affiliates *qua* public commenters swiftly rebuffed the proposal’s less-than-democratic nature. Some noted ambiguity in the proposal, asking for more details about the committee membership invitation process. Others decried how a smaller committee might shrink the number of participants and thus the

engagement process's "representativeness." Bridging these two concerns, EL advocates wondered how the district intended to include their students' and families' voices. Many also worried that the district's control over the committee formation process might seep into the committee's activity and possibly manipulate the proceedings. Summarizing the wide-ranging frustrations, one parent who participated in both the first year's LCAP Advisory Committee and KCC lamented the district's missed opportunity to "build trust" by excluding him and others from developing these structures.

Alongside concerns, they raised possible solutions. One representative from Faithful Leaders, a cross-religious CBO, explained how community organizations and organizers across the state played a pivotal role in engaging stakeholders "from the ground up" throughout the entire process. In one case, members in a sister organization presented proposals for strong stakeholder engagement to a Southern California school district's board of education. In another, a nearby board of education allowed parents and community members to directly elect representatives. Many later commenters trumpeted similar proposals; one even posited that an election would increase community "buy-in" to the LCAP engagement process. Finally, many commenters called for defensive mechanisms to minimize district control of the committee, including limited seats for district representatives and people with personal ties to administrators.

Be it for personal or political reasons, board members echoed commenters' concerns and did not select members at this meeting. Instead, they advised staff to further investigate ongoing "best practices" and return at the next meeting with structural revisions. Part of this included reviewing the evening's proposals to help refine their process. Even more, some trustees heeded the Faithful Leaders representative's suggestion and called on staff to solicit commenters' support with revisions.

At the following meeting, district staff proposed a recruitment process and committee structure that incorporated elements from this feedback and other statewide bright spots. Striking a compromise between direct elections and board members' hand-selected invitations, district staff proposed an application and appointment process. District staff would first disseminate applications for prospective members to explain how they would contribute to the PAC's "representativeness." Unlike requirements for how engagement unrolls, LCFF precisely explains that districts must make every effort to include stakeholder feedback reflective of their unduplicated pupil counts (5 CCR § 15495(e), as cited in Public Advocates 2016). Thus, applicants would be asked if and how they would represent one of the three LCFF targeted student groups—low-income students, ELs, or foster youth—or students with disabilities. To meet formal representative targets, staff proposed a committee quota system based on contemporaneous student demographics:

- At least eleven (11) Title I school representatives.
- At least three (3) EL representatives.
- At least one (1) Foster Youth representative.

District staff also proposed reserving two (2) of the sixteen seats for representatives of students with disabilities, a population omitted from LCFF's unduplicated student groups⁴⁶ but that maintained fiercely active champions locally.

District staff proposed additional criteria for trustees to consider in their selections. To prevent site overrepresentation, applicants would be asked which school(s) they represent. To promote demographic and geographic representation, board of education trustees and the superintendent would "make every effort" to select their two representatives from their Trustee

⁴⁶ Special education categorical program funding remains separate from LCFF supplemental and concentration funds. Thus, LCFF does not require school districts to collect feedback from families of students with exceptional needs about allocating the latter.

Areas. Finally, staff proposed to meet LCFF’s “strong [parent] majority” mandate by asking applicants to explain their current relationship to the school district and reserving ten of the sixteen committee seats for parents.

Despite some remaining grievances, board trustees adopted the “one-year model that can be remodeled in the future if need be.” With a formal committee and appointment process in place thanks in part to community organizers’ and legal advocates’ persistence, board trustees resolved to begin accepting applications.

4.2 – PACking the Vote

Administrative agents universally agreed that PACs should inclusively represent Kingdom Unified’s sprawling diversity. Beyond meeting regulatory mandates, inclusive representation would offer other significant benefits. Participatory governance experiments underscore the knowledge that lay-citizens, especially underheard and underrepresented voices, can bring to decision-making tables (Fung 2006; Fung and Wright 2001; Nez 2016). Ideally, advocates for different student groups would encourage committee members to consider unique educational experiences, needs, and wants they might otherwise overlook. Even better, experiential knowledge from “organic” representatives like parents could “authentically” inform the committee’s district needs assessment and proposed priorities.

However, administrative agents also tacitly expected prospective appointees to meet other criteria. Although the latter would be selected from various locales to ostensibly represent different constituencies, the former reasoned they should holistically assess and prioritize districtwide needs. Board trustees and district staff also sought prospective appointees who would at a minimum possess basic LCFF and statewide finance knowledge, but treasured “heavy hitters” who possessed policy, budgeting, educational, or other formal expertise. Such committee

members could contextualize experiential knowledge in larger systems and better tailor committee feedback. Finally, administrative agents wanted to balance seasoned district advocates with “new faces” on the committee. Seasoned participants often accrued extensive knowledge that could inform later PACs about prior discussions and avoid repeating missteps, but new faces could introduce different opinions into the PAC to keep internal conversations “fresh, dynamic, and evolving,” as former PAC member and then board trustee Valeria put it.

With an evolving appointment process, tacit criteria intertwined with informal recruitment practices (Koppich et al. 2015; Murray, Domina, Petts, Renzulli, and Boylan 2020), democratic procedures (Fung 2004; Johnson and Pajares 1996), and local and state regulations gradually narrowed the applicant pools’ and appointed committees’ composition. Paradoxically, interventions intended to alleviate participatory burdens often further alienated the afflicted committee members.

4.2.1 –Recruiting Appointees

The school year was halfway complete by the time the board of education adopted a PAC appointment process, and trustees needed to promptly seat members. Although district staff intended to widely disseminate the engagement opportunity, encroaching deadlines all but guaranteed that inaugural appointees previously participated in district LCFF offerings. Paula, a parent advocate turned the district’s first (and, until the end of my observations in 2019, only⁴⁷) LCAP/SPSA Coordinator⁴⁸, understood that debates over the committee’s structure meant

⁴⁷ I explore the consequences of Paula’s and other institutional engagement practitioners’ tenure for interactions in the next chapter, and its broader significance in the final chapter.

⁴⁸ The LCAP/SPSA Coordinator role would be responsible for all things LCAP, from collecting stakeholder feedback, writing the plan, and aligning it with SPSAs to engaging stakeholders. School Plans for Student Achievement, or SPSAs, are the site-level equivalents of LCAPs for schools that run federal categorical programs (California Department of Education 2018c, 2019). As with district staff and administrators in the latter, school site staff and administrators are legally required to engage stakeholders to develop the former. Unlike the LCAP, whose

assembling a “very robust” PAC “wasn’t going to be easy”: “[I]t was not going to be a committee of people who were just going to say, ‘Oh yes, yes,’ right? It was people that wanna challenge the status quo.” Paula braced for a passionate, if not antagonistic, committee of advocates.

Because they integrally helped the district solicit feedback as PEVs and shape the committee’s structure, representatives from both service providers and CBOs filled the applicant pool. Paula explained that early PACs were “almost like a blue ribbon panel”: “[I]f you were going to pick a foster youth rep, well of course you’d pick the CEO of the [Children Support Services Non-Profit Organization].” In district staff’s views, many service providers imagined they could propose specific programs and services that would fit their organizational niche, allowing them to “carve out” LCFF funds. Similarly, community organizers sought committee appointment for the opportunity to influence, if not directly oversee, district budgeting decisions. Unlike service providers, community organizers saw in local control not the state funding spigot it seemingly turned but its political prospects.⁴⁹

If early PAC members did not contribute to prior LCFF-specific engagement opportunities, they were nonetheless already involved in school district affairs. As Hank recalled, “many of the same parents [who participated in the first year’s community meetings], uh, or parents of like-minds were on the first LCAP [PAC],” including himself. Like Hank, many previously served on various district committees like the terminated DAC and 7-11 Committee who looked to the PAC as a new opportunity to stay engaged with the school district. Others previously served on targeted district committees like the DELAC and Community Advisory

structures for engagement were unclear and contested throughout its early implementation stages, state law clearly articulated SPSA regulations. These plans must be developed and approved by SSCs. Unlike other districts throughout the state, Kingdom Unified expected *all* sites to write SPSAs and maintain SSCs.

⁴⁹ I return to competing expectations of local control in chapter 5.

Council who saw the PAC as an opportunity to exercise additional influence for their children. Still others were previously elected to site-level decision-making structures like SSCs. Taken together, inaugural committee appointees brought strong wills for change and proven track records of district involvement.

When the first PAC convened, restless committee members wrestled with three interrelated participatory barriers. A quickly approaching end to the schoolyear imposed considerable time constraints to deliver usable LCAP feedback. Moreover, such a complex organization required extensive knowledge to diagnose district operational problems and propose solutions. Although district staff began feeding the PAC a healthy diet of data and reports, such a late start left some PAC members feeling like they had little time to fully digest them through what Malcolm described as a “late, bum rush, presentation-oriented process.” Second, the PAC lacked clear mandates about what form their collective feedback and decision-making processes should take. To top it off, district staff did not plan to furnish a draft LCAP until the PAC’s meeting schedule nearly closed, leaving committee members with little basis for their proposals.

Although inaugural PAC members deftly troubleshot long-lasting—and, as I will argue below, unintentionally deleterious—solutions, nearing deadlines and limited influence frustrated many appointees. Once district staff revealed committee members would first see a draft LCAP at a public board meeting in early May, many appointees had had enough. If PAC feedback would not be reviewed until well after the district wrote its plans, how could they expect to influence expenditures and operations? And if the district would not reasonably consider their feedback, why should they invest in it? Would-be service providers soon rotated off the committee when they realized their efforts to secure state funds were futile. Community organizers slowly followed in their footsteps who for many believed LCAP decisions began to

resemble earlier school closure decisions wherein district leadership seemingly eschewed community demands.

Even without the same earlier time crunch, district administrative agents deployed reliable, often overlapping strategies to recruit PAC applicants. As with earliest PACs described above, many later appointees learned about the committee from prior participation in district institutional processes. Like prior findings from participatory budgeting in the United States (Gilman 2016), eagerly curious and civic-minded parents and community members frequently immersed themselves in school and district affairs. Whereas some would-be PAC members sought other committee seats, others simply began regularly attending public board meetings. Here, parents, community members, and district administrative agents soon familiarized themselves with each other. Some struck up regular correspondences, like Rita, Cindy and Hank with their respective and other board trustees, while others simply became recognizable. Some board trustees even all but guaranteed the district's most vocal critics like Malcolm appointment to the PAC if they applied. In many of these cases, board trustees often carefully culled PAC appointees.

To recruit applicants beyond the usual participants, administrative agents launched digital media campaigns. Research shows that administrative agents can effectively recruit historically marginalized communities to become involved in participatory budgeting (Gordon, Osgood, and Boden 2017), and digital communication has become a staple practice among educators to deliver information to parents (Thompson 2008). Staff sent mass districtwide emails and text messages, and board trustees regularly posted on social media soliciting interested parents and community members to grab “a front-row seat to district decision-making” by applying for PAC appointment. Board trustees found the campaigns surprisingly successful. Whereas PAC member

Fam answered an email's call to apply, Tanya, Clara, and Chelsea, followed a Facebook post to the district's application portal.

Although committee appointment quotas promoted racial and geographic diversity, all major recruitment mechanisms ensured a disproportionately middle-class applicant pool. Drawing applicants from prior participation scaled up the "usual suspects'" scope of oversight: instead of providing feedback at a single school or for one student group, they now ostensibly spoke for all Kingdom Unified's students and families. Even great informational equalizers like digital technologies skew towards middle-class user predominance, unintentionally crowding out would-be participants with other class backgrounds (Posey-Maddox et al. 2016).

To promote PAC member turnover, board members later instituted staggered one- and two-year committee terms. PAC members with longer tenures could accrue operational and experiential knowledge to share with later appointees, and shorter terms could free time-strapped appointees from service without guilt.

4.2.2 – The Faults with Formalizing: When Policies and Procedures Collide

Informal recruitment practices narrowed the potential PAC appointee pool, especially after disillusioned volunteers who initially helped recruit oft-marginalized participants deserted engagement processes. Formal solutions intended to strengthen committee proceedings, including internal norms, board of education guidelines, and state regulations unintentionally fostered greater appointee homogeneity by exacerbating barriers to full participation. After the inaugural committee's truncated and seemingly perfunctory process, second-year appointees brainstormed solutions to avoid future frustrations. First, they immediately adopted a bimonthly meeting schedule to dive into district operations and additional weekend meetings to collectively workshop feedback. Committee members also formed and frequently met informally

in small working groups where people averse to public speaking might face lower stakes for self-expression (Marsh 2007) and allow time-strapped volunteers to arrange meetings around busy schedules. Besides substantive working groups, community organizers like Tommy also predominated a Process Subcommittee to formalize an internal feedback review and approval system.

However, formalizing the committee required more careful attention to state regulations. California's Ralph M. Brown Act, colloquially referred to as "the Brown Act," outlines sweeping transparency guidelines for local governing bodies to "bring participatory democracy to the citizens of the state" (Lockyer 2003). To promote citizen participation in public affairs, local governance bodies must give 72-hour advance public notice about meetings and their agendas and allow opportunities for attendees to comment on proceedings (Lockyer 2003:15, 19). The Brown Act additionally prohibits committee members from conducting committee business outside publicly noticed meetings, including through in-person meetings and telecommunications (Lockyer 2003:8). As board trustees' standing committee appointees, district administrators questioned whether the PAC fell under the act's purview. Tommy recalled the confusion and eventual resolution: "[I]t took us awhile to figure out if we were even Brown Act, uh, applicable. And I think where it ended up ... the district was going to officially say that we were not, but we were gonna try to, um, behave in a manner consistent with Brown Act."

The district's revised approach soon altered administrative agents' and PAC members' behavior. Extra-committee meetings and "offline discussions," as Tommy described them, were terminated, and PAC members could no longer discuss committee business outside official meetings. District staff later drilled the approach into incoming PAC members at committee orientations, emphasizing the utmost importance of consistent meeting attendance. By its fourth

iteration, district staff and appointees had even formally agreed to incorporate attendance mandates into the committee's Group Norms of Conduct. Successive PACs went further: the 2018-19 committee members adopted a provision warning sanctions up to and including reprimand and eventual removal for frequent absences. Most (would-be) PAC members internalized the warnings. Paula explained how a soon-to-be adoptive parent appointed to the 2018-19 PAC quickly resigned when she realized she "couldn't commit to the time." Although few members attended every meeting, many agreed that it was one of if not the most important requirement for membership.

Once district staff routinized PAC activities, they tapered their schedule to two-hour monthly meetings. Although Paula and Franklin tried to wrap proceedings on time, long and vibrant discussions often captivated the committee. Members asked in-depth questions and extensively commented about any given topic. PAC members also dialogued with each other, presenters, and other meeting visitors. On numerous occasions, some PAC members asked to extend their meeting. Some of these requests were for an additional fifteen minutes, others were for as much as half an hour. Although seemingly minor requests, extensions were inequitably onerous. Often caring for young children with few alternative childcare arrangements, working mothers specifically stressed the burdens the requests placed on them. Although the school district's FACE department provided free childcare during meetings to encourage full participation, paid providers' shifts ended at the meeting's original scheduled close.

Fam especially felt this impact. Growing up in the city as a second-generation Southeast Asian immigrant, Fam imagined herself giving back to her community. Although socially mobile, she frequently referred to herself as a "working mom" and wanted to give her all to her children's education and health. She attended most meetings but over time grew unhappy about

her time on the PAC, refusing to reapply after serving a one-year term. Specifically, she grew frustrated with the burdens that additional time commitments placed on her:

[T]here were times when [the meeting] went over and it was just, like—you know. ... Like, a lot of us that had the young kids, that dropped the kids off downstairs at the daycare, we're like, 'We can't stay here longer.' Like, a lot of [PAC members] wanted to go over, like, 'let's go over thirty minutes.' And I'm like, 'Woah! Like, my kid's bedtime is 8:30.' ... [P]eople wanted to stay longer and, like, a lot of us left early 'cause we're like 'We gotta go get the kids.' You know, they're bouncing off the walls downstairs, [laughs] you know?"

Imagine the counterfactual world where looser regulations allowed PAC members to meet outside publicly notified meetings. Although appointees and other stakeholders could collaboratively arrange meeting times around their busy schedules, the pressures of everyday life would likely inhibit participation even among the most motivated PAC members. Community organizers and activists often exercise their values through attending meetings, though (Polletta 2002); indeed, they requested bimonthly and as-needed additional meetings to ensure they adequately performed their duties when they sat on the committee. Although district staff adapted meeting schedules and provided childcare services to lower participatory barriers, numerous interviewees ultimately identified low-income students and families as inadequately represented throughout the PAC's short life.

But what of Kingdom Unified's early multipronged LCAP engagement strategy that solicited feedback from diverse cross-sections of stakeholders? Why did the smaller LCAP advisory committee that comprised "a group of engaged folks that are committed to and understand the work" outlive the PEV process and community meetings that allowed the district to engage a "broader group than ever before?" By LCFF's second full year of implementation, State Superintendent Torlakson clarified that LCAPs were intended as "three-year documents," citing research that education reforms require on average three years of implementation to

meaningfully assess their impacts. At the same time, local advocates and community organizers successfully pressured the district to meet “minimum accountability requirements” by establishing formal committees. District leadership thus endeavored to define local goals in a cycle’s first year and assess their progress over the following two years. In turn, the district no longer needed expansive engagement initiatives like the Community Planning Process; they could effectively rely on committees to meet state engagement requirements.

Towards the end of my observations, one newly appointed PAC member frequently declared how his low-income status allowed him to speak to similarly situated parents’ concerns. Paula praised his appointment, concluding “I think he’ll be a very authentic voice for the committee.” Without systematic opportunities to include similar voices, though, Kingdom Unified’s staff would have to rely on individuals to persevere through exhausting, time-intensive engagement opportunities.

4.3 – Discussion

It would be a mistake to conclude that administrative agents consciously stunted Kingdom Unified’s LCAP engagement processes, as local community organizers and new public participation theorists (e.g., Walker, McQuarrie, and Lee 2015) might conclude. Voluminous evidence marshaled above illustrates the former’s remarkable flexibility to meet stakeholders’ requests. More important than any conscious effort to alienate any group of parents, California’s state regulations including LCFF’s own narrowing engagement mandates and the democratic procedures it encourages ultimately curtailed Kingdom Unified’s expansive and representative practices.

Early ambiguity about what stakeholder engagement could and “should” look like allows, and to some extent ensures, that institutions revise engagement practices. At Kingdom Unified,

district staff and stakeholders alike resoundingly declared that the engagement process more generally and its accompanying committees more specifically always have been and will be “works-in-progress.” In turn, these processes dynamically leave the nature of engagement itself at stake: district staff not only asked how they would engage stakeholders, but *stakeholders themselves* explored how they would engage district staff. Outspoken stakeholders often hailed from intermediary organizations like CBOs that shared a great distrust of institutions and their agents alongside a commitment to decentralizing access to levers of local control. Subsequently, district administrators and board of education trustees faced stiff resistance throughout the stakeholder engagement planning process. Early struggles opened avenues for typically external stakeholders like community organizers to shape the contours for future district-wide engagement.

This analysis importantly demonstrates that, contrary to previous research’s assertion that climates of trust may be a “necessary precondition” for effective democratic engagement (Bryk and Schneider 2002; Putnam 2000), in some instances democratizing policy can open windows that at least temporarily help lift climates of distrust and facilitate extensive engagement. To do so, administrative agents must signal their commitment to equalizing the playing field and investing in representative and authentic engagement processes. This could mean deploying multiple opportunities to solicit stakeholder feedback, as Posey-Maddox and Haley-Lock propose ([2016] 2020); in others, it means consciously inviting distrusting stakeholders for participation and thoughtfully considering their feedback. When administrative agents take (dis)trust seriously, they may find great policy implementation support.

In line with early research on LCFF stakeholder engagement implementation (Marsh and Hall 2018), I find that intermediary organizations, especially CBOs, critically contributed to

these efforts. Whereas earlier cross-sectional analyses found that CBOs and their members primarily recruit populations to these processes that might otherwise be excluded, short-term analytical timeframes miss longer-term impacts. My longitudinal analysis highlights how community organizers' procedural repertoires influenced Kingdom Unified's LCAP engagement process at many turns. Deliberation often requires cultural know-how and practical experience (Baiocchi 2003; Fung 2006; Talpin 2011). With backgrounds in community organizing, KCC affiliates brought a repertoire of skills that educational administrators and staff may not typically hold, including organizational and meeting facilitation protocols. Community organizers' interventions did not simply intend to antagonize district staff; instead, distrusting participants' processual investments suggest a strong commitment to the institution, expansive interpretations of democratizing policy's mandates, and deepening engagement processes.

However, clarified policy mandates can gradually undermine the robust, substantive engagement efforts that early ambiguity encourages. Community organizers' vociferous advocacy for the district to meet minimum stakeholder engagement mandates allowed administrative agents to replace the multiprong Community Planning Process, surveys, and community town halls with formal committees. Formalized stakeholder engagement opportunities like committee appointment and participation restricted the breadth of options for parents and community members to influence local educational decisions. To be certain, limited opportunities may allow for deeper deliberations (Fung and Wright 2001). If regulations disproportionately select for certain groups' participation over others, though, they can implicitly cement who can "become" a stakeholder and inhibit equitable engagement (Fischer 2006; Pape and Lim 2019). Once formally establishing committees, accountability laws forced participating stakeholders to carry out their collective work at specific times and places. Collectively

constructed norms to ensure that participating stakeholders “got the most” out of their time together often butted against rich conversations at monthly meetings. This paradox often left important authentic voices—e.g., working- and low-income parents—outside and alienated within decision-making processes as informal recruitment practices further homogenized the applicant pool and eventual appointees.

Whereas this chapter explored who could and did enter engagement spaces, it only briefly addressed what happened when they arrived. I further explore how stakeholders and engagers “do democracy” in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: “Learning to Work Together”: The Politics of (Managing) Engagement

As the last chapter showed, unlikely conditions critically shaped who became stakeholders and their opportunities for engagement at Kingdom Unified. LCFF’s ambiguous stakeholder engagement requirements propelled different groups to initially support and then unwittingly challenge each about which and how participants would collectively work together. What happened when they entered these decision-making processes?

When questioned about how well participants collaborated, recent participants almost unanimously denied witnessing or experiencing any conflicts. Indeed, I rarely observed open disagreements among participants, but occasionally witnessed participants spar with administrative agents. This was not always the case. As I describe below, administrative agents and participants agreed that a process once bereft with open and at times overwhelming conflict had become relatively amicable and formally successful: over the years, deliberations avoided drawn-out disagreements while assembling robust feedback and set of priorities to submit for the board of education’s and superintendent’s review.

Numerous PG scholars theorize deliberative arenas as spaces likely ridden with conflict (Fraser 1990). In contrast, scholars of family and community engagement often envision harmonious interactions between different stakeholder groups. Only recently have the former began empirically demonstrating their propositions (Baiocchi 2003; Baiocchi and Summers 2017; Ganuza, Baiocchi, and Summers 2016; García-Espín and Ganuza 2017; Hanson 2018) while the latter have uncovered evidence contrary to the literature’s fundamental assertions (Bryk and Schneider 2002; Cucchiara, Cassar, and Clark 2019; Lareau and Muñoz 2012; Posey-Maddox 2012). However, little empirical research examines the contours of conflict and often implicitly denies changes in these patterns over time (but see Fung 2004 for positive evidence of

institutional interventions). In this chapter I explore these dynamics. I answer over what do participants and administrative agents struggle, and how do the two groups mitigate the frequency and intensity of conflicts over time?

Like how LCFF's ambiguity stimulated debate over stakeholder engagement opportunities, so too did it spur questions and conflicts over decision-making authority and control inside formal participatory structures. Arranged from least to most influence, five competing policy approaches swirled engagement's purpose: statutory, informational, advisory, oversight, and determinative. Whereas some of the approaches were compatible with one another, others were mutually exclusive. Furthermore, the approaches' uneven distribution routinized conflict between groups. Specifically, community organizers' determinative vision of districtwide stakeholder engagement often placed them at odds with other participants and administrative agents who agreed to more restrictive interpretations of stakeholder engagement mandates, exacerbating the formers' outsider statuses. Participants' and administrative agents' incongruent conceptions of stakeholder engagement's purpose subsequently affected how committee members interacted with each other throughout committee tenures around two interrelated sets of conflicts. *Technical-procedural conflicts* involved contestation over how PAC appointees collaborated amongst themselves. Committee members also fought *institutional relationship conflicts* around how they related to district leadership. Both sets of struggles implicated power imbalances between committee members and district leadership in decision-making processes.

As I demonstrate below, conflicts did not forestall stakeholders from accomplishing their formal and foremost task, developing a set of priorities for elected school board members to consider during budget decisions. Three interrelated mechanisms gradually moderated conflicts.

First, dissatisfied early committees populated with community organizers developed several semi-formal *procedures and positions* that better clarified the PAC’s decision-making boundaries. Second, committed staff members sharpened their skills and expertise as what I term *institutional liaisons* that seemingly narrowed the organizational distance between participants and administrative agents by simultaneously troubleshooting facilitation and managing PAC appointees’ engagement expectations. Finally, participants who rejected the boundaries or struggled to participate formally and/or informally *withdrew* from committee and other engagement activities, minimizing opportunities for less pliant members to dissent. As I illustrate below, these mechanisms that technically support short-term participation may critically obscure the political content embedded in conflicts and paradoxically hamper longer-term prospects.

5.1 – Surfacing Conflict

5.1.1 – “What are we being asked to do?”: Technical-Procedural Conflicts

As reviewed in chapter 4, district staff explained in a 2014 board of education presentation that “[s]tate law requires districts to convene a group of stakeholders to provide feedback and input into the development of their LCAP.” Ambiguous policy language vaguely outlined expectations about how and to what ends the committee would conduct its activities.

Staff initially identified three primary PAC tasks:

1. Synthesize stakeholder input.
2. Review the district’s annual progress towards stated metrics.
3. Provide their own input for budget and LCAP consideration.

District staff later temporarily included that PAC members would also be expected to serve as Public Engagement Volunteers until they phased out the Community Planning Process.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ See pp. 82-84 for role and program description, and 99-100 for the latter’s subsequent decline.

District staff codified two ostensibly symbiotic committee functions with these tasks. Tasks 1 and 3 suggested that committee members would primarily serve in *advisory* capacities: they would provide feedback for the board of education’s consideration without guaranteed inclusion in the approved LCAP and subsequent district expenditures and operations. Complementary, Task 2 bestowed the PAC with an *oversight* function: the committee would monitor district progress towards previously identified goals for student achievement. District staff imagined that PAC review of detailed staff reports and presentations to fulfill the latter task would substantively inform their advisory feedback, which would be the basis for later assessments and review. Moreover, Task 1 and the short-lived PEV task suggests district staff envisioned the PAC as a vector for broader stakeholder feedback: although the PAC formally represented the district’s diverse stakeholders, it could not substantively speak for tens of thousands of students, families, and community members. Even with these guidelines committee appointees struggled with how to technically proceed once convened, an increasingly acknowledged hurdle in other participatory experiments (Ganuza, Baiocchi, and Summers 2016; Baiocchi and Summers 2017). At Kingdom Unified, technical-procedural struggles centered around four overlapping concerns.

From the outset, committee members debated over their collective role. For some appointees like Tommy district administrators provided the committee with little guidance. “The description of what [the PAC] does,” he recalled, “was very vague and, you know, there were even less taglines than there are now.” Uncertainty at times seemingly consumed early PACs to other committee members’ dismay. Hank, for example, lamented how these first committees “got all caught up” in figuring out their purpose:

‘[W]ho are we? Should we be approving things?’ You know, getting all caught up and, ‘Oh, we’re just an advisory committee. Well, that’s a waste of time.’ You know, ‘Why do I bother if it doesn’t do anything?’ That kind of stuff.

Even district staff like Paula acknowledged these concerns. She attributed the “source of frustration” to “misconceptions” about the PAC’s role, recounting an incident that brought these divisions into view during a 2015-16 PAC meeting:

[The committee was] looking at the annual update and progress. And Malcolm [an appointed PAC representative] said, ‘Well this is all fine but I wanna know when are we gonna start writing the LCAP?’ And I said, “Um. The committee doesn’t write the LCAP.” And he goes, “What?! The committee doesn’t write the LCAP?!” And [Paula’s immediate supervisor] like banged—maybe [Malcolm] banged the table, [the supervisor] banged the table. [The director said] “No, you are not writing the LCAP.” So ... [T]here was a lot of misconception about the PAC in that way. And I think for some that was a source of frustration.

As suggested from Paula’s recollections, contention concentrated in early PACs as committee members struggled to clarify their role. For some committee members like Malcolm and Tommy, the LCAP engagement process and the PAC initially seemed to offer a more expansive role for community and family members alike. In this *determinative* conception, stakeholders would not only interact with each other and institutional actors to compose feedback but would also be empowered to make binding decisions about school district expenditures and operations. Community organizers-turned-committee members often held this conception, finding it reflected in committee recruitment materials like district fliers and online posts. As one early social media post put it, committee appointees would have a “front-row seat to decision-making.” Thus, to Tommy, an active member of Faithful Leaders, “the descriptions sound[ed] like you’re gonna be ... making a set of recommendations about what the final LCAP numbers are gonna be in the budget.” He recounted two ways he expected to enact this vision. In the first instance, he believed the committee would have greater budgetary control: “[I]t sound[s]

like you're really going to be digging in, making some recommendations about what financial investments are gonna be made; ya know, where to shift money to, where to shift money away from.” Second, he believed the committee would evaluate district programs and recommend which ones should continue and cease operating. Malcolm went a step further. As a long-time community organizer, he imagined the LCAP as a vehicle for “participatory budgeting.” His “philosophy,” as he put it, was “who controls the budget determines the priorities.” He elaborated further: “So, you don't control the budget, you don't—you could talk all you want, but if you have my good grace, whether I give it to you, doesn't matter.” With a dry chuckle, he concluded that “if the parents control it, then the district is at the good grace of the parents.”

Numerous previous and current PAC members reiterated the PAC’s fundamental *advisory* role. Hank stuck to the letter of the law, arguing for a more restricted interpretation: “[T]he reality is we list our priorities, we make our comments or recommendations, and we forward it to the board. ... You're answering to a board and so (...) we elected these people to make decisions. They're the ones who get to say yes or no.” He faced pushback early in his PAC tenure for this insistence. After a controversial process whereby one member “went rogue” and urged the Board of Education to reject that year’s LCAP for inadequately supporting English learners, Hank recounted how she turned to him and insisted, “You have a really good eye. You see what the problems are. You know what they are. But you need to learn to start providing solutions.” Hank retorted, “Well, it's not my job to provide the solution. My job is to make a recommendation and the board to provide the solution.” Hank saw a clear division of labor between the PAC and board of education: the former should pinpoint problems whereas the latter should divine solutions.

Other PAC members similarly acknowledged this purpose. As Rita put it, “so I think if what the district needs to hear from parents is ‘What do you value?’ I think that process worked.” Clara echoed the sentiment, noting that LCAP planning process’s goal is “to help to promote parents or community input into [how] the LCFF funds are to be spent.” She continued: “That doesn't necessarily mean those recommendations or input will be used. But it definitely, um, seems like it gets taken into account.” Committee members did not arrive at these conclusions on their own, however. PAC appointees’ competing approaches forced district staff to clarify committee expectations. By an early 2016-17 PAC meeting the PAC’s “roles and responsibilities” PowerPoint slide included a Primary Outcome bullet point: the committee should expect to “provide comments to the Superintendent and Board of Education on the draft LCAP.”

Even with a clearer end goal of developing a “work product”—committee members’ and administrative agents’ colloquial term for collective feedback—early committee appointees grappled with how to collaboratively develop and approve the document. In essence, they debated to what extent the committees’ processes should be formalized. Although district staff introduced readymade but revisable Group Norms to the PAC, they downplayed the need for formal voting procedures. In part they hoped to avoid the unpleasant and often tense experiences that formal committees like the defunct District Advisory Council endured.⁵¹ But early committees stressed that informality opened opportunities for district administrators and staff to control or manipulate the process. Numerous appointees denounced what they saw was “staff-driven facilitation” in public board of education comments and PAC meetings. Without some

⁵¹ See 87-88 for a discussion of these issues.

checks on district staff’s control of the process, the former appointees declared, “true empowerment” would forever be a distant unreality.

While other committee members may not have shared their colleagues’ pessimism they longed for similar solutions. More specifically, they wondered how they could present their “work product” as a collective outcome without formal approval procedures like voting bylaws. After retiring from a long governmental career filled with committee placements, Hank wondered how informality could cause anything except “chaos.” “I just feel like I don't know how you function if you don't do that [follow Roberts’ Rules of Order for making motions] with sixteen people in the room. ... Otherwise to me it feels like chaos, right? You—we’re doing a whole lot of talking but nobody is really making a decision or saying here's what we wanna do.” Rita similarly lamented the committee’s relative informality and wondered if formal structures would make the board of education “more accountable” to the PAC. I explore several clarifications and formalization efforts⁵² that helped mitigate these concerns below.

Formalizing a “work product” development and approval process did not guarantee that committee members would produce a substantive document. Although policymakers intended LCAPs to increase district budgetary and operational transparency state and private analyses reveal that plans often did just the opposite (California State Auditor 2019; Knudson 2016; Taylor 2015), leaving districtwide budgetary, curricular, and other organizational practices largely opaque to stakeholders. Indeed, the inaugural committee’s feedback questioned the superintendent about basic district functions with few specific priorities, demands, and goals.⁵³

⁵² Community organizers brought especially robust skillsets and familiarity with facilitative procedures. See chapter 4.

⁵³ Although PAC members often used priorities, demands, and goals interchangeably, later appointees distinguished these terms while developing their “work product.” Largely aligned with LCFF’s eight areas, *priorities* are broad overarching themes that stakeholders recommend district leadership to focus on for the coming years. *Demands* pertain to specific programmatic, curricular, or organizational changes and implementations. *Goals* typically include measurable outcomes to assess district progress, like target benchmarks.

District administrators like Franklin and his predecessors reasoned that PAC members needed to “get the context first” before they could expect to provide district priorities. As he figured it, “unless you're like attending the LCAP PAC meetings before you get appointed, you know you almost have to spend at least three to six months just [figuring out] what is this.” He and others maintained that extensive training through staff reports and presentations critically equipped PAC members to formulate robust feedback.

Many appointees tacitly accepted this assumption, stressing a “learning curve” to substantive engagement. Part of that learning curve to Tommy included “not only political but also internal administrative, labor, many other things” that complex organizations bring to bear on making internal decisions. Because appointees understood this “education speech” at different levels, Tanya and some of her colleagues appreciated the district’s trainings. Others like Rita questioned the necessity of informational sessions. She bemoaned district leaderships’ seeming patronization after she and her colleagues already spent significant time learning the district’s administrative structures through prior engagement⁵⁴, and decried district staff for not explicitly tying together trainings with the PAC’s advisory activities. These concerns were not new. As Malcolm recalled, he and other early PAC members tried to “shut down the district from doing so many presentations.” “All they were using us for,” he protested “is [*sic*] to checkoff that, you know, we presented our information to them and that’s it.” These latter comments suggested an *informational* approach to engagement whereby district administrators and staff passively updated the committee about the organization’s progress, programs, and other features with little connection to developing the committee’s “work product.”

⁵⁴ See chapter 4 for an extended discussion about stakeholders’ different pathways to LCAP engagement.

Finally, PAC members bemoaned how “work product” and LCAP drafting timelines typically misaligned. PACs rarely reviewed complete LCAP drafts before district staff presented it at the board of education. PACs therefore spent several meetings piecing together collective priorities without clear proposed expenditures to revise. Moreover, because committee members only met monthly, discussions were often vibrant and enthusiastic. This enthusiasm also meant meetings often went over schedule. PAC members could spend extensive time discussing indirectly LCAP-related concerns without directly contributing to their “work product.” Once PACs submitted their “work product” Tommy believed that board trustees would need to tailor specific revisions if the committee could expect to make any impact.

Unclear tasks, informal processes, opaque systems, and misaligned timelines meant that PAC appointees could spend significant time reinventing technical procedures historically ridden with conflicts.

5.1.2 – “Why did you bring me here if you didn't really want to hear what I have to say?”:

Institutional Relationship Conflicts

Alongside internal technical-procedural conflicts, PAC members scrutinized their relationship to district administrators and elected board of education trustees. Although LCFF included some modest accountability measures like requiring superintendents to “respond in writing to all comments and questions in advance of presentation of the LCAP to the board,” district staff repeatedly underlined the boundaries of advisement. “The intent of this group,” they concluded in a public presentation to the board of education, “is to, in part, provide *advisory counsel* to the Board and Superintendent regarding expenditures’ alignment to district goals, *not to override or usurp authority* of individual school communities” (emphasis added). Despite the guidelines, many PAC appointees simultaneously lambasted district staff’s hands-on meeting

approach as overreach while longing for maximal direct correspondence and interaction with district leadership. PAC members framed both instances as institutional actors' disinterest in stakeholder engagement and disrespect towards participants.

Early participants immediately raised concerns about who led LCAP activities. Some worried that district staff heavy-handedly managed stakeholders' activities and by extension the "work product" that eventually landed on the superintendent's desk. PAC members were greeted with data-rich presentations during formal committee meetings and had little control over what information they received from district staff. Recounting this concern, Malcolm posited that the PAC's "biggest struggle was trying to shut down the district from doing so many presentations." Some PAC members even raised these concerns publicly at board of education meetings, decrying what they called "staff-driven facilitation." One member who declared he would not return for future committee service juxtaposed how district leadership often acted on contracted service-providers' recommendations with volunteer parents and community members who were "not allowed to give input as [we] see fit." Later ostensibly active PACs raised similar concerns. During the 2017-18 school year, district staff asked PAC members to design a survey that would help track the district's LCAP implementation progress. Contemporaneous end-of-year meeting notes report that PAC members did not think survey preparation was "productive." Cindy, a first-time PAC appointee at the time, grew disheartened by Paula's description of the committee's purpose: "[The PAC] was supposed to receive information and make sure that information was received from various stakeholders. Not that we were supposed to give input. ... So already at the very outset it was defined: your role is just to collect information on stakeholder input." She and her colleagues detested "busy work" that they felt underutilized their talents and expertise and failed to fulfill the promise of LCFF stakeholder engagement.

In turn, several committee members believed that their service primarily helped district leadership fulfill *statutory* engagement mandates. Dolores, a local Faithful Leaders education organizer, recalled how former PAC appointee Tommy “felt like it [the PAC] was more like a checkbox” that did not sufficiently consider appointees’ contributions. Some board trustees like Patrick corroborated these accounts, referring to early committees as “rubberstamps.”

Beneath PAC members’ frustrations lay two overlapping dilemmas. First, veteran and newer PAC appointees alike struggled with the board of education to clarify their formal relationship. Put simply, PACs longed to function as an auxiliary working group to the board of education while the latter seemingly relegated the former to a more circumscribed role. Hank dated this tension back to the inaugural committee, explaining at one 2018-19 PAC meeting that the committee “hoped we pushed [feedback] to the district [leadership] each month with a response from [them].” He elaborated these expectations “to give updates on an ongoing basis” to the board of education, lamenting:

What I was pushing for that they [district leadership and staff] really didn't do was I wanted us [the PAC] to be making comments and pushing them forward every month and then those—we would get 'em back the next meeting to look at as a part of our regular meeting process, right? And that didn't happen.

Instead of submitting an end-of-year “work product” to the superintendent for review, he and his fellow PAC appointees expected it to be the culmination of continuous back-and-forth exchanges.

Moreover, little interaction between the PAC and district leadership signaled the latter’s seeming disinterest in and disrespect towards the former; sustained communication could therefore help several PAC members *feel* like an important board of education asset. For example, Tanya recalled hearing about earlier committee members’ frustrations when she first joined the PAC in 2016: “I knew that there were some issues with the PAC, how some previous

PAC members had *felt* that, you know, they weren't engaged as much as they thought that *they should*" (author's emphasis). Hank and his colleagues also wanted to share in these feelings:

[I]f we were pushing things forward every month and getting 'em back that it would *feel* more like a working group, right? *Like we were actually doing something* 'cause we were getting something back that said, "Yeah, I heard what you said. Here's why we're not. Here's—here's—you know, this is really good. We'll take a look at it." Whatever it is. So *they feel like you're—you're actually doing something*. (author's emphasis)

Kingdom Unified's simmering fiscal crisis exacerbated the gap between PAC members' engagement expectations and practices during my observation period. By January 2019, analyses from the state's fiscal crisis management agency shined a bright light on the district's sharp budget shortfall that district leadership and union public relations campaigns further illuminated. Given the likelihood of renewed austerity, PAC members worried that they would have little input on these decisions. Moreover, they imagined that they and district leadership could counsel each other through tough decisions. With unclear information about the actual state of the district's finances, Tanya resented that she and her colleagues still had seemingly little direct interaction with district leadership. As she put it at the PAC's January meeting, "They [board trustees] have priorities that don't follow us [PAC members] ... They need to reciprocate [us providing our priorities to them] with direction about cuts." She and her colleagues contemplated how to effectively contact board trustees. Third-year PAC member Cindy suggested that she and her colleagues individually consult their appointing board members about the committee's developing proposals. At the following meeting PAC members reported how board trustees largely shifted the conversations to their singular focus: resolving the budget crisis. Clara best described the response during our interview:

I think for everyone it was a little frustrating that just trying to talk to them about, um, priorities, like, what's your priorities for the LCAP they didn't have much to

say besides "Oh. Well. The budget situation." So then that next meeting is understandably we all just circle back to the budget situation, you know?

District leadership's unresponsiveness to the PAC's "work product" piqued committee members' frustration. At the school year's end, Kingdom Unified's board of education invites all district advisory committees to present their feedback. Several PAC members juxtaposed board trustees' responses to the PAC and other advisory bodies. Specifically, nearly every board trustee commented extensively on the African American Achievement Task Force's (AAATF) proposals. Rita lamented district leadership's unequal responsiveness. "The board had a lot of comments for the [AAATF], as they should. We [The PAC] should have had equally robust [comments], in my—in my opinion." Without the same thoroughness as shown to other committees, Rita felt this was "the lack of due respect by the board." While other PAC members echoed these sentiments at their final meeting and in interviews, few framed it as cynically and despondently as Rita: with a wry chuckle, she sighed, "I don't know if [the "work product"] will ever matter, um, more than the paper it's printed on or the FTP, you know, Google Drive that it's posted in, you know?"

Finally, modest accountability measures like mandated written responses from the superintendent underwhelmed PACs. Successive superintendents rarely responded to the PAC's priorities in a timely and comprehensible manner. Superintendents often submitted comments at the end of June, leaving no time for PACs to formally review them together. Moreover, many comments were often "eduspeak responses" by "prior superintendents that were just out to lunch," as Alejandra explained it. In the wake of several school closures⁵⁵ Kingdom Unified shuffled through three superintendents in nearly as many years. After hiring Superintendent

⁵⁵ See pp. 79-80 for a description.

Antonio Ramos, an administrator known nationally for successfully turning around a struggling school district, responses somewhat improved. Although PAC members received Superintendent Ramos's comments in time for review at their final meeting, they emphasized the district's budget crisis and forestalled union negotiations.

Taken together, PAC members longed for both a closer working relationship to district leadership and greater independence in coordinating their internal decision-making processes. Participants and administrative agents did not lose all hope, however; several time-tested mechanisms moderated conflicts over time.

5.2 – “We have to respond rather than just manage”: Managing Engagement

Despite frustrations and conflicts long-term participants and administrative agents alike celebrated recent committees' successful collaboration. Hank rejoiced that the committee “kind of got away from [debates about our purpose]. There's a little bit of it but it's not as—as much.” Indeed, field notes revealed minimal conflict between stakeholders and sustained but tempered conflict between stakeholders and district staff. Even more, new and veteran participants alike proclaimed the 2018-19 “work product” was the PAC's best yet. Unlike previous years, Hank gushed, “we [the committee] did it as a group, we wrote up all our stuff, and then we met again, and then we met again and just tidied them up and said, ‘Here we are.’ Right? And it worked great.” Even Paula cheered how the committee identified clear priorities, identified their presence or absence in the LCAP, and set clear targets to assess improvement. How, then, did stakeholders “get away” from these disagreements and produce such a robust set of priorities? Long-time stakeholders and engagers often attributed recent PACs' fewer successful participation to its members' individual personal qualities. Even if appointees like Cindy tried to avoid moralizing language, they often characterized newer PAC members as “better:” with a

laugh she explained that “this past year [the board of education] tightened it up and we've [the PAC] had better members. I don't really wanna say better members but better members.” Hank also effusively gushed about the most recent PAC: “I'd love to see if we have the same committee come back 'cause I just think we can blossom from that.” District staff and board members agreed with these sentiments. “I would say every year [the PAC has] gotten better and better and better,” Paula proclaimed. Board Trustee Patrick also noted that “over the past two years ... it's been a huge shift in making sure that we had the right people at the table.”

As I illustrate below, however, three interrelated mechanisms—semi-formalized facilitation positions and procedures, committed administrative liaisons' heightened capacities, and selective participant withdrawal—facilitated seemingly “better members” to become committee appointees, sustain cordial collaboration, and produce the committee's best “work product” yet.

5.2.1 – (Semi-)Formalizing Facilitation: Committee Protocols and Positions

One way that PAC members clarified their purpose, developed technical procedures, and sharpened their relationship to district leadership was through formalizing committee protocols and positions. Several scholars have emphasized formalized facilitation's importance to deliberation (Baiocchi 2003; Fung 2004; Lee and Romano 2013). Structured deliberation facilitates cordial, respectful, and minimally contentious interactions (Fung 2004). According to Caroline Lee standardized practices emerged as measures to prevent future uncontrollable contention in other social domains (Lee and Romano 2013) while managing dissent within deliberative spaces (Walker, McQuarrie, and Lee 2015). Given district staff's and PAC members' frustrations about how to conduct committee work, the earliest PACs tasked themselves with developing organizational protocols. Early PACs developed the committee's

first set of collective norms and bylaws along with instituting appointee co-facilitator and timekeeper positions.

After wrestling with an unclear priority development process and concerns about administrative manipulation, the second PAC tasked itself with formalizing committee protocols. First, PAC members deliberated about formal positions that could, as community organizer *qua* committee member Malcolm put it, wrest power for themselves. Specifically, PAC members longed for greater control over the information they received, how they structured their meetings, and what they could discuss together; quite literally, they demanded to exercise what Bachrach and Baratz term “the second face of power” by setting their own agenda (1962). Some committee members lobbied for a chairperson or president position ostensibly vested with executive decision-making power. Hank rejected that idea out of hand, worrying that an elected executive officer would inevitably push “their agenda” onto the collective committee. In turn, district staff and PAC members compromised with a co-facilitator position. Because of Tommy’s day job and experience with facilitation, he voluntarily filled this inaugural role and began specifying its responsibilities alongside other appointees.

Tommy recounted how early PACs “had to design a whole process from scratch” to collectively approve the committee’s “work product” for the district alongside their substantive work. As co-facilitator, he felt it incumbent upon him to coordinate a Process Subcommittee that could design a system to streamline their collective activity including “work product” approval. Tommy and two PAC members, including at least one fellow community organizer steeped in collective decision-making procedures, identified three overarching themes: meeting guidelines, decision-making processes, and co-facilitator responsibilities. The Process Subcommittee envisioned the co-facilitator would work alongside district staff to develop agendas and facilitate

meetings. Moreover, they envisioned the PAC's future need to revise governance procedures and deputized the co-facilitator to lead that conversation in conjunction "with other LCAP PAC members." Striving towards consensus, they set a 75% threshold for official committee "work product" approval and other communications with district leadership. They also acknowledged previous PAC members' dissatisfaction with previous "work products," and vested future dissenters with the right to submit a Minority Report of recommendations. Finally, they sought to align the PAC's "work product" with the LCAP approval timeline in meeting guidelines.

Although subsequent PACs adhered to fewer bylaws over time like formal voting procedures (more on this below) they strictly adhered to meeting guidelines that laid the basis for committee group norms. Group Norms, displayed in Figure 5.1, outlined basic behavioral expectations for PAC members and operationalized PAC members' commitment to their collective work. Member commitment was integral to thriving. Serving her third year as a PAC member, Tanya praised the committee for now seating "parents who are invested in it." When asked to describe an ideal PAC member, first-year participant Chelsea explained the person would be "somebody who's committed to the process." Commitment was often quantitatively measured in meeting attendance after 2018-19 PAC members additionally stipulated that they should "strive to attend all meetings." Cindy explained that the "better members ... show up and everything like that." Inversely, Hank decried the "people [who] commit to [committee membership] and then they don't show up." When a board member brought complaints from a fellow PAC member to Hank, he challenged their version of events, retorting "they haven't come to all the meetings."

Figure 5.1: PAC Group Norms

Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP)
Parent Advisory Committee (PAC)

Group Norms 2019-20

Revised following 10.28.19 Discussion

Discussion Norms

- Be student-focused and trust that everyone comes with a desire to support students
- Assume good intentions
- Listen to and respect each voice in turns
- Step up and step back – allow everyone to have input
- Honor and consider everyone’s voice and perspective
- Within the committee work, dissent and disagreement is healthy and should be encouraged
- Be open to new ideas and questions – do not judge ideas
- Stay on topic in discussion: use the parking lot for thoughts that are not on topic
- Use evidence and data to drive inquiry and support recommendations

Evergreen Documentation:

- Evolves over time - Revisited regularly to provide opportunities for discussion, reflection, modification
- Changes are made by the committee within committee meetings

Procedural Norms, Roles, and Responsibilities

Reviewed October 22, 2018, Revised on October 28, 2019

Communication

Provide one voice in Board Communications

- The LCAP Parent Advisory Committee shall review and comment on the LCAP draft, and provide comments on the LCAP to the Superintendent and Board.
- Written communication from the PAC to the Board will be provided through a Board Communication form facilitated by staff.
- The comment process can be determined by consensus.
- All communications to the Board of Education and/or Superintendent, such as PAC letters or oral communication during Board meetings must be discussed during a meeting and approved by a supermajority of the members present (75%).

Meetings

Meetings are held monthly during the school year. Special meetings can be added at the request of a majority of members.

- Meeting agendas are developed by District staff in consultation with the LCAP PAC co-facilitator.
- Meetings are open to the public. Applicable requirements for notice, agenda posting, and communication protocol must be followed.
- PAC meetings include public comment; which is limited to 2 minutes per speaker.

Attendance and Vacancies

- Come ready to be engaged, including by familiarizing yourself with the LCAP PAC agenda provided by email
- Strive to attend all meetings; if you miss a meeting, it is your responsibility to find out what was covered
 - Three unexcused absences will result in the member being excused from the committee.
- Vacancies on the committee will be filled by appointment made by a Board member or the Superintendent, as applicable.

Co-Facilitator

- The LCAP PAC will elect a co-facilitator with the following roles:
 - Consult with LCAP PAC members and district staff to determine meeting agendas.
 - Assist staff with facilitation of meetings to ensure that they run smoothly and efficiently and all voices are heard.
 - Coordinate the schedule of LCAP PAC members to speak at Board meetings during agreed-upon communication to ensure a diverse set of voices.

Other Roles

To support the use of norms and keep meetings on schedule, the following roles should be used during each meeting:

- Timekeeper – monitors time of agenda items and helps keep meeting on pace.
- Process Checker – Reflects on group’s success and challenges in following norms – particularly those associated with equity of voice – at end of meeting and/or specific discussions

Although meeting attendance was a necessary condition for PAC member commitment, it was not sufficient. Preparation for meetings was also important and stipulated in the Group Norms, encouraging PAC members to “be familiar with the LCAP PAC agenda provided by email [and] be prepared to participate.” Hank contrasted earlier PAC members’ preparedness with the most recent one.

[Some PAC members] don't realize that work doesn't happen in the meetings; work happens *outside* the meetings. And so they only do things when they happen in the meeting. ... [W]e had that problem happen like three years. And then I could tell some of them hadn't even read the LCAP because they'd have their comments and I'm like, "You know, right here if you had read the LCAP you would see that it had this." And—and so they were like, "Oh." ... The part that I really liked about this committee was that the people that were there, the people that showed up on a regular basis, were very focused. They knew what they wanted to know about. [his emphasis]

Indeed, oftentimes during meetings committee members brought prepared questions and contributions for the meetings’ presenters. PAC members could also revise the committee’s “work product” outside meeting time which several members did. When one member admitted she had not read the document prior to the final draft meeting, she hunched her shoulders in embarrassment; she had shamefully transgressed the agreed Group Norms.

PAC members also qualitatively measured commitment by the tenor and content of their discussions. Interviewees expressed this in terms of *respect* in two related but distinct ways. First, committed members demonstrated respect in how they interacted with their colleagues. Even though the Group Norms stipulated that “dissent and disagreement is healthy and should be encouraged” Hank greatly worried that his committee colleagues did not know how to respectfully disagree with each other and even him in an era when Americans avoid confrontation by obscuring overtly political goals (Eliasoph 1999). Even more, he prided himself on refusing to personalize disagreement with his PAC colleagues.

[A] lot of people have a hard time with [disagreement]. ... [I]t's hard to get people to not take everything personally. They just kind of do. ... [I]t's okay to disagree. It's okay to push back and, and you should be able to do it without being disrespectful. Uh, and it's okay to have passion and, uh—because these things matter. ... [People think] it's—it's a personal thing. And I go, "No, it's not." You know, it's—"We got a job to do and, you know, how are we going to do it and what's it going to work out." ... [W]e should be able to see each other [after disagreeing in meetings] and go, "This is fine." And, you know—I mean, I don't have to agree with what everything that went out. ... And that's how I work: ... Doesn't mean I don't like it. It just means I see it differently than you, and that's okay.

Similarly, members confided that at times they avoided expressing themselves too forcefully lest they be seen as “so pushy” and thus disrespectful to their fellow committee members and the PAC overall. Thus, interviewees linked a tempered interactional approach to a second and perhaps more critical dimension of respect: respect for the process. Cindy clearly connected these components in describing her approach on the PAC.

I was trying to be very, very careful. I will admit that. And, um, I don't wanna say not ruffling too many feathers. But I wanted to be careful that, again, I wasn't taking over the LCAP [PAC] because it is a group and it's not supposed to just be one person even if that one person maybe does have extra knowledge. But I'm not supposed to take it over. And *it's very much a team. And I do believe very strongly in the team.* [Author's emphasis]

Cindy's orientation was not only individually informed; Group Norms stipulated that PAC members should “allow everyone to have input and speak in turn.” Other PAC members elaborated what dedication to the team meant and how it supported their work. “I think this was a much better year from an LCAP committee perspective,” Hank declared, “‘cause [*sic*] we didn't get caught up in all the periphery stuff, right?” Members had to accept the PAC's circumscribed advisory purpose to effectively collaborate on the committee, another Group Norm stipulation that calls on committee members to “follow committee guidelines and rules.” Hank recounted how a former PAC member crystallized this notion for him.

[W]hen we were kind of arguing, [another PAC member] goes, "It is what it is." And, you know—and I said, "Yeah, that's kinda what it is." You know, 'cause some would say, "Is this all we do is make these recommendations and send 'em forward? Well, what is that?" You know. And I said, "It is what it is. If you don't wanna do it, don't do it."

PAC members demonstrated their commitment to the process by monitoring their own and other stakeholders' behaviors. During one PAC meeting members debated how they should present their priorities to the board of education. When many participants worried that their efforts would be for naught, fellow committee member Pablo clarified their role with a twinge of aggravation:

This is a committee that advises. At the end of the day [our priorities] may not make it [into the LCAP]. [Board members] won't pick up the phone and ask for our approval. When we are not inside these discussions, the line is a gray area.

Pablo thus stepped into a role that veteran PAC member Hank often played: reminding the PAC about their relationship to district leadership and making substantive decisions.

Group Norms not only outlined how committee members could demonstrate their commitment; they also enabled PAC members and district staff alike to frequently redirect discussions during meetings. After an informal and undirected first 2018-19 PAC meeting, Fam suggested an additional provision to the Group Norms: PAC members need to "stay on topic in discussion." To enforce the provision, she lobbied to add a Parking Lot to their meetings, a large sheet of white butcher paper where PAC members could affix additional but unrelated questions and comment via Post-It Notes for district staff to answer at later meetings. PAC members especially used the Parking Lot to focus "work product" discussions. Specifically, when PAC members conversed back-and-forth about whether to "prioritize their ["work product"] priorities," Rita as acting facilitator refrained "maybe we should Parking Lot this concern?" Even

if PAC members wanted to continue the conversation, they conceded to the request, longing to maintain their commitment to the process and Group Norms.

Thus, successive PACs found several ways to self-manage committee interactions.

5.2.2 – *Institutional Liaisons*

ALEJANDRA: Working together is hard!

INTERVIEWER: And it's long.

A: I know. It doesn't happen overnight. It's messy. And so the LCAP process is messy because that's what it is: it's organizing. I think [Paula] understood that.

I: Mm-hmm.

A: And she did her best to try to keep it organized.

Comments like the ones above were commonplace among Kingdom Unified participants. Indeed, almost every interviewee praised the district's inaugural (and, through my data collection period, only) LCFF/SPSA Coordinator, Paula Harris for her role in facilitating the PAC and stakeholder engagement more broadly. For example, Rita marveled at Paula's attention to the LCAP and PAC.

[A]s the [LCAP/SPSA] coordinator, Paula's amazing. I just need to say—I mean, personally I respect her immensely in what she's able to accomplish ... [S]he's clearly the subject matter expert within the district about everything that goes into the LCAP. ... So it's been her job solely to convene the PAC, to make the meetings meaningful, to record our, um, our, um, discussions, and try to fold them into the updates. Um, and again, y'know, I don't know that there's any other person that could do a better job than she is given her position.

Franklin, a district administrator who supervised Paula, similarly applauded her LCAP stakeholder engagement coordination, especially as the district's sole employee overseeing its implementation.

[C]ertainly a lot of this is uh credit to [Paula] as a unit of one because I think to her credit, you know, uh probably the most defined path is the LCAP PAC, right; the monthly meetings trying to get the LCAP PAC on board in terms of district

results, uh providing an opportunity for—to see the LCAP, offering opinions about the LCAP.

Paula first became involved in district affairs when she volunteered with her daughter's elementary school Parent Teacher Association (PTA). As she climbed the local PTA ranks, she grew increasingly well-acquainted with many employees throughout the district, developing longstanding relationships with district staff, school employees, and students' parents alike. She occupationally thrived until the September 11th attacks disrupted her industry. With few job prospects thereafter, she immersed herself in Kingdom Unified as a teacher's aide. Just as she ascended through the PTA, so too did she climb the district's employment ladder; in a short time, she was promoted to working alongside district administrators. When Governor Brown signed LCFF into law, Kingdom Unified's superintendent knew that Paula was the perfect person to oversee the district's LCAP stakeholder engagement process. Paula worried that she lacked fiscal knowledge to oversee LCAP development, but she recalled how her supervisors persistently remarked at the time, "We can teach you about the budget. You have engagement skills. You can't teach that."

Paula's personal proclivities and individual history may partially explain her superior role performance, but administrative agents need not necessarily be special to be especially effective at facilitating engagement. Administrative agents can broker cultural differences between institutional norms and parents, especially ones from nondominant communities (Martinez-Cosio and Iannocone 2007), during policy implementation (Ishimaru, Torres, Salvador, Lott, Williams, and Tran 2016). Administrative agents may also function as what I call liaisons. Whereas brokers share insights and create bridges between two groups, liaisons filter information - they share what "needs to be shared." That is, liaisons stake themselves on institutional leadership's side of

the struggle for authority when the social distance between administrative agents and participants widens. I conceptualize liaisons as expert political managers who bind stakeholders and institutional leaders vertically, and stakeholder groups horizontally.

Participatory governance processes require both technical facilitative knowledge—deliberative skillsets or toolkits (Campbell 2010; Talpin 2011)—and subject matter expertise (Fung 2004), both of which effective liaisons must possess. In Kingdom Unified, consistent institutional agents like Paula gradually developed these skills and expertise.

I mean, in my brain I would say every year it's gotten better and better and better. And maybe a little part of it is that as a facilitator I had more confidence. I had more knowledge. ... I think I had better ideas about the structure of the year and the committee role in terms of like framing the work for them.

Paula highlighted several forms of expertise she developed over time. First, she solidified herself as the district's resident educational budgeting and governance expert by closely following changes to LCFF, LCAP, and state education code. Later in our discussion she explained how her "own capacity grew in learning the document [LCAP]." Alejandra, a prominent statewide LCFF advocate, independently expounded upon Paula's substantive expertise. "[Paula] was just so on top of things. ... I mean, she would read the Department of Ed's [*sic*] UCP findings and she knew what needed to be done and what didn't, you know?" Because of her subject matter expertise, PAC members like Rita praised how Paula "equipped [PAC members] for more rich conversations." Paula's reputation as an LCFF/LCAP subject matter expert was so widely heralded that by the time I concluded data collection the County Office of Education recruited her to monitor their districts' LCAP compliance.

Paula also pinpointed how she better grasped the timing for committee activity and LCAP planning, a perennial thorn in the district's side. In committee assessments and exit surveys, misaligned "work product"-LCAP timelines consistently topped PACs' lists of

concerns. As described above, this problem was twofold: PACs frequently began meeting several months after the schoolyear convened, and committee members' extensive inquiry and comments often ran meetings long. Paula creatively solved these concerns over time. First, Paula scheduled each successive PAC's initial meeting earlier in the schoolyear. She also assembled a recommended orientation that led PAC appointees through the LCFF, the district's LCAP, and previous PACs' contributions. For Paula's colleague and FACE supervisor, Shannon, orientations benefitted both incoming and continuing PAC appointees alike. "[T]hat's a really good way to kind of keep things moving forward for those who've had a lot of experience and make sure that folks who need a little bit of the information that they may have missed by not being a part of it before, you know, that they, they have that." Special meetings for orientations thus prevented training from encroaching on the PAC's regular monthly meetings, allowing appointees to use their allotted time more efficiently for "work product" development.

Increases in Paula's facilitative confidence also helped her better manage timelines. PG scholarship elaborates how participants and engagers must negotiate complex and often new ways of interacting with each other (Baiocchi 2005; Lerner 2011:34-35; Talpin 2011, 2012). As the LCAP/SPSA Coordinator, Paula was primarily responsible for facilitating PAC meetings where she spent extensive time learning how to, in her words, "deal with people." Several PAC appointees referenced how she "managed" meeting discussions. On the surface, Paula's interventions into errant conversations mirrored PAC members' interventions; however, whereas PAC members justified their interventions using Group Norms, Paula smoothly intervened by dint of her confidence. Paula thus learned several techniques to structure PAC meetings that kept committee members focused on "work product" development. Paula's adjustments over time also shows how liaisons' growing confidence influences their willingness and ability to respond

to stakeholders' needs and requests. For example, after PAC members raised concerns about discussion points "falling through the cracks" Paula added a ten-minute Parking Lot recap section to the committee's subsequent agendas. Such changes came after years of learning how to walk the line between policy implementer and engagement facilitator.

Finally, framing the committee's work included several strategies to, implicitly or explicitly, manage stakeholders' expectations for engagement. After years of facilitating contentious committee meetings, Paula preempted inevitable disagreements by "framing" what PAC members should expect to accomplish during their committee membership terms.

I would almost spend the whole first meeting just talking about, um, vision and teamwork and, y'know, how we communicate and how we resolve conflicts or how we let conflict just live, y'know? It is what it is. Um, so that they're less focused on, like, the LCAP but [more focused] as the committee, like, learning to work together.

By framing committee work around stakeholder collaboration instead of substantive district changes, Paula limited committee discussion within designated boundaries. Those boundaries, as discussed above, emerged from institutional leadership's interpretations of LCFF stakeholder engagement mandates.

Like brokers (Stovel and Shaw 2012), liaisons must share information between different groups. However, liaisons more readily filter that information through the institutional lens with which their organizational roles arm them. For example, when PAC members vented their frustrations with little communication from the board of education, they proposed various ways that district staff might help close the gap. Some PAC members suggested that Paula and Franklin carbon-copy them to email communications with district leadership. To PAC members' dismay, the latter explained that this was not standard operating procedure but committed themselves to sharing what information they could from district leadership's perspective.

Franklin disclosed to me later that he and Paula must “read the political tea leaves” when it comes to sharing information. As liaisons, Franklin explicated, district staff must ask themselves “Are we on an issue that may be very political for board members, and how do we support our board members managing a tough issue that has political implications for them?” Eventually, Paula secured time for a PAC member to present committee updates monthly at public board meetings.

To be certain, institutional agents cannot always forestall or solve engagement conflicts through sheer dedication, skills, or expertise. Oftentimes organizational structures constrict their authority (Martinez-Cosio and Iannocone 2007). Several participants highlighted that Paula held a non-executive role vested with relatively little organizational power; she could not execute her own or PAC-generated decisions. District staff could highlight the PAC’s contributions in the LCAP but even Paula confessed that “[t]he real challenge is hearing the stakeholder engagement and finding a way to incorporate it into the plan or ... parts of the comments and being very, very transparent about where you cannot include stakeholder engagement or where the comments have to be tabled for a future consideration.” When PAC appointees grew disillusioned with administrative agents’ lack of authority to ensure the former’s desired impacts, other mechanisms like withdrawal may be the only viable solution.

5.2.3 – Withdrawal

Finally, stakeholders who disagreed with the PAC’s process, role, and/or relationship to district leadership critically minimized opportunities for conflict when they withdrew from engagement opportunities.

As detailed above, community organizers entered collective decision-making structures when they believed they had an opportunity to internally lobby for institutional change.

Community organizers exited when they accepted LCFF's legislated limitations and its disjuncture with their own participatory expectations. "The law didn't allow for [participatory budgeting]," Malcolm capitulated. He drily chuckled: "So, uh, [LCFF] ... allows you to, um, *comment* on their plan, but that law—the law does not allow you to *dictate* the plan" (his emphases). Similarly, Tommy partially regretted his time on the committee after coming to terms with the boundaries for engagement: "[I]t definitely wasn't worth it to, um, really impact how the district spends its money and delivers program to students. Um, it's not the venue for that. ... [The PAC] is, however, a venue for having a voice." Eventually, both Malcolm and Tommy left the committee. Whereas members of Malcolm's organization remained on the committee throughout my observations, members from Tommy's organization did not. Other community activists, like members of a local budget watchdog group, infrequently attended PAC meetings during my research period. For the most part, though, community organizers' participation in the engagement opportunities they vigorously lobbied to create eventually faded over the years.

Community organizers' formal withdrawal was thus met by other PAC members and some engagers with great satisfaction but perhaps greater unintended consequences. As we saw above, community organizers played a pivotal role in formalizing PAC procedures as strong and forthright co-facilitators. Although they left behind formal procedures and positions, they took their deliberative repertoires with them (Baiocchi 2005). That is, later co-facilitators did not possess the same steadfast commitment to the responsibility that came with structured deliberation. For example, first-time PAC appointee and unaffiliated parent Anthony volunteered to co-facilitate the 2018-19 committee. Although he was involved in student government as a high schooler, he had little experience in committee leadership since then. As the PAC's Group Norms explained, Anthony should have collaborated with Paula to assemble each agenda.

Instead, Paula confided, she often assembled the agenda on her own in preparation for the meeting. Although administrative agents' facilitative capacities managed engagement, community organizers' deliberative toolkits could redouble Paula's and her colleagues' efforts.

Withdrawal did not only look like vacating one's committee seat, and community organizers were not the only ones who exited. Withdrawal was also informal disengagement. Hank explained how "[i]n past committees, if some [PAC members] didn't get their way, they would just literally disengage. They would sit in the meeting and kind of not participate anymore." According to some participants, this behavior was also present in the current PAC. Fam confided how she and some other "newbie" members "kind of had a silence alliance" when they grew increasingly dissatisfied that certain participants seemingly dominated meeting discussions.

There was [*sic*] about two or three of us and myself and we were like the first new first-timers [that] kind of had a little alliance that was [*sic*] smiling [at each other]. We kind of looked at each other every time it kind of got off track [and] we were like straying away and someone was putting their agenda into the recommendations and taking over the group.

Their discontent grew over the year and took more drastic forms.

[S]ome of them checked out. Some of them didn't show up. You know, because it was just, like, okay—a continuum of 'Well, the district has always done this. Well, when I worked here on this—when I was a district, you know, parent.'

Long-time school governance participants did not seem to notice these participants' informal withdrawal, as evidenced by Hank's comments above. Why was this the case? While I lack sufficient data to substantiate claims, readers should consider two important differences between earlier and later withdrawers. First, appointees who withdrew from earlier PACs explicitly challenged district staff throughout their committee term. Even though Fam and her "silence alliance" compatriots disagreed with their PAC colleagues' approaches in meetings they

did not openly acknowledge it before receding into the participatory background. Informal disengagement allows dissatisfied participants to conceal their frustrations and active participants to unabatedly collaborate. Moreover, social distance between participants greatly narrowed over time: whereas the district drew earlier participants from varying walks of life, a more homogeneous group of participants later replaced community organizers on the PAC. With fewer categorical divisions, participants could later interpret conflicts as emanating from individual disputes. Both how conflicts were handled and the social divisions undergirding them help explain why conflicts seemingly vanished in later years.

5.3 –Discussion

Many PAC appointees, especially unaffiliated parents, anticipated participating in a “unitary democracy:” with a child enrolled in the school district and a targeted focus on increasing student achievement, they imagined themselves and their fellow committee members propelled by common interests (Mansbridge 1983). Instead, early committees often found themselves enmeshed in intertwined technical-procedural and institutional relationships conflicts. Beneath both sets of relational conflicts sat a competition for decision-making power and definitional questions about local control: who constitutes “the local,” what constitutes “control,” and how does collective activity bring these answers into focus? Ambiguity in LCFF’s stakeholder engagement mandate meant that different actors could read what they wanted into its potential. LCAP processes could be an opportunity to wrest decision-making authority, a chance to oversee decisions and hold administrators accountable with no final say, a way to learn more about educational operations to meet statutory requirements, or something between these approaches.

The distribution of these differing interpretations in Kingdom Unified exacerbated uneasy tensions between parents and community organizers, and stakeholders and engagers. Committee members disagreed amongst each other and with district staff and leadership about the committee's role in and relationship to planning, other district operations, and organizational governance itself. Earlier appointees, disproportionately drawn from community organizations, envisioned gaining concrete control of the district's budget and operations. They subsequently sat in direct opposition to an administration that, as Malcolm saw it, "didn't want to give up power." Community organizers were well-equipped to launch several semi-successful bouts to wrest greater control over committee proceedings (Baiocchi 2003) like developing protocols and positions that centered committee appointees. Despite their contributions, their orientation stood at odds with the statutorily mandated advisory expectation upheld by the board of education, administrators, district staff, parents, and other community members alike. As disillusionment with institutional engagement spread among community organizers, they withdrew from the committee to refocus on extra-institutional activity. Community organizers' withdrawal from the committee simultaneously reduced opportunities for contention and amplified the remaining members' seeming commitment to the process, formalized in the protocols and positions they left behind.

For district staff and later committee members, the PAC became a space to exercise voice that leaves decision-making power in the hands of elected representatives; namely, board of education trustees. District leadership envisioned advisement through LCFF's restricted legal definition whereby district staff literally and figuratively facilitated an opportunity for stakeholders to offer feedback to and receive a response from the superintendent about their outlined priorities. District administrators like Franklin keenly understood the stakes in this

conundrum: inviting the PAC to approve the LCAP would challenge the board of education's governing authority, leaving the former as "basically the board." Many stakeholders, however, envisioned advisement as an ongoing process whereby they would consistently collaborate and interact with district officials throughout the school year.

Research on conflicts between PTAs and school administrators highlight similar dynamics that I found at Kingdom Unified. Although parent volunteers ostensibly strive to support their students' principals, each role occupies different institutional space with legitimate access to different sources and levels of power (Lareau and Muñoz 2012). PAC members similarly imagine supporting district leaderships' ability to govern. However, PTAs occupy a relatively liminal space: they operate outside but depend upon formal educational structures. PACs and other education-based participatory governance structures operate within the boundaries of schooling structures and are therefore beholden to not only informal procedures but also formal policy diktats and administrators' interpretations thereof.

Later conflicts did not debilitate PACs' productivity. Indeed, district staff used conflicts as opportunities to strengthen their skills and expertise as institutional liaisons. When conflicts impel administrative agents' to proactively solve stakeholders' concerns, they clarify practices for themselves and future participants. Most importantly, they learn how to effectively manage stakeholders' expectations before and throughout engagement in PG processes. Clearer expectations for engagement subsequently compel stakeholders to monitor their own and each other's behaviors.

Successful management of technical engagement procedures and institutional relationships may curtail later conflicts from arising, but they also inhibit stakeholders from substantive deliberation. That is, focusing on the *how* of engagement may shift attention away

from the *why* of it. I explore these consequences for not only engagement but community empowerment in the conclusion of this dissertation.

Chapter 6: From Engagement to Empowerment: Practical and Policy Considerations for Collective Participatory Governance in Education

Participatory governance reforms model what future social institutions can look like today (Wright 2011). Inviting family and community members to influence critical institutions' priorities and expenditures like education instill a sense of public ownership that decades of expert-driven neoliberal policy mandates have sought to undo (Mudge 2008). As I have shown, though, PG implementation comes with tremendous difficulties and often stark ambiguities simultaneously mediated by institutional structures and competition between social forces. I briefly summarize the dissertation's key findings below.

Chapter three documented how LCFF's minimal guidelines swirled with compressed timelines that nudged administrative agents towards compliance with the letter of the law in early implementation. School districts often acknowledged that they solicited feedback on their plan at regular board of education meetings and held required public hearings on draft LCAPs. To be certain, this trend was not universal. Analyses revealed that districts across the state used expansive engagement practices to varying degrees: many districts described surveying various constituencies; some districts also relied on school- and district-based institutional channels of stakeholder engagement; and still fewer districts emphasized strategic planning sessions as a site for engagement. Like prior research found (e.g., Marsh and Hall 2018), racially and ethnically diverse school districts often described using expansive engagement techniques, especially when they had the support of nearby organizations. However, districts with greater student need especially emphasized expected engagement techniques. Thus, although most school districts concentrated on meeting stakeholder engagement compliance requirements, several promising practices emerged during early LCFF stakeholder engagement implementation in unlikely places.

Case study findings from chapter 4 and 5 further shed light on these trends. In Kingdom Unified, a large and diverse urban school district with extraordinary student needs and a history of tense racialized conflict, LCFF's early ambiguity empowered administrative agents and community organizers to mutually deploy multiple and varied engagement practices by instrumentally framing engagement around their respective goals: the former struggled to lift the longstanding climate of distrust and the latter pursued greater institutional influence as self-styled community representatives. Policymaker clarifications gradually prompted local administrative agents and community organizers to meet the policy's minimum mandates in lieu of its substantive, expansive starts. Board trustee's tacit appointment criteria, informal recruitment mechanisms, and formal strictures swirled with prior governance regulations to exacerbate participatory inequity by inviting civic-minded, highly available, and more "organic" (i.e., authentic) participants in LCAP proceedings, like middle-class parents and community members, at the expense of earlier and more representative cohorts.

Like how LCFF's ambiguity stimulated debate over stakeholder engagement opportunities, chapter 5 demonstrates how it also spurred questions and conflicts over decision-making authority and control inside formal participatory structures. Inductive analysis found multiple competing approaches to stakeholder engagement's purpose whose incompatibility and uneven distribution routinized conflict between groups. Participants' and administrative agents' incongruent conceptions of stakeholder engagement's purpose subsequently affected how committee members interacted with each other throughout committee tenures around how PAC appointees collaborated and the committee's relationship to district leadership. Both sets of struggles implicated power imbalances between committee members and district leadership in decision-making processes. Conflicts did not forestall effective and successful engagement,

however. Semi-formalized facilitative positions and procedures, committed institutional liaisons' heightened capacities, and selective participant withdrawal gradually attenuated the conflicts over time. Mechanisms that technically support short-term participation may critically obscure the political content embedded in conflicts and paradoxically hamper longer-term prospects. In sum, Kingdom Unified's trajectory suggests how in some instances ambiguous PG policy (re)structures inequitable formal structures and informal practices that can supplant substantively representative and authentic practices and participants.

I conclude this dissertation by considering how the central arguments expounded above point towards some practical and policy interventions. In short, administrative agents in especially unlikely places, with help from community organizers and other supporters, showed surprising ingenuity in engagement practices during early LCFF implementation. Ambiguity in the policy's language allowed different groups of on-the-ground actors to interpret what they wanted from its guidelines. Those different interpretations catalyzed conflicts throughout implementation that several mechanisms, including administrative agents' policy clarification, gradually moderated over time.

6.1 – Practicing Participatory Governance

Unlike readymade and transportable PG technologies like participatory budgeting (Baiocchi and Ganuza 2016; Lerner 2014), LCFF's stakeholder engagement mandate encourages local administrative agents to experiment with practices to discover what best fits their unique contexts. Findings from computational analyses of administrative plans and an in-depth case study find that implementers affirmatively responded with trial-and-error initiatives. Although my analyses identified several barriers that stood in the way of full implementation, they also highlighted useful tools to overcome them.

Early ambiguity about LCFF’s mandates encouraged administrative agents to innovatively solicit feedback. As findings from chapter 4 showed, many opportunities with varying time commitments ensured diverse participants could voice their hopes and dreams for Kingdom Unified. However, misaligned timelines between engaging stakeholders, convening advisory committees, and approving accountability plans critically interjected discussions about technical procedures to the detriment of substantive deliberations. These findings suggest that extended time for administrators to seek LCAP approval may encourage robust conversations focused on the nuts-and-bolts of education.

Such a focus invites a recurring conundrum: how can practitioners make “meaningful engagement” *meaningful*? Rita points to some ways in her critique of the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence’s (CCEE) suggested “data walk” exercise Kingdom Unified used during early town hall-style meetings:

[The data walk activity] had some good suggestions about using infographics in sort of an engaged, um, setting ... [T]hey had like different infographics on different tripods around a room and they were trying to engage parents in sort of small group discussions about what the data meant and everything. ... [W]hat was missing to me is that—okay, well now that you know this and you've had a chance to, you know, think about it, now let's bring you back together as an informed group, get your feedback about whether or not we're on the right path or whether there's something that we're missing or that we should change, and let's show you how we are gonna do that. (her emphasis)

Thus, administrative agents would do well to not only identify how stakeholder input informs educational priorities and budget decisions but also directly notify stakeholders about their decision-making impacts. To be certain, the LCAP template has consistently required administrative agents to match stakeholder impacts alongside involvement descriptions. Stakeholders could conceivably learn about their impact from published LCAPs, but such an orientation would require significant stakeholder motivation.

Moreover, time constraints that riddled intensive engagement opportunities like committee positions as the chapter 4 analyses showed would likely inhibit even motivated stakeholders from reviewing long administrative plans. Administrative agents should expedite those efforts by directly communicating with stakeholders about LCAP changes driven from their feedback. Such practices will undoubtedly build the trust that typically undergirds shared decision-making policies like LCFF's stakeholder engagement.

Several promising initiatives are underway throughout the state. After reports documented local administrative agents' limited engagement knowledge and skills, the CCEE launched multilevel Professional Learning Networks for district administrators to support one another. PLNs also endeavor to "establish metrics to evaluate... effective models of community engagement" (Perry et al. 2019). One such PLN, the LA Charters PLN, even produced a family engagement handbook, and their ongoing participatory action research seeks to test their proposals (Families In Schools, forthcoming). Sharing their lessons outside their networks may not guarantee imitators' success but can encourage implementers to troubleshoot relevant engagement problems.

Administrators and staff undoubtedly play a critical role in implementing PG reforms. Only focusing on institutional actors leaves aside the critical constituents such reforms target: would-be participants. From administrators like Shannon's view, gaps in individual capacities impede deliberations much like how monolingual conversations inhibit participation among people from marginalized communities (Marsh 2007).

[O]ne thing that we did learn was, with translation we use headsets because it's simultaneous, right? That's just a—that's just a weird example but it certainly

deescalated that real weird, um, dynamic of people because it was happening in real time in any language. So how do you translate that idea to ability?

Unfortunately, simultaneous skill translation seems unlikely. Researchers highlight how developing democratic capacities like collective reasoning and reasoned persuasion take time (Talpin 2011). Much like language fluency, the capacities to engage democratically is a muscle that individual little-d democrats must build through exercise. As chapter 5 illustrated, administrative agents like Paula tried to level the participatory playing field by offering training sessions to bring new PAC recruits “up to speed” about prior discussions and establishing codified behavioral norms early. The former could provide important substantive context and the latter guidelines, but neither can teach participants how to interact.

Although school districts may employ a designated LCAP/SPSA Coordinator like Paula who consolidates diverse constituencies’ feedback, administrative agents should consider transforming parents and community members into “hubs” that connect varying stakeholder group “spokes.” Such changes have several benefits. Not only might community members and participants tap their personal networks to support institutional practices (Murray et al. 2020; Posey-Maddox et al. 2016), but they can build the civic capacity so desperately needed to navigate deliberations (Stone 2001). Alejandra suggested that a longtime parent involved in the District English Learner Advisory Committee could share information between district committees. Such requests may place additional burdens on some participants, but as Kingdom Unified shows, there may be community organizers ready and willing to mobilize support.

Perhaps most inhibiting to expansive engagement is a sense of widespread disillusionment with stakeholder engagement’s potential. In our conversation, Paula recounted findings from a survey question that asked respondents why they did not participate in LCAP engagement opportunities like LCFE meetings. Paula found that respondents overwhelmingly

selected the option “I don’t care about LCFF meetings.” With an exasperated sigh, she sought answers: “how do you change that?” Although I did not independently review these data, it is noteworthy that Paula and likely other district staff believe this apathy to be true.

How can administrative agents promote support for LCFF and other PG reforms? One set of solutions may rest in changing policies.

6.2 – Policy Considerations

As California’s history of school finance reform shows, individual and collective civil societal actors can pressure state lawmakers to vitally alter existing policies or enact entirely new and more participatory ones. Although implementation often calls their democratic spirit into question, my analyses suggest several changes that may preemptively fortify it.

One way to increase LCFF’s democratic character is to expand stakeholder engagement’s purview. Tommy criticized the LCAP’s primary focus on supplemental and concentration grant expenditures. “The role of the PAC,” he explained, has largely focused on how “those funds are being spent on the populations they’re supposed to be.” Beyond the implied accountability approach to local control, his and fellow community organizers’ determinative approach meant to them that the PAC and other LCAP oversight committees and feedback mechanisms should expand their purview to all LCFF allocations, including base grants.

Although LCFF bestows school district administrators with wide latitude to identify medium and longer-term goals, contested concepts like local control invite questions, and in some cases conflicts, over authority to make those decisions. As chapter 5 illustrated, whereas some community organizers wanted to adopt measures that would decentralize budget decisions to committee and even popular decisions, others championed LCFF stakeholder engagement’s narrower advisory mandate. To minimize contention, policymakers would do well to clarify the

intent of local control. Even more, they should avoid creating impressions in publicity materials that LCAP participants will “make decisions” about LCFF or other expenditures. Clarifying the purposes upfront may dissuade some would-be participants from getting involved, but it may also avoid raising expectations that when unmet intensify participatory frustration, skepticism, and distrust (Fernández-Martínez et al. 2020; García-Espín and Ganuza 2017; Hanson 2018). Policymakers must weigh tradeoffs but in the interest of expanding democracy would do well to strengthen its mandates by binding stakeholder feedback to institutional decisions.

But Peter, a researcher contracted by the school district to gather student LCAP input, reminded me, no policy is a silver bullet; in fact, they often require larger structural changes outside their scope. Paralleling David Berliner’s (2005) insights about challenging educational inequality, he remarked “I think there's just larger structural issues not just in [Kingdom] but in all of our communities that are tied into education that also need to be addressed if we're gonna have more equitable school districts and education systems.” Lobbying for larger structural changes are critical to ensuring equitable participation. Shorter workdays and workweeks are one possible solution to help bring more free time to overworked and overburdened parents and community members towards managing public institutions. Moreover, policymakers could incentivize participation akin to how jury duty operates today⁵⁶: guaranteed pay for time spent involved in shared decision-making initiatives.

Many of the suggested changes also imply a necessary shift in values, one that upholds public engagement in decision-making as virtuous. Such changes rarely occur spontaneously or via policy. However, exogenous shocks byway of a global pandemic may disrupt institutional routines and the values that undergird them.

⁵⁶ I thank my research assistant, Preetha Vellayapan, for this suggested analogy (Personal communication, October 11, 2019).

6.3 – Pandemics, Participatory Governance, and Parent and Community Voice

At the time of this writing, education, like all social institutions, faces unforetold ramifications from an unprecedented pandemic. In California, increased budgetary pressures will almost certainly squeeze already financially strapped school districts in urban, suburban, and even rural locales bracing for budgetary shortfalls (Krausen and Willis 2018; Melnicoe, Hahnel, Koedel, and Ramanathan 2019). In turn, educational policymakers and administrators may place stakeholder engagement on the backburner. Early research shows that would be a mistake: school districts with deep community relationships that listened to families quickly identified needs and adapted to distance learning (Kaura and Melnicoe 2020). Reviews of Learning Continuity and Attendance Plans (LCPs)—a temporary LCAP-like template that invites district administrators to describe distance and hybrid learning—reveal that many districts swiftly swung into action to gather feedback and better adjust schooling practices (Niebuhr, Arseo, and Simeón, forthcoming). Despite the positive engagement signs, the potential for returning austerity measures akin to and perhaps greater than 2009-2011 raise the likelihood of renewed clashes. Indeed, my time in Kingdom Unified elucidates some of these processes and offers some hypotheses that future research should consider.

In AY 2018-19, Kingdom Unified braced for the storms of distrust and fiscal crisis under conditions eerily like early LCFF implementation. County officials began unearthing years of fiscal mismanagement and a ballooning structural deficit. Parallel analyses identified another key culprit of the impending fiscal shortfall: retired teachers' rising healthcare costs.⁵⁷ When the district proclaimed that union officials had to renegotiate collective bargaining agreements, one

⁵⁷ To protect the district's confidentiality, I have omitted references to the report.

holdout—the teacher’s union—protested what they characterized as continued attacks on labor carried from the Great Recession.

Despite tense meetings and publicity campaigns, parents and community members did not immediately express support for either administrators or union officials. Rather, several groups of parents, many of whom maintained they had been “asleep at the wheel” of local schooling politics, began to regularly meet and strategize around how to navigate the rocky waters of impending fiscal shortfalls. With “students first” as their clarion call, they coordinated public comments at board of education meetings, released press releases, and organized other actions to expedite collective bargaining.

District leadership marveled at the parents’ organic response, and some predicted big changes in the district’s future. A longtime parent involved in site and district decision-making initiatives, Board Trustee Patrick saw the uproar’s potential: “I think we’re gonna see some, some shifts where we see more parent involvement in kind of the district level stuff which we haven’t really seen, like, outside of just the school site.” Activity in the district bore evidence for his prediction sooner than later. Unlike earlier tumultuous years, administrative agents maintained strategic outlets for discontented parents and community members to direct their bubbling anger. Administrators hosted community town halls at strategic sites throughout the district that drew large attendances and allowed involved parents to grow their budding organizations. Even more, all but one of the eight committee replacements appointed for the AY 2019-20 PAC had participated in the grassroots campaign.

Many new participants shared their predecessors’ class background I described throughout chapter 4. Highly educated parents and community members sharpened their criticisms through independent, detailed financial analyses. Parent group meetings at sites in

wealthier neighborhoods teemed with standing room-only attendance; identical meetings in impoverished neighborhoods struggled to fill two folding cafeteria tables. Many hoped that they could help right the ship through the district's choppy fiscal waters from the district committee's crow's nest. At their introductory meeting to the committee—the final AY 2018-19 PAC meeting and my last field observation—they recognized the difficulties ahead but trumpeted their optimism.

Of course, none could have foreseen the wrenches a global pandemic and state policy responses would throw in their plans, but there are glimmers of hope in terms of engagement practices. Kingdom Unified's administrative agents drew lessons from earlier tumult into their LCP drafting, hosting town hall meetings focused on returning to in-person instruction. Even more, notes from PAC meetings focused on the pandemic response show lively discussions enraptured committee appointees. Their feedback included actionable items, but they worried about the possibility of changes given collective bargaining restrictions. Despite the concerns, that discussions continued virtually suggests administrative agents' adaptability to changing circumstances.

To that end, researchers must continue exploring participatory governance reforms' long(er)-term implementation to document variation in the process and consequences of stakeholder engagement efforts like California's Local Control Funding Formula. Different political-economic contexts could pre-empt changes in administrative agents' and participants' behavior, and thus comparisons over more cycles could elucidate these changes. It is also possible, though, that prior structures and cultural practices (e.g., "compliance orientations") persist in the face of turbulence. In either case, it is entirely likely that prior relational struggles will mediate local responses in engagement practices. Early signs suggest that real changes are

underway across California's and, as is wont to do, the nation's schools. It is imperative that analysts' rigorously and systematically chart those trends to examine whether, and under what circumstances, engagement translates into empowerment.

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Appendix A: Model Selection

Like with all dimensional-reducing analyses, researchers using topic models must seek a balance between parsimony and accuracy when selecting a model for interpretation (Airoldi and Bischof 2016; Chang, Gerrish, Wang, Boyd-Graber, and Blei 2009). Critics have emphasized three primary limitations. First, users must *a priori* define the number of topics the model will “find” in the corpus prior to running the algorithm. Separate but related, the model’s framework has lacked rigorous post-estimation likelihood tests that quantitative analysts typically use to validate their model’s fit (Chang et al. 2009). Finally, initial model parameters have a non-insignificant effect on results and reproducibility because the model uses Monte Carlo Markov Chain sampling to iteratively generate a corpus’s structure (Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley 2014). I explain my approach to mitigating the impacts on my analyses by addressing the first two criticisms separately from the third criticism.

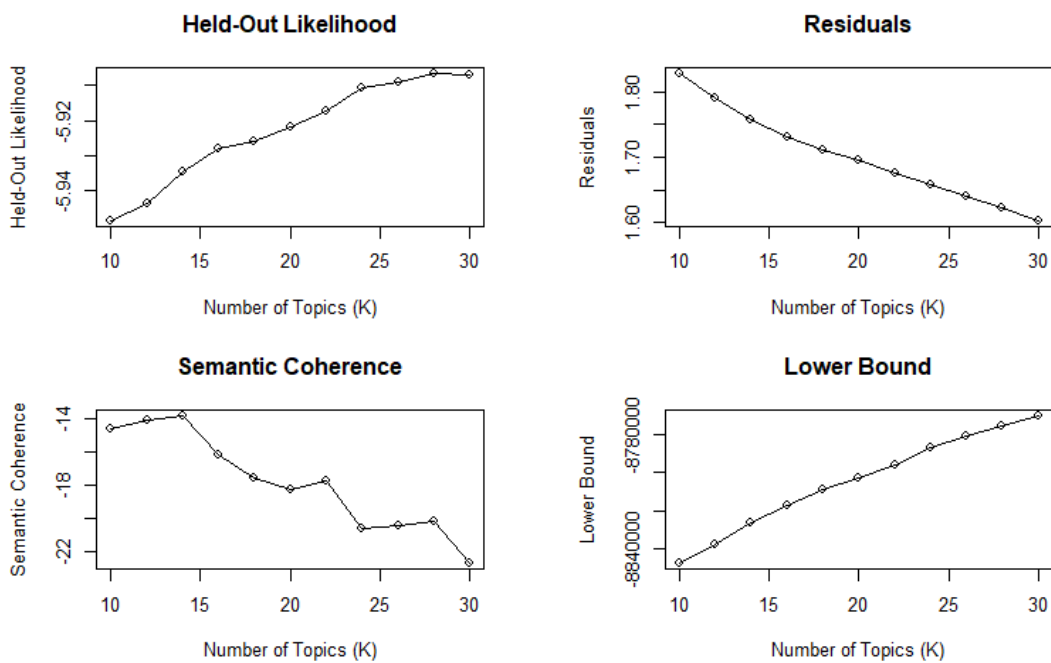
First, methodologists have innovated and begun deploying approximate statistical measures to assess fit (Chang et al. 2009; Roberts, Stewart and Tingley 2014). Roberts and colleagues’ have incorporated numerous metrics into their **stm** package to test the relative “fit” of a variable number of topics to a corpus, including held-out likelihood (Wallach et al. 2009), residual analysis (Taddy 2012), semantic coherence⁵⁸ (Mimno, Wallach, Talley, Leenders, and McCallum 2011), and their own semantic coherence vs. exclusivity⁵⁹ scores (Roberts, Stewart, and Tingley 2014). Figure A.A.1 plots these measures for models predicting between ten and thirty topics by multiples of two. Predicted held-out likelihood unabatedly rises over the range of

⁵⁸ Semantic coherence measures the co-occurrence of word types in a given set of documents. Full measurement documentation can be found in Mimno et al. 2011.

⁵⁹ Exclusivity looks for whether a given set of words have a high probability to be found under a given topic i and low probabilities under other topics (Roberts et al. 2014).

number of topics, suggesting that a model with more than 30 topics may be a better fit. However, the residuals and semantic coherence graphs tell a slightly different story. The models' residuals rapidly decrease from $K = 10$ to $K = 20$ topics and plateau for models with more topics. Semantic coherence tells a similar story with two inflection points dividing the graph into three discernible chunks. Co-occurrence among the predicted topics' most probable words greatly increases at $K = 16$, temporarily plateauing until a significant increase in topical coherence with twenty-four topics before plateauing once again. These initial statistical tests suggested that a model between $K = 20$ and $K = 26$ may best fit these data⁶⁰.

Figure A.A.1: Diagnostic Values by Number of Topics

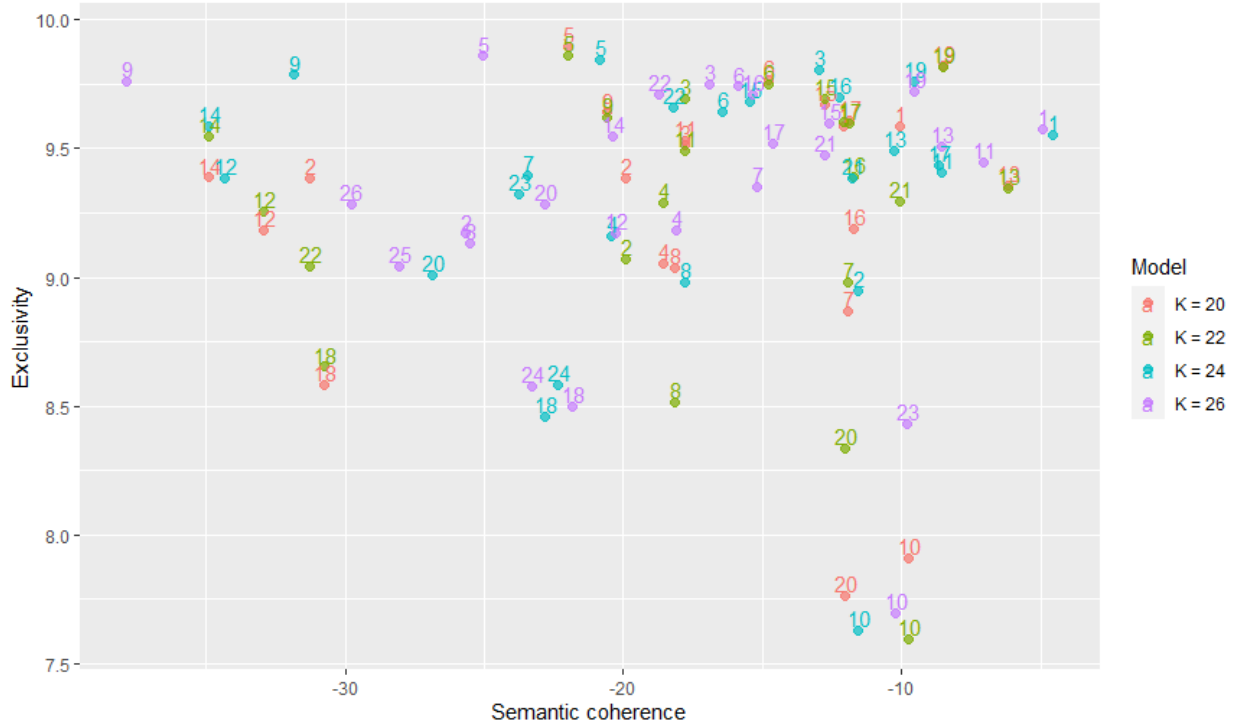


I performed additional statistical analyses to assess model fit, including distributions of each models' topical exclusivity and semantic coherence as presented in Figure A.A.2. Analysts

⁶⁰ To be certain, analysts are likely to yield increasingly exclusive and semantically coherent topics with greater numbers of topics as models identify narrower and more idiosyncratic themes (Mimno et al. 2011).

want to select a model that yields highly exclusive and semantically coherent topics; put differently, most topics should congregate in Quadrant 1. As shown in the figure, less than half of all topics in $K = 22$ and $K = 24$ fall outside Quadrant 1. This evidence further narrows the pool to the best fitting model.

Figure A.A.2: Comparing Exclusivity and Semantic Coherence, $K = 20, 22, 24, 26$



Besides statistical tests, most topic modelers agree that substantive knowledge of the corpus and case should be used to make sense of and draw meaningful conclusions about computer-assisted results (DiMaggio et al. 2013). I iteratively reviewed topic output from numerous potentially best-fitting models, including $K = 20$, $K = 22$, and $K = 26$, but $K = 24$ best represented the corpus.

Appendix B: Custom Stop Word Dictionary

ach	annual	apr
april	august	california
creek	dec	decemb
district	feb	februari
friday	hill	involvement
jan	januari	lcap
lcff	los	mar
march	monday	nov
novem	novitem	oak
oct	octob	paae
page	san	santa
school	sepitem	the
thursday	tuesday	update
valley	vista	wasn
wednesday	wer	weren

Appendix C: Interview Protocols

LCAP Participant

After introducing myself, going over study information, and getting verbal consent. The first few questions I am going to ask you are to get to know about you and your involvement in the school district and community.

1. How are you currently affiliated with the school district?
 - a. When did you first become affiliated with it?
 - b. Do you have children enrolled in the school district? If so, in what grades?
 - c. How did you first get involved with the school district?
2. Besides the LCAP, what other related district activities have you participated in, if at all?
3. Are you a member of an organization?
 - a. Describe the work and purpose of your organization.
 - b. How do you participate in the organization?
 - c. Do you participate in any activities as an organizational representative?
4. Do you consider yourself engaged with your local government?
 - a. If so, how do you engage with it? For example, do you vote for candidates in local government races; have you ever run for local governmental office; have you ever worked for a local candidate's campaign, etc.?
 - b. Do you think it is important to engage with your local government? Why or why not?
5. Do you participate in any other community activities? If so, please explain.

Now I would like to know more about your views & outlook on the Local Control Funding Formula.

6. How did you first learn about the Local Control Funding Formula?
7. One of the Local Control Funding Formula's goals is to provide an equitable education to all students in California. What does equity mean to you?
 - a. Do you think your school district provides an equitable education to its students?
 - i. IF YES: What demonstrates that the district provides an equitable education?
 - ii. IF NO: How could this district provide an equitable education to its students?
8. What do you think is the purpose of the LCAP and the planning process?

Now I would like to know more about your involvement with your school district's Local Control and Accountability Plan process.

9. How did you first learn about your school district's planning process?
10. How did you get involved in contributing to this school district's LCAP?
 - a. When did you first get involved with your school district's LCAP planning?
 - b. What led you to getting involved with this school district's LCAP planning?
11. What did/do you hope to accomplish by participating in LCAP planning?

- a. What are your concerns and priorities for this school district?
- 12. How do you participate in this school district's LCAP planning?
 - a. Do you think there are other ways you could engage? If so, what are they?
 - b. Can you describe one example of each ways you have participated in contributing to the school district's LCAP?
- 13. Who participates in planning this school district's LCAP?
 - a. How do they participate?
 - b. Did you know any current or former LCAP participants prior to participating in the LCAP?
 - i. IF YES: How did you know them?
- 14. Who do you think should participate in planning this school district's LCAP?
 - a. How should these people participate in planning this school district's LCAP?
- 15. How have the concerns and priorities you mentioned been addressed through the LCAP, if at all?
 - a. What changes, if any, have you suggested during the LCAP planning?
 - b. Have your suggested changes been incorporated in the LCAP? If so, how?
 - c. When you participate in LCAP planning, do you feel that your concerns are addressed?
- 16. Have you ever witnessed or experienced any disagreements while engaging in the LCAP? Please walk me through one of these experiences.
- 17. What do you think you have gained by participating in the LCAP planning process?

Now I would like to ask you some basic demographic questions.

- 18. What is your gender?
- 19. What's your race and/or ethnicity?
- 20. What is your current occupation/job?
 - a. If you are not currently working, what was your longest and most recent occupation/job?
- 21. What's the highest education degree you have earned (High school, Associates degree, Bachelor's degree, Master's degree, etc.)
 - a. When did you finish this degree?

LCAP Implementers

After introducing myself, going over study information, and getting verbal consent. The first few questions I am going to ask you are to get to know about your relationship with the school district.

1. How are you currently affiliated with the school district?
 - a. What position do you currently hold at the school district?
 - b. When did you start working in this school district?
 - c. Is your current position the one you held when you started working in this school district? If not, please walk me through the path to your current position.

Now I would like to know more about your school district's relationship with the community.

2. Think back to this school district before the Local Control Funding Formula's (LCFF) passage (before 2013). If at all, how and for what purposes did your district engage stakeholders?
 - a. Do you think your district had active community involvement? Please explain.
3. Is it important to have community participation in your school district?
 - a. What are some of the challenges and benefits it brings?
4. Outside of the LCAP planning process, does your district engage its stakeholders? If so, how?

Now I would like to know more about your views and your outlook on the Local Control Funding Formula.

5. What do you think state policymakers expected to accomplish with the LCFF's focus on parent and community engagement?
 - a. What do you think are the LCFF's greatest impacts on this district?
6. One of the Local Control Funding Formula's goals is to provide an equitable education to all students in California. What does equity mean to you?
 - a. What are your school district's educational priorities?
 - b. Do you think your students receive an equitable education at this school district?
 - i. IF YES: How does this district provide an equitable education to its students?
 - ii. IF NO: How could this district provide an equitable education to its students?
7. What do you think is the purpose of the Local Control and Accountability Plan?
 - a. Do you think it is a useful planning tool? Is it a useful tool for accountability? Is it useful for transparency?

Now I would like to know more about your school district's Local Control and Accountability Plan process.

8. [IF BOARD MEMBER OR SUPERINTENDENT] In this school district, each board member appoints two people to the district's LCAP Parent Advisory Committee. Can you explain that selection process?
 - a. What led the board to implement this process?

- b. What criteria guides your decision?
- c. On average, how many applicants for these positions do you receive each year?
- 9. What plans did your district make to engage stakeholders during the first LCAP cycle?
 - a. Did you receive any training for engaging stakeholders?
 - i. IF YES: What training did you receive? From who?
 - b. What other resources did you use to learn about engaging stakeholders?
 - c. How have these engagement plans changed over the time you have been involved with the LCAP?
- 10. Who currently participates in the LCAP planning process?
 - a. Are there any organizations that contribute to the LCAP planning process? If so, which ones?
- 11. How do stakeholders participate in this district's LCAP planning?
 - a. What activities and opportunities do you offer for engagement?
 - b. How do you advertise these opportunities?
 - c. What district or site-level committees contribute to the LCAP?
 - i. How do these committees contribute to the LCAP?
- 12. What obstacles do you face in engaging stakeholders?
 - a. Are there any stakeholders you would like to see more involved?
 - i. IF YES: How do you think these stakeholder could be engaged?
 - ii. IF YES: Why do you think these stakeholder should be more involved?
 - b. Have you witnessed or experienced any disagreements among stakeholders while planning the LCAP? Please describe those experiences.
- 13. Once you have gathered feedback from stakeholders, how do you use it?
 - a. Are stakeholders' concerns or priorities the same as yours? As the district?
 - b. Do you think stakeholders recognize their contribution to the LCAP?
- 14. What do you hope to accomplish with this school district's LCAP and the planning process?
 - a. What do you think you have already accomplished or gained?

Some of these are basic demographic questions.

- 15. Are you a caregiver for any children enrolled in the district?
 - a. Were you a caregiver for any children previously enrolled in the district?
- 16. What is your race and/or ethnicity?
- 17. What is your gender?
- 18. What's the highest education degree you have earned (High school, Associates degree, Bachelor's degree, Master's degree, etc.)
 - a. When did you finish your degree?