United Way Youth Town Hall: 2015-2016 LCAP Recommendations

On March 7, 2015, 101 high school students from across the district came together to learn about the history of school funding and the proposed 2016 LCAP. Calling on their own experiences in their schools, students created the following recommendations to the LCAP. Given the LCFF emphasis on parent, student and community engagement during the LCAP development phase, the students expect these proposed investments and addendums to appear in the 2015-16 LCAP.

Goal	Recommendation	Strategies	Context of Group Discussion
100% Graduation	Ensure students are consistently engaged in their progress towards graduation and are informed about available resources	Employ a regularly updated, functional online system where students and parents can check grades and required courses.	While all of the seniors in the group had completed the FAFSA, very few (>20%) had completed or even had a conversation with a counselor about a graduation plan. Additionally, students had varying experiences across different schools when it came to accessing their grades—half of them attend schools with websites (although not always updated) while others rely on printed report cards. The students recommended a consistent, accessible and reliable online system to access grades as well as assemblies to engage parents on aspects of their child's education.
		Make it a requirement that all homeroom classes visit the school's college center.	
		Beginning freshman year, administrators and teachers must continually engage students and their parents in a conversation on graduation and college going requirements.	
	Additional counselors and peer support programs to engage in students' academic & non-academic lives	Proactive counselors that provide effective, engaging interventions when students are struggling academically.	Students cited that counselors at their schools were not proactive, especially when the student was struggling academically. This had to do somewhat with the ratios of students per counselor. Seventy-five percent of the group had not been approached when their grades had declined; many of them took it upon themselves to approach their counselor for help. A quarter of the students received mandatory tutoring when they received a D or lower in a class, however, the onus was still on the student to initiate the conversation. Some stated that "when [I] was too far behind, no alternatives were presented," or mentioned that it "was too late" to seek help. Additionally, students mentioned that their counselors did not provide information on resources or tutoring and did not always encourage or motivate them to graduate and go onto college.
		Mandatory tutoring when a student's grades are at a D or lower.	
		Multiple avenues/resources for grade improvement (i.e. tutoring, academic counseling and personal counseling).	
		Peer supports to motivate and connect struggling students to resources.	
	Increased, meaningful parent engagement--both in person and online. Effective communication with parents around college going knowledge and access	Information for parents on the importance of graduation requirements, strong grades and extracurricular activities for getting into college. This should go beyond an annual parent night or email.	School to parent communication was inconsistent across the student group. Some schools called home or sent a letter if a student was struggling academically, others had a website parents could check. Information about the importance of grades, graduation requirements and extracurricular activities is not being conveyed in a consistent or effective manner across the district. Only 5% of the group had support from their parents or guardians when they were struggling in a class.
		Tools for parents to assist their children with homework and other class assignments (i.e. syllabi, online tutoring help, answer keys and lesson plans).	
	Programs in schools & communities that promote positive school culture centered on graduation and opportunities for improvement for all students	Relevant curriculum that allows students to apply their classes to real world experiences.	With the current state of the education system, only 5% of students in the group thought their school could achieve 100% graduation, and 70% believed that most students simply give up and do not graduate. This indicates negative school culture; graduation for all is not encouraged. Students indicated that some of their peers did not graduate because curriculum was not relevant or they felt the broader community did not see education as a priority. Seventy percent of the group believed students gave up due to external factors such as gang involvement. Additionally, students observed counselors told students there were "no alternatives" or it was "too late" to do anything about a challenging class. These external and internal factors point to a negative school culture that disrupts, stunts or dismantles high graduation rates.
		A school culture that promotes a graduation centered atmosphere.	
		Provide options for engagement for students who are at risk of failing behind or dropping out.	

Proficiency for All	Create supportive atmosphere (peer & parent involvement in student achievement)	Develop peer mentoring service for incoming students who are ELL so they can practice English outside of the classroom.	DACA and ELL students cannot ask for support and are often isolated outside of the classroom. One student cited her school's Spanish Honor Society that established peer supports. Teachers often depend on students to translate materials and lessons for them in the classroom. Additionally, outside of class-time support from teachers would help move the needle on proficiency.
		Have a designated faculty that students can approach for help.	
		Establish different learning models for students.	
		Establish a community of peer, parent and teacher support.	
	Test preparation (more for ELs and focus on them in general from teachers—bilingual training for teachers, proper class placement)	Develop a testing model for ELLs that places them in classes at their ability level with a greater emphasis on subject comprehension.	Students who are recently reclassified face challenging transitions to English only courses: they are often placed above their ability level and don't receive additional supports. Students felt that they were more preoccupied in earning a good test score rather than comprehending material.
		More teacher and tutor support after school or outside of class, especially from bilingual staff.	
		Practice tests that help hone in on problem areas for each student.	
	Establish and communicate out resources	Ensuring ELL parents and students understand the LAUSD education system such as classes, college preparation, etc.	Students strongly believed they could help their struggling peers to succeed, if given proper resources and learning models. They also reflected that being in an encouraging, positive environment with supportive teachers would make a large difference (decreased feelings of isolation, for example).
		Add translators to campuses.	
		Ensure students are placed in the appropriate classes.	
		More social, mental and health services.	
		Inform students of peer support groups, student teachers and counseling services.	
100% Attendance	Programs to allow students to make up absences	Allow students to make up hours missed through afterschool opportunities.	Students identified a range of barriers to attendance. For foster youth, they identified the transitions to new environments were extremely challenging and beyond the student's control. They also found that students weren't always supported or pushed to attend school, due to a parent's strenuous work schedule, for example. They cited the responsibility for low income students to work to support their families as a barrier to attendance. Additionally, if a student falls seriously behind, they often felt it was "too late" to make up classes. These students pointed to a cycle of falling behind.
		Increase resources for students to make up all the classes they need to graduate.	
	Increased staff to support safety on campuses	Measure expulsions and suspensions.	Students say they don't always feel safe at school and that more staff to monitor and prevent bullying would decrease this unsafe feeling that leads to absences.
		Decrease police presence.	
		Increase staff/volunteers on campuses to ensure students are in class.	
	Maximize homeroom periods so they are more structured and relevant	Adjust the use of home room time to promote college and career readiness.	Students often baby sit their siblings, work a job or deal with transportation challenges. Some suggested that homerooms could be optional or provide a space for students to work with a counselor, look for a job, or learn about and complete specific graduation requirements.
	Free metro passes to students in school	Provide bus passes and other options of transportation for students.	Some students have to take the bus for over an hour to get to school. If a student is already feeling unmotivated, a lack of easy transportation is a large barrier.
...agement	School site specific focus groups and surveys to redefine student engagement and participation	These focus groups should be different based on different neighborhood and school needs.	Throughout the conversation, students defined engagement as an in person process where student and community voices are hear and accounted for. They indicated that for an engagement experience to be meaningful, it must empowering. District lead focus groups seemed like they would offer a this kind of meaningful experience. Students did not feel the current District metrics for engagement were effective, as the questions were too generic and did not focus on progress, lived experiences nor inequity. For example, students pointed out the question of "are you proud of your school" was not
		Define engagement based on face to face interactions, empowering community experiences and indicators of how students are part of their school.	

Student & Community Eng...		Center surveys and focus groups around progress and lived student experiences.	students pointed out the question of "are you proud of your school" was not a good indicator of engagement, as a school could have a good football team, but poor academic outcomes. Students felt these general questions silenced specialized experiences (i.e. different types of schools measuring progress differently).
	Demonstrate to parents and students that surveys and focus groups are making a difference in district policy	Demonstrate responses to surveys and focus groups are being incorporated at the school and district level.	Students agreed that often their parents felt like "engagement" opportunities at school sites were just lectures. Parents were not able to participate because they did not feel these lectures would make a difference in the school system. Students reflected that their parents were disengaged because they were not empowered as co-agents of change in their school communities.
		Ensure engagement sessions are not just lectures to parents, but rather spaces to learn and improve a school together.	
		Share back when suggestions and recommendations are creating change.	
	Multicultural and collaborative, multicultural parent, teacher and administrator representatives.	Promote open communication among students, parents & counselors.	Currently, students felt that engagement as it is now, with no cultural relevancy or collaboration, it is not effective. They noted that the surveys and other means of participation often separate the stakeholders in the school community. They believe that in order to really improve a school, all groups must have a seat at the table. Students recognized that school did not provide their parents the space or skills to collaborate efectively. Students also identified that schools were not speaking to cultural values of parents, and must do a better job meeting parents where they are at to remove current barriers to engagement.
		Measure the creation and effectiveness of spaces of open communication and collaboration between students, parents and administrators.	
		Acknowledge traditions of parents across cultures that build on similarities in a meaningful and inclusive manner.	
Safety	Have administrators and community members on campus who will get to know and advocate for students	Measure police presence and police record of school security.	Students felt that restorative justice tactics are making their schools safer. The purpose of measuring police presence is the belief that having ex gang members and school staff get to know the students could actually help motivate the students to do well instead of having the threat of the police on the campus. They also critiqued "random" searches and metal detectors. Students would like to see police motivating and getting to know students.
		Have community members (ex-gang members, for example) monitor children's activities on campus in lieu of increased police presence.	
		Positive interventions when students are frequently suspended.	
	Community meetings inside and outside of the school campus that focus on the safety of the students	School meetings will focus on the students speaking to staff and the police on their experiences. Have the opportunity to give staff and police their recommendations.	Students defined school safety as "feeling at home" with "staff making the students feel safe." They also thought school safety was the ability to feel "welcome and "free wherever you are in school." Students also mentioned feeling protected by the police. When discussing suspensions, students felt the measure around suspensions was not enough to really describe school safety.
		Community meetings that focus on the safety in a school and its surrounding area. These meetings with be held with students and adults and discuss their frustrations towards the police commission.	