



## **YOUTH VOICE IN SCHOOL FINANCE: THE BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S INVOLVEMENT IN SHAPING LOCAL CONTROL ACCOUNTABILITY PLANS**

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Over the last quarter century, California youth affiliated with community-based organizations have participated in a variety of local and state campaigns to influence educational policy and practice. They have addressed issues such as school overcrowding, insufficient access to college preparatory courses, or the lack of ethnic studies curriculum. But, until recently, youth have had limited say in school budgets. Changes ushered in by Proposition 13 in 1978 reduced revenue for the K-12 public school system, tightened school district budgets, and constrained the potential for local communities (and local youth) to shape how education dollars were spent.

Dramatic changes to this historic trend have emerged in the last few years. In 2012, a coalition of California youth and community organizing groups, organized labor, and other civic organizations joined together to campaign successfully for Proposition 30 which brought new streams of revenue into California's cash-strapped K-12 education system. Then, in 2013, Governor Brown signed into law the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), which provides additional funds for high needs students and encourages local participation in setting budget priorities.

As part of the Youth Leadership and Health Study, this report examines how California youth organizations have used the new structures created by the Local Control Funding Formula legislation to engage young people in efforts to influence educational budget decisions. The report draws on a survey of staff in youth organizations that were part of the Building Healthy Communities (BHC) initiative. Funded by the California Endowment, BHC includes youth leadership as part of its strategy to improve health in 14 high-poverty communities around the state. BHC-affiliated youth organizations focus on grassroots organizing, advocacy, healing practices, media production, and/ or other forms of youth leadership.<sup>1</sup> Staff members in 75 out of 132 BHC-affiliated organizations that participated in this study in 2015 and early 2016 claimed that their youth members were involved in efforts to shape school finances. Staff members reported on how young people in their organizations attempted to

influence district budget priorities, the types of demands they made, and the commitments they secured from local school districts as a result of grassroots organizing and advocacy efforts.

## DESCRIPTIONS OF THE LOCAL CONTROL FUNDING FORMULA AND THE LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY PLANS

Under LCFF, school districts receive additional funding according to their proportions of high-need students—defined as those who are low-income, in the foster system, or designated as English Language Learners. This relatively new legislation also intends to increase accountability and transparency in district budget decision-making by requiring districts to engage community members in the development of the LCAP (Local Control and Accountability Plan). The LCAP describes the district’s goals, proposed activities, and spending to address state priority areas and improve high-need students’ outcomes. As part of the LCAP development process, districts must create parental advisory committees, provide opportunities for public review, and generally consult with stakeholders to solicit input and feedback. Beyond minimum requirements, school districts have some discretion as to how exactly they facilitate engagement with the LCAP development process. Examples of avenues for community participation include public hearings and town halls, parent and student advisory committees (including English learner advisory committees), school site councils, surveys, focus groups, and online comment boxes.

**Table 1. Involvement in the LCAP**

BHC Site	Number of programs
Boyle Heights	11
Santa Ana	4
City Heights	5
Coachella Valley	7
Del Norte	2
East Oakland	8
Fresno	7
Long Beach	10
Merced	9
Richmond	8
Sacramento	7
South Kern	5
South LA	9
<b>Total Number</b>	<b>92</b>

### BHC-AFFILIATED YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS AND THE LCAP

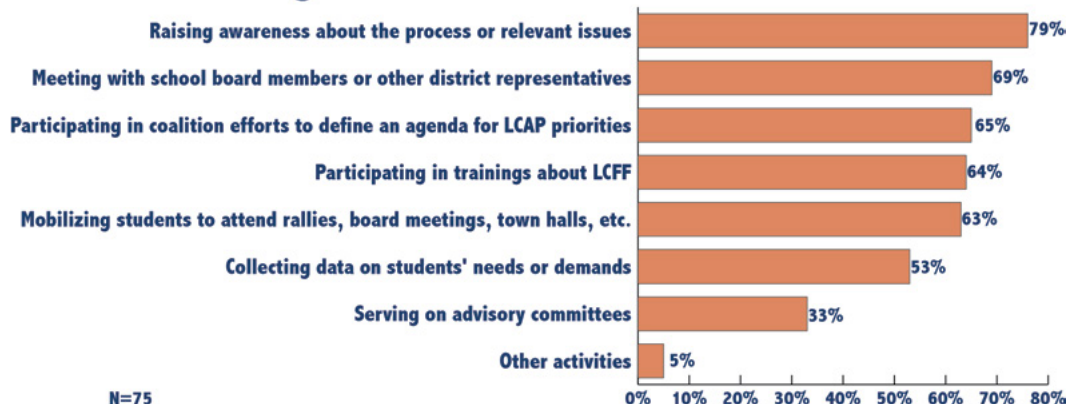
As part of broader efforts to promote well-being in their communities, 75 BHC-affiliated youth organizations operate 92 programs across the state that engaged adolescent and young adult members in the LCAP process. (Seven organizations operate in more than one BHC site.) Table 1 lists the number of programs that reported some level of involvement in this process in 13 out of the 14 communities that are part of the BHC initiative. All of these organizations work with high school adolescents, while 65% also involve young adults who are no longer in high school. Membership in these BHC-affiliated organizations is largely comprised of low-income youth of color. It is worth noting that these organizations often work collaboratively; ninety-two percent participated in coalitional efforts with other BHC-affiliated organizations.

### YOUTHS’ INVOLVEMENT IN THE LCAP

Through their BHC-affiliated organizations, youth have been involved in a variety of ways in the LCAP process. As shown in Figure 1, seventy-six percent of staff report that their youth members raised awareness of the LCAP process and relevant issues. Efforts to influence district funding are also providing young people with the notable experience of working with elected officials, decision-makers, and other community members. Specifically, youth in 69% of organizations met with elected officials and other district decision-makers, while youth in 65% of organizations have been involved in coalitional efforts to help define LCAP priorities. In the majority of organizations, youth participated in trainings about LCFF and the LCAP; they also mobilized their peers and other community members to participate in rallies, board meetings, and other events related to the LCAP. Additionally, youth in just over half of organizations (53%) collected data to help identify student needs or demands. Meanwhile,

in a third of organizations, youth sat on advisory boards that helped define budget priorities. Needless to say, LCFF has provided youth organizations with early exposure to government decision-making processes.

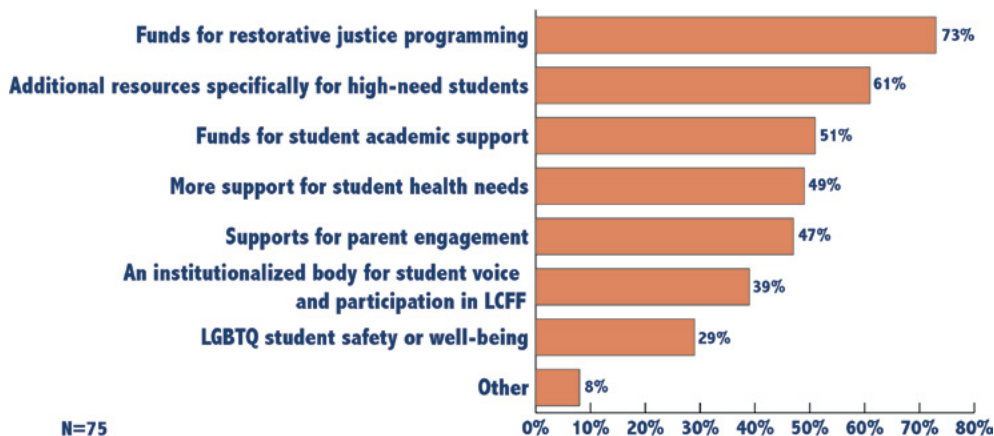
**Figure 1. Youths' Roles in LCAP Efforts**



## YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS' DEMANDS AND VICTORIES

Thanks in part to local and statewide collaboration efforts, BHC-affiliated youth organizations often shared common demands when engaging in the LCAP process. As shown in Figure 2, a large percentage —73%— advocated for increased funding for restorative justice programming, an alternative to punitive school discipline policies (such as suspension and expulsion) that disproportionately affect young men of color. Restorative justice prioritizes repairing harms caused by student behaviors and aims to prevent future conflicts. Most organizations—61%—also sought additional resources that promoted learning for high-need students, and 51% sought funding for general types of academic support services. Additionally, just under half of organizations advocated for resources that specifically address students' health needs, as well as for support for parent engagement. Thirty-nine percent of programs participated in efforts to institutionalize a body of students who would advise the district or schools during the LCFF process. Meanwhile, 29% directly fought for resources that would help ensure the safety and well-being of LGBTQ students.

**Figure 2. Types of LCAP Demands**

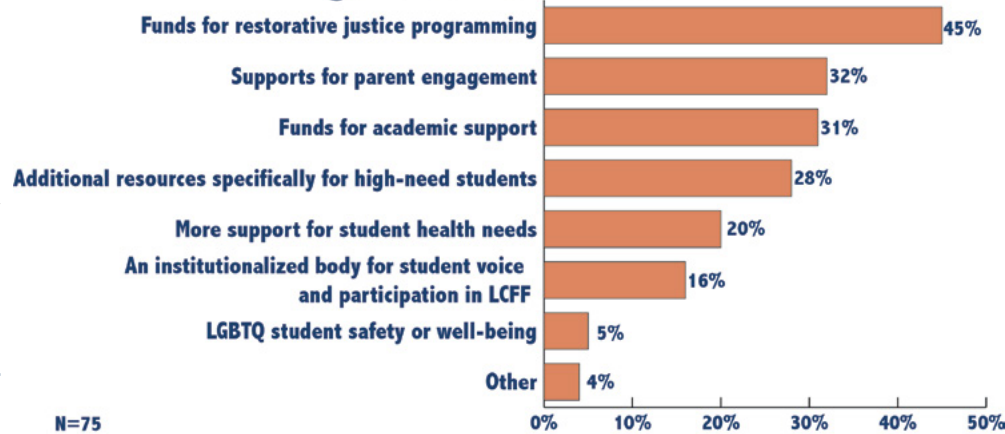


BHC-affiliated youth organizations claimed a significant number of victories by securing commitments from their local school districts to meet some of their demands. Figure 3 on the next page lists the LCAP victories that individual organizations reported; because of coalitional efforts, many of these wins are shared by more than one group. BHC-affiliated organizations most commonly

won commitments for funding for restorative justice programming, with 45% claiming such a victory. Nearly a third (32%) received commitments from school districts to provide additional support for parent engagement. A similar percentage also won funds for student academic support. Twenty-eight percent claimed winning commitments for additional resources for high-needs students, and 20% reported making

gains toward obtaining support for student health needs. A smaller number of programs (16%) won an institutionalized body for student voice in LCFF. Such institutionalized bodies may ensure that youths' voices are heard in future budgetary processes. Finally, a handful won support for LGBTQ student safety or well-being.

Figure 3. LCAP Victories



LCFF, YOUTH LEADERSHIP, AND PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

The Local Control Funding Formula requires public input into school budgetary processes. Yet even with the affordances provided by this legislation, young people need guidance and scaffolding to participate meaningfully in sharing their views on educational spending priorities. Community-based organizations play a critically important role in facilitating the engagement of young people from low-income background in this process. They provide training on the LCAP process while presenting their members with clear avenues of involvement. As earlier findings from the Youth Leadership and Health Study have demonstrated, BHC-affiliated youth organizations have actively sought to make government institutions more responsive to the needs of low-income communities of color.<sup>2</sup> The Local Control Funding Formula offers an historic opportunity for youth, with the support of community-based organizations, to shape how schools advance their academic achievement and broader well-being.

<sup>1</sup>Terriquez and Lopez, 2016. *BHC Youth Program Staff Inventory Report: Key Findings*. Program for Environmental and Regional Equity. University of Southern California: Los Angeles.

<sup>2</sup> For short reports visit <https://dornsife.usc.edu/per/bhc-youth-leadership/>. Also see Bloemraad and Terriquez. 2016 in press. "The organizational foundations of advancing health in immigrant and low-income communities of color." *Social Science & Medicine*. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277953616300582>.



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