

Fostering Educational Excellence: A model partnership between an LEA & their COE

Below are the responses to questions submitted to the presenters during the Open Door session with Fresno County Superintendents of Schools and Kings Canyon Unified School District, held on December 7, 2023. Questions that were submitted are not necessarily provided verbatim and may have been edited for clarity, but have not been altered in substance. Questions that are similar or on the same topic have been grouped for ease of navigation and response.

Presenters:



Jose Guzman
Assistant Superintendent,
Kings Canyon USD



Dana Budd
Associate Director,
LCAP & Compliance

Q&A:

- **QUESTION:** These are amazing tools! Can you share an example of something you both struggled with in preparing your LCAP.

RESPONSE:

- Jose: Speaking for myself, one of the most difficult things we dealt with was identifying appropriate metrics to use returning from the COVID-19 pandemic. We knew we needed to begin using a better diagnostic universal screener like iReady, but we had not using one previously. The tools we had used were going to no longer be utilized so it would be nearly impossible to compare “apples to apples” for accountability purposes. We discussed several different ways to do it together and ultimately landed on where we are currently. This happened over many conversations and resulted in something we could easily explain to Ed. Partners and have meaningful conversations with sites regarding progress. That was not easy at all.*
 - Dana: Tracking the effectiveness and implementation of each action can be difficult. To help with this, we added a secondary discretionary code within our budget management system to see exactly the dollars being spent; we created teams to look at and monitor each goal and the associated metrics for implementation, effectiveness, and expenditure review throughout the school year.*
- **QUESTION:** What do you see most Fresno County schools struggling with?

RESPONSE:

Dana Budd: Addressing the size of the LEA is a crucial consideration, and we tailor our support to meet the unique needs of each. Our approach varies for single-school districts, mids, and bigs, recognizing the distinct requirements of each LEA category.

Moving forward, a significant challenge lies in carefully examining the needs and identifying opportunities to articulate support within the LCAP. For the first time, we are delving into actions that specifically target school sites and subgroups beyond English learners, foster youth, and low-income groups. This is an area we are focusing on, aiming to refine and enhance the support extended to our LEAs.

Time is a valuable resource, considering the multitude of responsibilities that LEA administrators juggle. Turnover adds another layer of complexity. Thus, our emphasis is on helping them recognize the LCAP as a deliberate document. We aim to be strategic partners, enabling them to work smarter rather than harder.

- **QUESTION:** How does KCUSD generally engage communities and families in the LCAP process?

RESPONSE:

Jose Guzman: Our approach to engagement encompasses both traditional and innovative methods. We employ surveys for staff, students, parents, and the broader community, a longstanding practice. However, a recent trend has emerged through our involvement with community schools in the state, shedding light on novel ways to communicate and involve not only parents and staff but also community members and partners.

Community schools align with the LCAP's core principles, focusing on determining the needs of our students beyond curriculum and instruction. This extends to career and technical education, peripheral services, and social-emotional support. One notable shift this year involves hosting community school-type meetings, emphasizing collaboration and partnership.

A highlight for me has been engaging with cross-cutting groups of students, representing various campus cliques. These sessions, reminiscent of my days as an activities director, involve open conversations where I share experiences, and students express their thoughts and desires for their siblings. It's an enriching experience that I highly recommend.

Additionally, we conduct workshops for families, exploring different formats for enhanced participation. Mr. Pack, leading this initiative, is considering innovative approaches while building on traditional methods. District departments contribute by hosting workshops aligned with specific goals, providing a platform for parents to share thoughts on what's going well and areas that need improvement.

Furthermore, we organize showcases and meet with smaller advisory councils throughout the year, ensuring varied avenues for engagement with our community. These initiatives collectively contribute to a comprehensive and inclusive approach to involvement.

- **QUESTION:** Dana, how are you planning on monitoring the new provision in the LCAP that asks districts to change strategies if goals are not achieved? I imagine that some initiatives will take longer to achieve goals than the LCAP provision permits.

RESPONSE:

Dana: We are planning on making what we are calling “one-pagers” for every LEA within our district. We will do some of the leg work for our LEAs by collecting and organizing the state-level data and other data points that are now required for LEAs to capture within their LCAP. This will allow us to have more deliberate coaching conversations, and it will also provide us with a document to reference when reviewing LEA LCAPS to ensure they capture all of the new requirements (required actions, DA, CSI, Equity Multiplier).

- **QUESTION:** If you have a COE and district that don't have a strong relationship or even a previously charged one, what would you suggest they do to begin building toward the trust and collaboration you've achieved?

RESPONSE:

- a. Jose: During the Open Door conversation, I mentioned the Ted Lasso line about trying to be “curious, not judgmental.” Ultimately, this is the absolute best advice I can provide. In all the years we have collaborated with the team at FCSS, I never felt “judged” by our support providers. Regardless of the person providing the support, the philosophy of our COE’s LCAP team appears to be one of side-by-side support and not one of “gotcha” type oversight. For any COE team or department, I recommend going “alongside” LEAs instead of directing what needs to be “fixed.” That is not to say that COEs shouldn’t tell LEAs when something needs “fixing,” but asking questions, understanding the local context for that LEA, and collaborating to arrive at what should ultimately be the final, compliant, and best for kids result. FCSS does this for us time and time again. We also mentioned “reciprocal accountability.” This will build tremendous trust. When the COE states that they will “be there to support the LEA” and then actually shows up and supports by being a thinking partner, solution finder, and not just an oversight provider.*
- b. Dana: We experience this often because of the amount of turnover our LEAs have experienced over the last three years and even changes within FCSS. First, give it time and be patient to listen and understand the LEA you are supporting. Coming alongside as a partner is critical. We never have a meeting with an LEA where they leave with more work after the meeting than before. One-on-one meetings with LEAs are often “working” meetings where we provide feedback, and get into the LEAs LCAP alongside them to talk them through necessary changes and adjustments. It provides additional clarity to the LEA around their local context, and everyone leaves the meeting feeling like something was accomplished.*