



# Equity in Our Schools

How schools are working to ensure the success of each child



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# Introduction



***“For a long time, educators have been focused on this notion of ‘helping ALL kids succeed’ but that hasn’t necessarily meant each kid. What we actually need is to give each child the unique tools they need to learn. That’s equity.”***

Terry Metzger, Assistant Superintendent | Rincon Valley Unified

Two children are given access to the same teacher, the same textbook, the same computer lab. Does that guarantee they have equal opportunity to succeed in school? Increasingly, educators are saying the answer is no. If one of those two students comes to school hungry from having missed breakfast and anxious about his parent’s threat of harm, he may need extra support before he is ready to focus on learning in the same way as his counterpart who comes to school well-fed and confident in the safety of her home life. Indeed, studies show that childhood trauma can have lasting impacts on health and learning.

Educational leaders around California are realizing that providing students an equitable education means more than giving them equal access to traditional educational resources: It means making sure each child has the resources they need to succeed, from extra homework help to mental health counseling. They’re encouraging change through the Local Control Funding Formula — and local districts are heeding the call.



**SCOE has launched a multi-year commitment to promoting these ideas in our schools. Learn more: [scoe.org/equity](https://scoe.org/equity)**

# A Case Study in Equity

## A Change of Mindset

Since 2012, Santa Rosa City Schools (SRCS) has focused on promoting equity in schools as a way to build community, improve student learning, and reduce suspensions and expulsions. It all began when district leaders turned to Restorative Justice as a way to address the district's high number of suspensions and expulsions, which had raised concerns from advocacy groups and community members. But it has grown into much more than that, says Diann Kitamura, interim superintendent at SRCS.

"It's not a program," she says. "It's a mindset, a way of being. It's about how we build community at our schools so suspensions and expulsions don't even happen at the same rate." A simple phrase drives the work they do, she says. It is: **"Equitable access for equal outcomes."** At first, there was a concern it would be hard to get all staff members to embrace the dramatic changes that were taking place, she says, adding, "It's a different way of thinking."

## Meeting the Need

But SRCS leadership believed it was important to stick with the work in order to address the stark inequities in student opportunity revealed by a 2014 study commissioned by the Sonoma County Department of Health Services, the [Portrait of Sonoma](#). The study measured how Sonoma County residents are faring in three fundamental areas of life — health, access to knowledge, and living standards. It found that while students living in the Bennett Valley area had scores above those of residents in the top-ranked state of Connecticut, those living just a few miles away in the Roseland Creek area had scores below those of the lowest-ranked state, Mississippi. "The data is startling in terms of what's happening," Kitamura says.

Kitamura and then Superintendent Socorro Shiels, both new at the time, decided to support the work by providing the opportunity for 250 school staff and school community members to attend a training at the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, funded by a museum grant. Nearly everyone returned with



an invigorated commitment to change. "It was life-changing," she said.

Since then, SRCS has launched programs including:

- BEST PLUS (grant ): Fosters positive behavior through a mix of Restorative Practices, mental health support, interventions, and discipline.
- Restorative Justice program that has been incorporated into the LCAP by setting aside funding to hire Restorative Specialists and Family Engagement Facilitators .
- Collaboration with the California Teachers Association (CTA) to provide interested teachers with free training in Unconscious Bias.

The results are clear: SRCS was recently highlighted in [EdSource](#) as one of the most successful school districts in California in its effort to drop its suspension rate. But there's still work to do, Kitamura says. The majority of students suspended are Latino, and this is something her district wants to change. She says any district interested in restorative practices should "take the risk to do it." "Have the courage to fight for kids," she urges.

# The LCAP: Striving for Equitable Outcomes for All Students

## Equitable Access

Equity is at the heart of the [Local Control Funding Formula](#) (LCFF), California's new funding mechanism for school districts, marking a huge shift in thinking as the state strives to narrow the achievement gap for its students.

The system, which has been in place since 2013, is built on the simple but powerful idea that students with additional needs — English language learners, low-income students, and foster youth — require extra resources to ensure an equal education. LCFF provides an avenue for school districts to receive extra funding to support these students.

***“Equitable access to learning for all students is the underlying goal. Districts now have to ask themselves how they can most effectively fund services and actions that will have the direct impact on this goal.”***

Anna Moore | SCOE Director leading the LCAP approval process

## Spending Plans

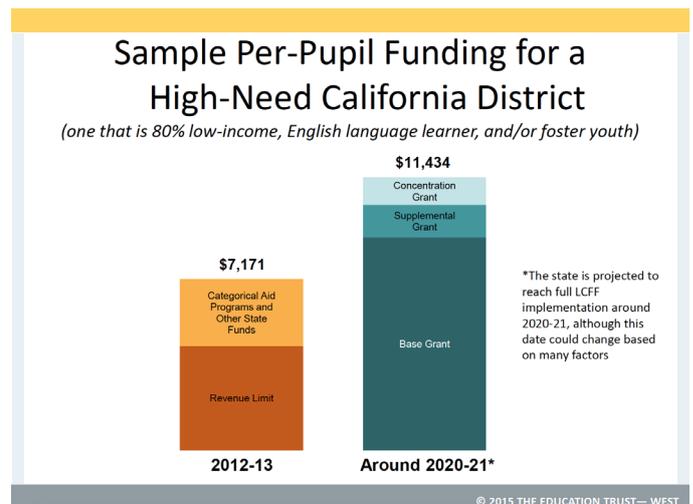
Along with the new funding formula, LCFF brings a new way for districts to plan their spending. Districts must create Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs) to ensure they're using their additional money to increase opportunities and close the achievement gap for the intended children. These plans are required to be developed with feedback and input from stakeholders and the community.

Teachers and school administrators have an important role to play in voicing what they perceive as the needs in the district — representing their and their students' needs, either as members of their school's LCAP teams or as individuals. This is a positive development, according to Moore. “When people are engaged in the process, there's more buy-in,” she says.

The new process also requires those in charge of finances and those in charge of instruction for each school district to come together in the same room to discuss what's best for kids. While some districts have done this as common practice, for many, “This is a huge shift,” says Moore.

## Get Involved

To get involved, teachers can start by reading through their district's LCAP. These plans can be accessed via [scoe.org/lcap](http://scoe.org/lcap) and on district websites. The section called Actions and Services is most relevant to teachers, as it outlines services students should be receiving in and out of the classroom.



Graphic courtesy of The Education Trust-West

## What LCAPs Must Include



*“Equality gives everyone the same thing. Equity gives them what they need, when they need it.”*

Jeff Duncan Andrade | Associate Professor of Raza Studies and Education at San Francisco State University and Co-Founder of the Teaching Excellence Network (TEN)

Graphic courtesy of The Education Trust-West



### Questions to Ask While Reading the LCAP

- What actions outlined here involve teaching and how can I implement them in my classroom?
- What kinds of services have been promised to stakeholders? How can I help with that?
- Are the services outlined here meeting the needs of all my students?
- Are they meeting the needs of my disadvantaged students specifically?
- How much extra money has my district received (in supplemental and concentration grants) to support disadvantaged students?
- How will this money be spent to specifically help these students?

### Don't Forget About Summer

LCAPs provide an opportunity to fund quality summer education programs, which are a proven way to narrow the achievement gap by reducing what is known as summer learning loss, where students lose the English and math skills they gained over the school year because of a lack of practice.

This loss is especially true of students who are socio- economically disadvantaged or are learning English as a second language. Across California, schools are addressing this challenge by funding innovative summer engagement programs that give children the chance to learn, grow, and build skills all summer long. Learn more: [summerlearning.org](https://summerlearning.org).



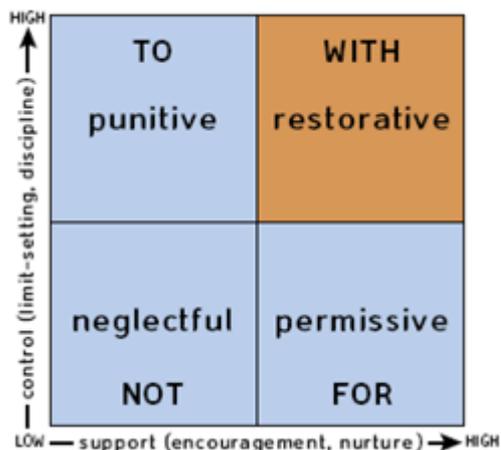
### Learn More

Ask questions, consult SCOE experts, and share stories at an LCAP Coffee Break.

Dates at [scoe.org/lcap](https://scoe.org/lcap)

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# Restorative Practices: A Voice for all Students



Graphic courtesy of p12.nysed.gov

## A Growing Trend

Across Sonoma County and beyond, many educators are embracing the idea that children are more engaged and ultimately successful when they have an active voice in their education. At the same time, California has named reducing truancy and increasing student engagement among eight key priorities it wants all school districts to address through the Local Control and Accountability plan process. These are among the factors driving an increasing number of local school districts to embrace the concepts of Restorative Practices and Restorative Justice.

Just what do these terms mean? According to the [International Institute for Restorative Practices](#) (IIRP), restorative work “is about offering high levels of support while challenging inappropriate behavior, encouraging acceptance of responsibility, and setting clear boundaries.”

“Educators are embracing a continuum of restorative practices that includes both proactive, community-building strategies as well as reactive strategies that seek to repair harm,” said Jessica Progulsk, student engagement coordinator at SCOE. She is working with school districts like Healdsburg and Windsor to implement these ideas. Other districts, like Santa Rosa City Schools (SRCS) and Rincon Valley Unified (RVUSD), have worked with other nonprofit agencies, like the Santa Rosa-based [Restorative Resources](#).

## A District-Wide Practice

Advocates for Restorative Practices encourage districts or schools interested in pursuing this concept to consider training staff in the concepts of Restorative Practices at every level, from counselors to key teachers to principals, so that everyone has the skills necessary to approach the work with confidence and consistency.



### Defining the Terms

**Restorative Practices:** A proactive approach to building community and good behavior through positive relationships, where those in authority involve those under their supervision (students) in the decision-making process.

**Restorative Justice:** A process of addressing wrongdoing and promoting accountability where those who have a stake in the offense collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations in order to make things as right as possible.

# Fostering Community & Preventing Problems



Students from various Santa Rosa schools take turns sharing their “rose and thorn” — a positive and a negative reflection on the day — in an afternoon “accountability circle” at the Restorative Resources office in Santa Rosa.

## Not Just for Discipline

Restorative Resources, a group that has taught Restorative Practices since 2001, has seen the practices grow and be embraced by the broader community over the years, says Executive Director Susan Kinder. “Things are quickly evolving,” she said.

What began in Sonoma County as an alternative form of discipline for at-risk teens has expanded into a set of practices that many schools are adopting as a way to build community and improve student well-being, even for young children.

RVUSD, a K-6 district, last year chose to adopt Restorative Practices as a way to help their older students stay engaged and work through conflict. They launched the program at three pilot sites. But first, all staff, from teachers to administrators to office managers, went through an important three-day training.

They learned how to hold “circles” where students and educators sit in a large ring for a discussion where everyone has a turn to speak. This year, the district has used the circles for everything from teachers introducing new curriculum to their class or addressing students interrupting a lesson, to counselors confronting bullying

with just a few students and their parents.

“Teachers have seen that the circle concept really does allow students to have a voice,” says Cathy Myhers, RVUSD’s director of student services, who said the work has dramatically decreased office referrals and, for some bullied students, restored a sense of safety on campus. “It just allows every student to have equal weight (in the conversation) or the option to pass. It’s not just a classroom with rows and four students who always talk and others who rarely participate.”

## Reaching Students Both Old and Young

Meanwhile, another program is underway with fifth and sixth graders from six diverse school districts from around the county: Cotati-Rohnert Park, Petaluma, Sonoma Valley, Wright, Windsor, and Roseland. The program is being coordinated by Restorative Resources, which received a grant from the California Board of State and Community Corrections.

The idea is that fifth and sixth grade is the time at which students start exhibiting the first signs of disengagement or troubled behavior that can potentially, according to the School to Prison Pipeline Research released in 2014, lead to suspension, expulsion, and incarceration in the teen years. Over the next four years, they’ll work with students to build positive self-image and self-control. They’ll involve parents as well as educators to support these young children in developing pro-social skills and growing in positive engagement within the school community and at home.

***“Our goals are improved confidence and resiliency over the years. It’s important that every student senses their value in school.”***

Susan Kinder | Restorative Resources



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### Online Resources

#### LCAP

[scoe.org/LCAP](http://scoe.org/LCAP)  
[cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/lcffoverview.asp](http://cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/lcffoverview.asp)

#### Restorative Practices

[scoe.org/restorative](http://scoe.org/restorative)  
[iirp.edu](http://iirp.edu)  
[restorativeresources.org](http://restorativeresources.org)

#### Equity

[scoe.org/equity](http://scoe.org/equity)



### Questions about this publication?

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