



Thinking of LCAP as an Opportunity: Questions to Ask

Research by Pivot Learning Partners and others suggests that the most successful school districts, districts that are able to raise student achievement and narrow achievement gaps system wide, approach the work of improvement with focus, intensity, and coherence. Focus means that they have a clear strategy for improvement and do a small number of things well; intensity means that they do enough of the things that matter to make a difference; and coherence means that the pieces of the system work together and reinforce each other.

Yet public education organizations are pulled in many directions, which means that achieving focus, intensity and coherence is never-ending work for leaders. Increasingly, these leaders envision LCAP as not just as a compliance document for the state, but rather as an opportunity to create a more coherent, focused, and effective plan for the district. To do this, the LCAP would capture the totality of the work happening in the district and connect various other plans that might be required by specific funding sources or grants. This perspective makes the LCAP into a working document that can guide a school district as it strives to provide the best possible education for all of its children. Creating such a document is a balancing act: it must be short enough to communicate a big picture and outline the broad choices and strategies the district is making, clear enough to be comprehensible by a variety of individuals and groups, and specific enough to provide guidance to implementers. Since the work that the LCAP summarizes is necessarily complex, LCAPs may need to include links to other documents that are more detailed.

The following questions reflect the idea that LCAP is an opportunity as well as a requirement. They are intended to be questions that LCAP developers, LCAP implementers, and stakeholders might ask as they review and reflect on their LCAP. The questions in bold represent broad categories for investigation, while the questions underneath provide more specific areas of inquiry. This series of questions is a framework for thinking about LCAPs, not a checklist. Context matters: the LCAP is a new tool, and not every question must have an answer in every situation.

The questions below are organized into four sections: 1) questions about the LCAP development process and about stakeholder experience; 2) questions about the LCAP elements; (3) questions about the connections among the key elements of the plan; and 4) questions about implementation of the plan. Answers to questions about implementation may not be included in the LCAP itself, but need to be captured somewhere if the plan is to succeed.

Questions about the LCAP

Section I: Questions about the LCAP Development Process and about stakeholder experience

How districts involve stakeholders in the LCAP development process will have a direct impact on local understanding and support of the plan. The kind of engagement envisioned under LCFF represents a rethinking of accountability relationships and a new way of working for school districts. The questions below explore key aspects of the district's first attempt at this kind of engagement. Answers are likely to suggest improvement opportunities for districts to explore in future years.

1. Who was involved?

- a. Were a broad and representative range of people and groups involved in the development of the LCAP? Did the district use an engagement process that utilized the strengths, perspectives and input of its stakeholders?
- b. Is there evidence that stakeholder voices were heard and their input used? Did the engagement feel authentic to those involved, especially to parents, students and community members whose voices might not have been heard in the past?

2. With what result?

- a. Is there evidence that the goals reflect the community's goals for children? Is there evidence that key strategies or activities reflect what stakeholders believe matters?
- b. Is the LCAP process meeting the goal of strengthening the connection between the district and its key stakeholders?
- c. Did the LCAP development process uncover new opportunities for partnerships or new roles for stakeholders? Could it?

3. What did the district learn about the process?

- a. If the timeline was a barrier to authentic engagement, does the district have a plan to start earlier next time around?
- b. Will stakeholders be more willing to engage in the LCAP process in the future?
- c. Will they know more about it and thus be able to be more effective?

Section II: Questions about the LCAP elements

1. Goals: Are the goals the right ones?

- a. Do they reflect state priorities?



- b. Do the goals matter for the district’s children? Do they reflect what the data says about the district’s gaps and needs?
 - c. Do they include the goal of building capacity in both people and the organization?
 - d. Are they coherent, that is, are they consistent with other goals the district may have (Board goals, strategic planning goals etc.)?
 - e. Are they “SMART,” that is.....
 - i. Specific—aligned to your needs and student population
 - ii. Measurable—how will you assess success or attainment?
 - iii. Ambitious but also attainable—something that is worth doing but also within your control or power to influence
 - iv. Relevant—related to the needs of your students and school community
 - v. Time Bound—accomplishable or able to show significant progress within the timeframe of the plan
- 2. Progress indicators: Does the plan propose metrics to measure progress toward each goal? Have annual targets been specified? Will these metrics be useful to assess the effectiveness of specific initiatives, programs, services and/or activities?**
- a. Are the metrics sufficiently robust to provide decision makers with what they need to determine if the goals have been met?
 - b. Are data collection timelines and data analysis roles clear and appropriate to give decision makers what they need? This information may not be included in the LCAP, but key agreements should be captured somewhere.
 - c. Do the metrics proposed exist, or are some of them yet to be created? If the latter, how will the metrics be created and tested? By when? Who will sign off on these?
 - d. Are the targets for the coming year sufficiently ambitious? Are they achievable?
- 3. Actions and Services: Does the plan support implementation of a coherent set of high leverage broad initiatives; programs and services; and specific activities?**
- a. Is it clear what major initiatives the district is investing in and why? Is it clear what programs and services are being supported, what students will benefit, and what activities will be carried out?
 - b. How are the target students addressed in the plan? If a program or service is going to be offered district-wide (rather than only for target students) is there evidence that this is the best strategy to support the target students? Is it clear how and when impact on target students will be assessed?
 - c. Does the plan describe how the work and services the plan supports will be played out at school sites? How they will impact teachers and classrooms?
 - d. Are roles, responsibilities and timelines specified? These may not be included in the LCAP, but key agreements on these issues should be captured somewhere. See implementation section below.)

- e. Is it clear which of the state priorities the high leverage initiatives, programs, services and activities will address?
 - f. Every plan involves making choices, but this is year one of a three-year plan. Are there important activities or priorities that have been postponed?
- 4. Expenditures: Does the LCAP reflect a clear plan and rationale about how best to invest scarce resources? Do the students who need more, get more?**
- a. Was the district able to connect the planning process with budgeting in this first year of LCFF and LCAP? Did goals shape funding priorities?
 - b. Does the Plan communicate a clear rationale for the district’s spending choices, a “through line” or plausible story about how spending money in the way outlined will produce the results we want? Is this supported by research, data and/or experience?
 - c. Does the plan meet the test of “intensity?” Does it spend enough money on the priorities it has identified to get the impact desired? If investments will need to increase over the three years of the plan as funding increases, is that intention clear?
 - d. Is it clear what funding sources are being spent on what programs and activities?

Section III: Questions about Connections among the key elements of the plan

The individual elements that make up the LCAP—goals, metrics, activities, and expenditures— are the building blocks for the district’s plan. Yet individual building blocks must also be connected if the Plan is to support a continuous improvement process. The questions below explore five key connections.

- 1. Goals and data:** Do the district’s goals reflect data about student needs and student performance in the district?
- 2. Goals and metrics:** Are goals tied to a broad set of metrics that will allow both decision makers and stakeholders to determine whether goals have been met?
- 3. Metrics and programs or services:** Are specific metrics connected to initiatives, programs, and/or activities in such a way as to allow implementers to determine how effective these were and what might need to be adjusted?
- 4. Metrics and target students:** Will metrics and the data collection and analysis processes allow the district to determine for which students initiatives and programs were effective and under what conditions?

5. **Metrics and expenditures:** Are metrics connected to expenditures in ways that will allow the district to answer questions about what kind of “return on investment” the district got?

Section IV: Questions about Implementation of the plan

A good plan is both worth implementing but also implementable. The following questions explore this issue. Of course, not all answers to the following questions may be captured in the LCAP itself.

1. **Management and decision-making: Are the key agreements in place that will be needed to manage the implementation of the plan?**
 - a. The LCAP is intentionally a summary document and most likely incomplete. When will detailed implementation plans be developed? By whom?
 - b. Are structures, process, and roles clear? Are a broad and representative set of people and groups, included those whose voices may not have been heard in the past, involved? Are the roles and responsibilities of each group clear? What about timelines?
2. **Monitoring and adjusting: Are there structures, process, and roles in place to manage the evaluation and adjustment of the plan?**
 - a. Is it clear what data will be collected, when, and by whom, and how it will be used to evaluate and adjust the strategies supported by the plan?
 - b. Are roles clear? Are the right people and groups involved? Are the timelines clear?



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