

WE DECIDE | WE WIN

To positively impact under-served students in their district, parents, students, and community leaders in West Contra Costa organized and advocated to direct the flow of new funding opportunities.

BACKGROUND

West Contra Costa families and schools

As a mid-sized district in California, West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD) serves nearly 30,400 young people across 54 schools in Richmond, San Pablo, El Cerrito, Hercules, Pinole, El Sobrante, and Kensington. The West Contra Costa region (WCC), and Richmond specifically, has a deep history of activism, rich diversity, and strong spirit of resilience which has continued to today as the community advocates for better education and health outcomes for their students in the face of significant inequities. Families in WCC have long felt a need for the district to better support students in reaching their full potential as well as invest in services that support students' mental and emotional health.

This case study is focused on the ways in which Richmond families, with support from Healthy Richmond, seized the opportunity afforded to them through the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) to advocate for the needs of their students. Looking back at the 2014-15 school year, when the District Local Accountability Plan (DLAP) committee was established, African American, Latinx, and Pacific Islander 3rd grade students met or exceeded standards in English Language Arts at lower rates (17%, 20%, 17%) than their peers (white: 52%, Asian: 47%). Additionally, 8th grade African American, Latinx, and English Learner students experienced an achievement gap in math performance (6%, 14%, 3%) when compared to their peers of other ethnic and language backgrounds (white: 33%, Asian: 40%), making clear the critical need to provide resources and interventions to support students from historically underserved backgrounds.¹

¹ *West Contra Costa Kids Can Report*. Go Public Schools West Contra Costa. January 2017. <https://gopublicschoolswwc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/KIDS-CAN-Report-5MB>

BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Building Healthy Communities (BHC) was a 10-year, \$1 billion comprehensive community initiative launched by The California Endowment in 2010 to advance statewide policy, support community-driven narrative change, and transform 14 of California's communities most devastated by health inequities into places where all people have an opportunity to thrive.

HEALTHY RICHMOND

As one of the 14 BHC communities, Healthy Richmond endeavored to make meaningful and lasting local policy and systems changes, improve the health and safety of residents, and become a place where all children are safe, healthy, and ready to learn.

The Healthy Richmond (now Healthy Contra Costa) staff engaged, convened, and coordinated community-based organizations and resident leaders in the initiative to collectively work towards health equity and racial justice in the community.

For more information about Healthy Richmond/Healthy Contra Costa, go to www.healthyrichmond.net

To have a truly positive school climate, students should be able to feel confident that they are cared for, supported, and that the expectations set for them are clear, yet data indicated that African American students, who made up just 18% of

“When you trust the system, you don’t ask much questions because you trust they’re doing what they’re supposed to be doing. But then you just realize when you get training, they help you to learn how to ask and what to ask.”

- Parent



the student population in 2014-15, were not faring well. These students represented nearly half of all out-of-school suspensions and 34% of all suspensions for defiance.²

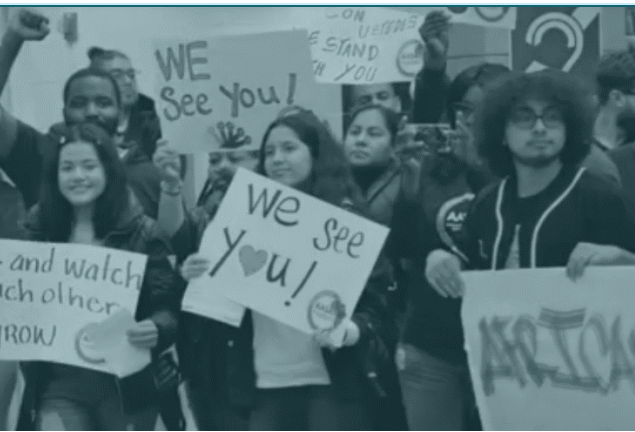
An opportunity emerges: the promise of the Local Control Funding Formula

Without adequate resources and support, these gaps and disparities can continue to negatively impact student learning and health outcomes, particularly for African American, Latinx, and English Learner students. Fortunately, the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) can serve as a vehicle to address these opportunity gaps, representing a significant shift in how California funds its schools. Enacted in 2013, the LCFF encompasses three broad principles: 1) funding schools more equitably, based on student needs; 2) making more decisions at a local level; and 3) measuring school achievement using multiple metrics (i.e. not just test scores), and supporting schools so they help students improve rather than punishing them for failing.³ A key component of the LCFF requires parent and community engagement in setting priorities via a Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), a comprehensive planning tool that describes how school districts plan to use funding (see next page for more detail).

Recognizing the opportunity to leverage the LCAP to advance educational equity, Healthy Richmond’s Schools and Neighborhood Action Team (SNAT) convened a group of parents, students, and community members to advocate around the LCFF and LCAP. The group wanted local voices to be heard and involved in bringing forth opportunities that support student success. By being part of the process, they could help make their dreams for their children a reality—namely, to develop and grow in a healthy school environment where they will have all the resources they need to be successful in school. **This case study tells the story of how parents, students, teachers, and partners worked together to realize their dreams and expand and preserve district resources for its highest-needs students and families.**

² Defiance is defined by CA Education Code 48900(k) which requires districts to report incidents involving students who disrupted school activities or otherwise willfully defied school personnel.

³ *Local Control Funding Formula Guide*. EdSource. Updated February 2016. Accessed on August 20, 2020 from edsource.org. <https://edsource.org/2016/local-control-funding-formula-guide-lcff/89272>



“Everyone has a right to learn. It doesn’t matter the color of our skin, the money their parents make, the languages we speak, the edge of our mind, the capacity to learn. Some in our schools are prepared to fail, which needs to be eliminated because everyone deserves a chance to succeed.”

- Student

How does the LCFF Work?ⁱⁱⁱ

LCFF by itself creates no new sources of revenue; rather, it determines how available state revenues will be distributed to districts in three main areas:

- **Base funds** provide districts with the bulk of their funding. These per-pupil grants vary by grade level and increase each year.
- **Supplemental funds** provide districts with 20% more funding for students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged^{iv}, English language learners, and/or in foster care (highest-need student groups).
- On top of that, when intended student groups make up at least 55% of a district's enrollment, districts receive **concentrated funds** equal to 50% of the base funding rate for its percentage of intended students above the 55% threshold.



Who are WCCUSD's Highest-Need Student Groups?ⁱ

The LCFF is structured to support highest-need student populations: socioeconomically disadvantaged students, English language learners, and youth in foster care—these student groups make up 84% of the total student population in WCCUSD.

- **70% Socioeconomically disadvantaged students**

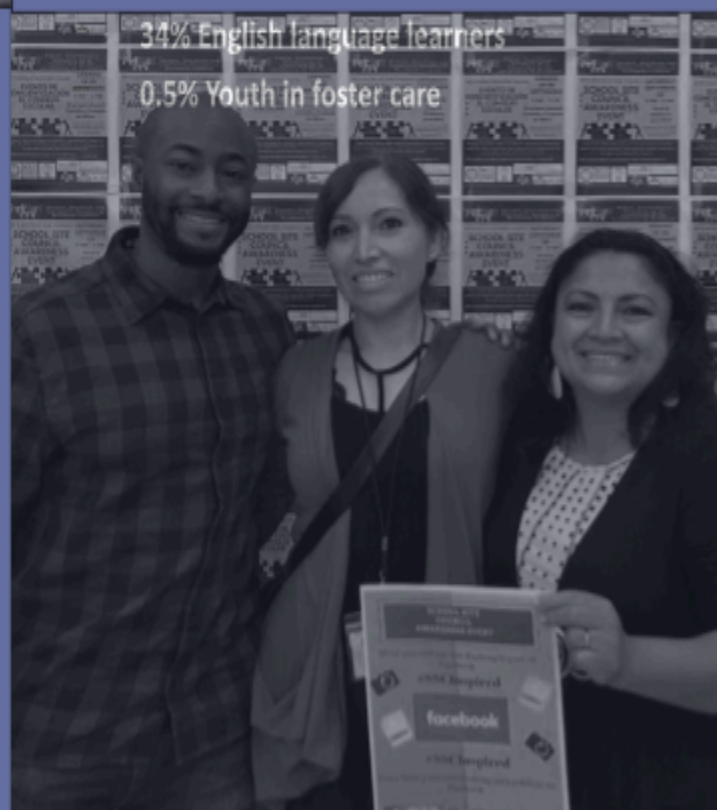
What is in the LCAP?ⁱⁱⁱ

The LCAP is intended to be a comprehensive planning tool to make the district accountable to students, parents, and community members by:

- listing the **goals** they are working to achieve,
- defining **outcomes** they plan to reach,
- detailing **actions** they will take,
- and tracking **expenditures** that fund the process.

The LCAP requires that districts set annual goals for students covering multiple areas of school and student performance that fall within eight broad priorities, grouped into three categories:

- **Conditions of learning:** basic school conditions; implementation of state standards; access to a broad course of study



BUILDING POWER

While the LCAP represented a potentially powerful opportunity for parents to have voice in funding decisions, it took some time before parents were able to adequately leverage that opportunity. In 2014 WCCUSD established the District Local Control Accountability Parent (DLCAP) committee (later changed to DLCAPS to encourage student voice). While this district-controlled committee was developed to provide space for parents to contribute to the LCAP process, it was not clear how. Indeed, the early years of the LCAP were marked by tensions between the district and community. The first community engagement meetings facilitated by WCCUSD were presentation-focused, did not allow for rich parent engagement, and did not include Spanish translation. For these presentations, the district borrowed heavily from a prior school-board-approved strategic plan that had goals which were too vague to understand and utilized spending categories that were so general that it was difficult for parents to engage in a discussion around them. Notably, no meetings were offered in the Iron Triangle, one of Richmond's highest-needs neighborhoods. Community members expressed frustration that meetings were structured in ways that did not support authentic community engagement, and district leaders were ill-equipped to design opportunities for meaningful community engagement. To make community engagement efforts more effective, the LCAP process needed support from community-based organizations that were trusted by Richmond residents and that understood how to navigate complex systems and policy environments. Healthy Richmond and its robust network of community partners stepped in to offer their support.

Healthy Richmond's SNAT had already been working with Richmond parents to help them articulate concerns around school climate, strengthen their understanding of and ability to navigate around school policies and systems as well as the capacity to effectively advocate for the needs of their children, and strengthen the sense of solidarity and belonging across the diverse community of Richmond parents. Recognizing the opportunity the LCAP process afforded parents to meet these goals, the SNAT made LCAP engagement a priority, focusing on helping parents to recognize, understand, and step into their power so they could leverage this opportunity.

Healthy Richmond's approach to power building is rooted in a deep respect for and belief in the power of community voice and the recognition that Richmond parents are leaders. Where parents needed support was in collectively harnessing and strategically leveraging their power to influence decision making. To this end, Healthy Richmond and its network of partners provided support by convening parents and community organizations to build the collective advocacy capacity of parents, caregivers, and students in Richmond. This included supporting parents in recognizing that the LCFF afforded them the power to influence how monies should be spent, and helping them to fully

SNAT and its Community Partners

SNAT's overarching goals are to improve outcomes in health and well-being, school climate, academic achievement, and community and student engagement in policy change. Comprised of Richmond parents, Healthy Richmond staff, and community-based partners, the team has a targeted focus on securing resources and advocating for policies that promote a positive school climate where students can thrive. Key organizations that partner and/or have received funding from Healthy Richmond to support for these efforts include:

- Bay Area Peacekeepers
- Bay Area Parent Leadership Action Network (PLAN)
- Building Blocks for Kids
- Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization (CCISCO)
- East Bay Center for the Performing Arts
- Latina Center
- Oakland Participatory Budgeting Process consultants
- Richmond High African American Family Support Services
- Safe Return Project
- Students for Education Reform
- West Contra Costa Parents Council
- YES Nature to Neighborhoods
- Youth Together

Technical Partners

- ACLU-Berkeley/North East Bay Chapter
- Education Trust-West
- Public Advocates

understand their rights and the mechanisms within the LCFF that hold districts accountable to the community and the legislation itself.

Healthy Richmond and its partners took a layered approach to power building, focused not only on ensuring that parents, caregivers, and students had a clear understanding of the LCFF and LCAP, and the opportunity afforded to them through the DLCAPS committee (and how to navigate this opportunity), but also building their advocacy capacity through a range of activities/strategies:

- **Close partnerships with youth organizers to amplify student voice.** From its inception, the SNAT worked closely with the Richmond Youth Organizing Team (RYOT) at [RYSE](#)⁵ to support youth advocacy capacity building and to support inclusion and amplification of youth voice in their advocacy and organizing work in Richmond schools. Parents and students attending initial training sessions on LCAP and developed and presented policy platforms to the school board during LCAP budget public hearings. This included ensuring that students were placed on the DLCAPS committee.
- **Workshops to increase knowledge around school policies and parents' rights.** Healthy Richmond and its partners provided trainings on how school district governance works, how to engage in participatory budgeting processes, and the history of advocacy in education. They also held trainings focused specifically on understanding the LCFF and the LCAP. One of the strongest achievements of this effort was the development of the “You are the Experts Curriculum,” which was developed by parents and community partners. This curriculum explained the LCAP using more engaging and accessible language (as opposed to policy or legal jargon) so that parents and family members could understand how it works, and how to get involved in the DLCAPS committee. To expand its training reach, HR partnered with East Bay Center for Performing Arts and parent leaders to create a brief LCAP [informational video](#). This enabled partners to share the film and host training at 10 school sites and various community venues.
- **Leadership training.** Healthy Richmond’s approach to leadership training begins with a recognition of the inherent leadership skills that parents already have and helping them hone and leverage those skills in service of advancing their advocacy goals. This included not only strengthening their knowledge in the key areas noted in the bullet above, but also providing individualized coaching support to help them strengthen specific skills that were critical for LCAP engagement, including mobilizing other parents to support these efforts, sharpening presentation skills, crafting succinct and actionable recommendations, etc. Some parents wanted more intensive advocacy leadership training and took advantage of an intensive leadership training hosted by the Center for Third World Organizing (CWTO). Offered over the course of a weekend, the training focused on building critical skills in community organizing, including developing a campaign strategy, canvassing, and participating in community action.

⁵ RYSE is an organization in Richmond that is focused on youth organizing and power building for Richmond youth and their families. It describes itself as a “movement led by young people that ensures dignity for youth, their families, and communities.” RYSE received separate funding from TCE to focus specifically on youth organizing and Healthy Richmond’s SNAT team partnered closely with RYSE in service of shared goals around the health and wellbeing of Richmond’s children, youth, and families.

“Everyone was doing it on their own—each advocating for ourselves directly. With Healthy Richmond it really gave us a place to come together. I think that has been really helpful.”

– Parent

- **Strategic networking.** Recognizing the power afforded through strong relationships, Healthy Richmond staff helped to connect parents with other community-based organizations that had strong advocacy and organizing experience and with influential district leaders, board members, and the superintendent. These efforts to support strategic networking afforded parents better access to decisionmakers and also gave those decisionmakers connections to key parent leaders in the Richmond community.
- **Community building.** In addition to connecting parents with community-based organizations and school leaders that could help support their efforts, Healthy Richmond provided space and opportunity for parents to build relationships with one another. Parents formed powerful relationships with one another over the course of their work together on SNAT and through Healthy Richmond-sponsored activities designed to support cross-cultural relationship building and a sense of belonging. These activities included a Richmond “Parent Power Convening” focused on storytelling, community-building, and celebration, a “School Site Council Awareness Event” to inform parents about their potential to influence their school’s budgeting process, and a series

Building Knowledge and Community: YES Healthy Richmond Family Camp

YES Nature to Neighborhoods provides access to experiences in the natural environment for youth, adults, and families living in Richmond and other parts of West Contra Costa County. In the fall of 2017 and 2018, YES Nature to Neighborhoods collaborated with Healthy Richmond’s SNAT to design a special camp focused on helping parents understand and engage around the DLCAP. Twenty-three parents attended the camp. Participant survey results indicated that an overwhelming majority of respondents left the camp having a better understanding of the DLCAP process, feeling more connected to their community, and feeling compelled to become more engaged in school advocacy and in their community in general. The final YES-Healthy Richmond camp was a SNAT Parent Retreat in early 2020 that focused on understanding how race equity impacted their policy advocacy work and review the Healthy Contra Costa new Vision, Purpose and Horizon statements that discuss their collective goal to eliminate anti-black racism in institutions.



of YES-Healthy Richmond Family Camps designed to engage parents in activities to learn about education equity and advocacy strategies. [See text box below for more details.]

The advocacy capacity building support provided by Healthy Richmond and its partners made a significant difference in parents' and caregivers' ability to engage more productively in the LCAP process. Much of their success was rooted in Healthy Richmond's ability to leverage the resources of multiple partners to provide comprehensive capacity building support to Richmond residents. As one Healthy Richmond parent leader shared:

We got to see the logistics of it, what are our rights, you know, the legalities to it. As a parent, I don't think I would've been able to achieve that on my own because it took a lot of resources. It took a lot of people coming in and sitting at the table for different points to be able to work out a plan of what we want to do with the LCAP. What are the changes that we want—immediate changes that we want to see, versus the long-term changes that are going to take time.

Their success was also rooted in their thoughtful approach to power building, which begins with the explicit recognition and promotion of parents and students as leaders and experts and is designed to meet parents wherever they are to support accurate understanding and effective engagement. At least two parents shared that this approach was much more effective than the district's approach in the first few years of LCAP engagement, which one parent described as "information presentations" from district staff that did not take the time to answer parents' questions. One parent described it this way:

The way that [Healthy Richmond] presents the information [helps] us to really understand. For me, they make me feel very comfortable asking questions and a plus was that I could ask in both languages. If they didn't understand my English, I could do it in Spanish.

Key Elements for Power Building

Building power takes time, particularly with communities that have been historically and persistently excluded from decision-making efforts. It also requires mutual respect and attention to trust building, and a firm belief that communities are powerful. In addition to these foundational elements, Healthy Richmond's LCAP engagement process illuminated key strategies for effective, community-centered power building. These include:



- **Creating safe spaces for participation.** Encouraging community members' active engagement in policy discussions and decisions requires more than simply inviting them to meetings, particularly in arenas where they have been historically excluded. It requires thoughtful attention to community cultures and context in order to create spaces for discussion that feel safe and welcoming. To that end, Healthy Richmond staff emphasized the importance of "meeting people where they are" so that they could engage productively and comfortably in the LCAP process. This included taking time to break down policy jargon, encouraging questions and discussion, and having bilingual staff in place so that participants could engage in either Spanish or English.



- **Investing in "reach" to ensure broad participation.** Healthy Richmond and its partners recognize how difficult it can be for Richmond community members to participate in workshops or trainings, given work schedules and family demands. To ensure access to LCAP information and trainings to as many families as possible, LCAP training development included a focus on creating common scripts and aligned messaging so that in the recruitment and engagement process they could ensure that they were sharing clear, accurate, and consistent information. As noted previously, they also increased access to this information by disseminating these trainings across multiple school sites and developing a film version of the You are the Experts LCAP training to support even wider distribution of information.



- **Creating paths for community engagement at different levels.** Recognizing differing levels of interest and capacity for engagement, Healthy Richmond and its partners offered multiple paths for engagement with varying degrees of intensity. Whether it be attendance at information workshops or town halls, participation on the DLCAPS committee, or participation in intensive organizing trainings, parents and students were afforded a range of opportunities to engage in ways that felt comfortable to them and that met their needs.



- **Cultivating strategic relationships and community.** Healthy Richmond staff recognize that cultivating strong relationships is key to building power. They focused on supporting relationship building between parents, advocacy organizations, and school leaders so that parents could have direct connections to decision-makers and to organizations that could help them achieve their goals. They also focused heavily on fostering strong relationships across families in order to create a sense of solidarity across cultures so that their advocacy efforts would be rooted in a strong sense of unity and belonging.



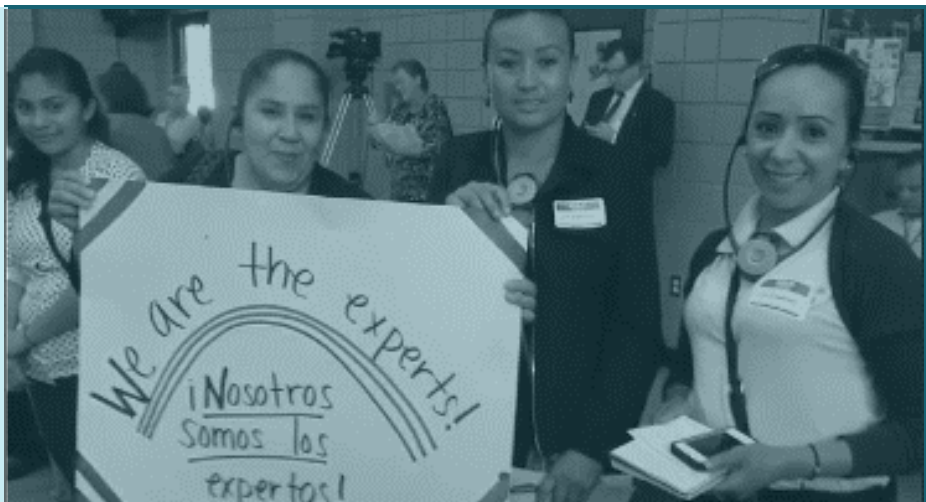
- **Attending to reflection and celebration.** Healthy Richmond staff shared that power building efforts should always incorporate time for reflection to learn from missteps and from successes. They added that taking time to not only learn from, but also acknowledge and celebrate their successes is critical for helping parents and students remain motivated, hopeful and better able to remain resilient against persistent challenges.

LEVERAGING POWER

Parents, students, Healthy Richmond and its partners began leveraging their power even as they were building it—asserting their voices at district and school board meetings, writing letters to the superintendent, and crafting DLCAPS committee recommendations for the district. Over the years, as parent engagement and advocacy strengthened, Healthy Richmond continued to hold the district accountable to the community engagement mandate in the LCFF and pressed them to be more transparent and to work towards a more authentic and trusting partnership with community members. Meanwhile, parents became more confident in their advocacy and systems navigation skills as they got better at knowing what to ask for and how to ask for it, resulting in demands that got clearer

“Parents have really ‘deputyed’ up....now we’re telling the school board [what we want]. Before, I think we were so disconnected that we couldn’t. That, to me, is a positive change and we’re now really taking ownership of our schools.”

- Parent



and more refined over time

The persistence of Richmond parent and student advocates and their allies resulted in a strong base that was able to remain resilient in the face of big changes happening in the district, such as the arrival of a new superintendent, Matthew Duffy, in 2016. While leadership changes can often result in a backwards slide in advocacy efforts, parent and student advocates on the DLCAPS committee bucked that trend and continued to issue their recommendations, urging the district to take specific actions toward increasing data transparency, improving school climate, shifting funding from school resource officers and community school officers towards investments for more student support services, and providing more and clearer opportunities for parents and students to engage in decision making that impacts the well-being of Richmond students.⁶

While the first few years of DLCAP community engagement was somewhat rocky, the persistence of parent and student advocates started paying off, not only in terms of stronger advocacy capacity, but also in contributing to incremental progress in key areas of concern, including:

⁶ [SNAT LCAP Recommendations timeline:](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1TmtgUFaoMpEXgcMx7jJrTDSadeqafbS/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=107560342837981232414&rtpof=true&sd=true)
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1TmtgUFaoMpEXgcMx7jJrTDSadeqafbS/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=107560342837981232414&rtpof=true&sd=true>

- **Shifting of funds to support positive school climate change initiatives.** In 2017, WCCUSD passed [Resolution No. 49-1718](#) which focused on the establishment of a comprehensive school climate policy. Through this resolution, the district formally acknowledged that African American, Latinx, and Special Education students were being suspended and expelled at disproportionately high rates and resolved to address and reduce these inequitable practices. The resolution provides a detailed plan for full implementation of Restorative Practices (RP) and School-Wide Positive Behavior interventions and supports (SWPBIS) at all WCCUSD schools, focused on deepening and extending positive, tiered interventions and alternatives to suspension, increasing instructional time, and reducing racial disparities. It also creates space for parents and students to have a role in the development of a tiered behavioral discipline matrix; a commitment to regularly collect, analyze, and share discipline data with the community; and a process for students and parents to appeal to the district for redress if RP or SWPBIS practices are not implemented. In successive policy platforms parents and students recommended the district sustain funding for the school-based health centers and hire a Positive School Climate Director. The district hired that Director and advocacy continues to ensure sufficient funding of the health centers and programs.
- **Timely access to school data.** Parents had long been frustrated by their inability to get school data in a timely way to help them make informed recommendations about school funding and how best to support their students. In 2018, Healthy Richmond partner, Public Advocates, worked with Richmond parents to file a legal complaint.⁷ In response, the WCCUSD signed a formal agreement to release school data in a more timely manner. One parent, Wendy Lopez, expressed her relief at this outcome, saying “It was like we finally achieved something. Now we’ll be able to work with the right tools and with the right data.”
- **Shift in DLCAPS committee bylaws to increase community control.** During year 5 of the LCFF implementation (school year 2017-18), Healthy Richmond provided technical assistance to the DLCAPS committee as it worked to rewrite its bylaws. While this ultimately proved to be a lengthy process, these efforts were critical in demystifying the LCAP process and creating clearer paths for community leadership. The updated bylaws clearly articulated how community members could join the DLCAPS committee, as well as a codified process for DLCAPS engagement. Perhaps more importantly, it articulated a shift in control over the bylaws (and, by extension, of the DLCAPS committee itself) from the district to the community. Strong parent leaders worked to design and facilitate the committee meetings and led an effort to create a Parent Leadership Council that ensured coordination and communications between parent Co-Chairs of the District Advisory Councils. Healthy Richmond Hub Manager, Roxanne Carrillo Garza emphasized the significance of this milestone:

⁷ *Complaint spurs Bay Area district to provide parents with more timely accountability data.* EdSource. July 24, 2018. Accessed on August 20, 2020 from [edsource.org](https://edsource.org/2018/complaint-spurs-bay-area-district-to-provide-parents-with-more-timely-accountability-data/600586).
<https://edsource.org/2018/complaint-spurs-bay-area-district-to-provide-parents-with-more-timely-accountability-data/600586>

The whole point of changing the by-laws was to flip the dynamic and actually have the DLCAPS leadership become more empowered. And I think it worked. I mean, for a while there were 20, 30 people coming up to those meetings. That was the point of it, really, just to have the parents lead it rather than the district lead it.



“I think the value is just understanding the energy that’s really out there. I mean, they (Healthy Richmond) were really involved last year around the positive school climate policy that we moved forward. So, I do see it as just a deeper understanding of what’s important to the community.”

- Matthew Duffy, WCCUSD Superintendent

- **Increased and targeted attention on African American student achievement and support.** Efforts by the African American Site Advisory Team (AASAT), a group of parent advocates focused on supporting and promoting the needs and successes of African American students, resulted in unanimous adoption of School Board Resolution 46-1920, which makes African American/Black student achievement a district priority, with the school board committing \$7.2 million towards this effort. This resolution resulted in the creation of an Office of African American Student Achievement, which is required to work in full partnership with the AASAT Executive Committee to manage and oversee programs focused on providing targeted interventions to better support African American students. While Healthy Richmond was not directly involved in the evolution and implementation of these efforts, they had focused much of its advocacy efforts, particularly in its 2015-16 LCAP recommendations, to pushing for more funding to support Richmond’s African American families by creating a taskforce to increase African American student achievement in 2016, the development of an Office of African American Student Achievement 2017. Both of these goals were eventually realized by the power of African American Parent leaders.
- **Seats at decision-making tables.** Fueled by their growing sense of knowledge, skills, and confidence around advocacy, a couple of parents who participated in the DLCAPS committee took the bold step of running for a position on the school board. While their efforts were unsuccessful, they have continued to exercise their leadership in other arenas. One now serves as an enrollment specialist a community health center, where she works to make sure immigrants have access to health care, and is Co-Chair the Community Schools initiative. The other currently sits on the City of Richmond’s Youth Commission and is considering running again for the school board in the next election cycle.

The growth in power for Richmond parents is evident in their ability to advocate more effectively for the needs of their children, their successful efforts at eliciting commitments from the school board focused on educational equity, and their persistence in holding the district accountable to these commitments. At the same time, the district has also grown in terms of its own relationships with Richmond community members and its increased recognition of the importance of meaningful community engagement. In fact, the district now has staff in place to support accountability and communications between district staff and the DLCAPS committee. As Healthy Richmond Hub Manager, Roxanne Carrillo Garza noted,

The district is actually now in a place where they are interested in how to engage the community in a more authentic way. This is the first time we’ve heard that—those words from them, and I think it’s because of the parents that have been involved to date.

SUSTAINING POWER: LOOKING FORWARD

The LCFF/LCAP has now been in place for eight years. Over the course of these years, Richmond parents, students, and community-based organizations grew their skills to become powerful advocates for educational equity. They clearly articulated their needs, demonstrated a stronger understanding of their rights and the opportunities afforded to them through the LCAP, and they built relationships with each other and with the district so that they could work better together towards shared goals. Healthy Richmond and its network of partners helped Richmond parents and students build a strong foundation for change.

Since 2020, however, the strength of this foundation has been repeatedly tested. The district underwent massive leadership changes in 2020, when four out of the five school board members were unseated during the elections. Then, at the end of the 2020-21 school year, Superintendent Duffy resigned. With all the leadership changes, the pivot to respond to the pandemic and the need to focus on relationship building with new school leaders, the potential for the district to revert to leading and facilitating the parent advisory spaces is high.

And then the COVID-19 pandemic hit, taking a disproportionate toll on low-income communities of color and further exacerbating the existing inequities that Richmond advocates have been working tirelessly to address. Still, the knowledge, skills, and relationships they built through their LCAP engagement enabled them to quickly pivot, mobilizing to ensure focused attention to the needs of their community through the pandemic. In May 2020, Healthy Richmond partnered with West Contra Costa residents to host “Building Parent Power,” a parent-led town hall that served as a forum for parents to voice their concerns about issues related to distance learning and the impacts of the pandemic. The town hall produced nine clear recommendations specifically focused on addressing problems related to equity, transparency, and inclusion and includes specific steps the district should take to measure and communicate progress. They then hosted online community sessions focused on welcoming the new superintendent and asking him to respond to their recommendations.

While COVID-19 stalled LCAP efforts, Healthy Richmond and its partners forged ahead in advocating for the needs of Richmond’s high needs students and their families who were experiencing severe challenges in the wake of the pandemic. They ran several platforms in 2020 and 2021, focused on sustaining funds for health centers and ensuring they had enough resources to support home visits, hiring a positive school climate director, providing services for justice-impacted students, and creating a Racial Equity Community Oversight council. Healthy Richmond also hosted community conversations focused on racial equity so that community members and resident leaders could more readily see the tie between racial equity and the goals of their advocacy efforts. Though SNAT and its community partners were persistent in their efforts to advocate in service of more equitable outcomes for Richmond’s high needs students, the challenges they have faced have been significant—from the sheer volume of continued and increasing needs resulting from the pandemic, to the communications and

“We actually were sitting at tables where we necessarily wouldn’t sit. People really started listening to us. The work that we did at Healthy Richmond around the LCAP really helped to push a lot of the work that we are also doing independently outside in different areas because our voices were really strong, I think, at these tables.”

- Parent

collaboration struggles they faced in their interactions with the district, to the personal toll all of this has taken on community leaders. As a result, several community leaders have shared a sense of exhaustion and burnout and work on the LCAP has slowed as a result. Recognizing the strain felt by community leaders, SNAT has narrowed its efforts to focus primarily on rebuilding the base of parent and student leaders and positive school climate as part of its LCAP and Community Schools initiative support.

Building community power is critical to ensuring that communities have voice in decisions that affect their lives and that they have the capacity to serve as drivers of the change they want to see. But building power takes time—and it requires patience and persistence to see results. It also requires attention to the care, healing, and rejuvenation needs of those on the front lines of change, as well as resources to continue building a leadership pipeline and expanding the base of community leaders that can support one another through challenging circumstances. Sustaining and continuing to build their power is critical for forward movement and for effectively holding the district accountable to its commitment to better serve Richmond students and ensuring that those who have been disproportionately negatively impacted by inequitable policies and practices (namely, African American, English Language Learners/Latinx, and special education students) are will be better served and provided the supports they need to thrive

End Notes

This case study was authored by Dr. Rachel Estrella and Laura Wong Ravinder with contributions from Dr. Sallie Yoshida from Social Policy Research Associates (SPR), the learning and evaluation partner of Healthy Richmond/Healthy Contra Costa, in the Fall of 2023.