



Rooted in Community, Rising Together: A Decade of Advocacy and Partnership in Long Beach

**Children's Defense Fund-California
Education Equity Department**

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Dear Reader,

Children's Defense Fund (CDF) is a national nonprofit organization founded in the 1970s by Marian Wright Edelman. CDF has local offices around the country (California, the District of Columbia, Minnesota, Mississippi, New York, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas). Children's Defense Fund-California (CDF-CA) supports children and their families by focusing on four key issue areas: education, economic justice, healthcare, and youth justice.

CDF-CA's Education Equity department presents this report as documentation of our continuous support of local campaigns and our involvement since 2012 with community leaders in Long Beach, California. During this time, CDF-CA has supported community members' vision of a public school district that holistically supports young people through specific initiatives and supporting community members in becoming better advocates and leaders.

CDF-CA's footprint in Long Beach extends beyond community campaign support. One of our longstanding programs, CDF Freedom Schools®, has a site hosted by the Woods' family. *CDF Freedom Schools* is a summer literacy program that supports young people in their journey towards adulthood.

In our support of grassroots initiatives in Long Beach, CDF-CA has fostered strong connections with local leaders. There are plenty of amazing people doing amazing work, but Long Beach is not unique. Communities that look out for one another and support the development of youth are everywhere in this country, and each has its own leaders. Although CDF-CA is not everywhere, we encourage local leaders to reach out to CDF-CA or other local community-based organizations that can support the causes they advocate for.

Our theory of change calls on advocacy organizations to work alongside grassroots campaigns and amplify their voices in halls of power. The examples shared in this report highlight the work of our community partners in their advocacy and CDF-CA's support along the way.

We hope you will be inspired by the work of grassroots campaigns in Long Beach and implement some tactics and strategies in your advocacy for your communities.

Enjoy!

Children's Defense Fund-California
Education Equity Department

Children's Defense Fund-California: Education Equity

CDF-CA's Education Equity team amplifies community voices through advocacy which builds intentional and sustainable movement toward equitable policies, budgets, and programming. Within our advocacy, we continue to acknowledge polarization within communities and strive to foster connection among stakeholders and relevant decision makers.

The Education Equity team works at the local, county, and state levels to advocate for marginalized communities and the dismantlement of systems of harm that create disproportionate outcomes. Through our work, we advocate alongside community campaigns and leaders' and call on decision-makers to prioritize the well-being of the communities they serve.

Our goal is to create a network of advocacy tools and methods for grassroots campaigns to use and modify as needed. We want people to use these models to inspire radical change, exercise power in their communities, and visualize the effects of democracy as their common vision is implemented.



Executive Summary

Over the past decade, Children's Defense Fund-California (CDF-CA) has partnered with Long Beach community leaders to continue to develop education equity, to disrupt the school to prison pipeline, and to work to strengthen local advocacy. Through initiatives such as the Every Student Matters campaign, the progression of the Long Beach Education Connection (LBEC), and collaborations with local organizations, CDF-CA has helped organize parents, guardians, students, and residents to help better understand and change district policies and budget priorities.

This report documents our journey in Long Beach, highlighting the voices of community leaders, strategies, tools, and actionable steps. The goal is to provide a structured approach for community advocacy as well as offering practical tools from filing Public Records Act requests to crafting effective public comments that can be adapted and also applied in other communities.

The work in Long Beach shows us that systemic change is possible when communities are equipped with knowledge, educated on shared purpose, and supported by partnerships. While progress has been made, sustainability and expansion will require continued investment in development, equitable policies, and genuine community partnership.

Objective

The main objective of this report is to understand the framing of the work in Long Beach in the following ways:

1. **Document the Journey:** Capture the history of CDF-CA's partnership with Long Beach leaders, highlighting campaigns, initiatives, and milestones that advanced education equity and disrupted the school-to-prison pipeline.
2. **Elevate Community Voices:** Center the experiences and perspectives of parents, students, and grassroots leaders who shaped local advocacy efforts.
3. **Share Strategies and Tools:** Provide practical, replicable resources such as Public Records Act requests and effective public comment practices that can empower other communities to engage in systems change.
4. **Assess Progress and Challenges:** Reflect on what has been achieved, where barriers remain, and what lessons can inform future advocacy.
5. **Offer a Roadmap for Change :** Present guidance for sustaining and expanding community-driven reforms through leadership development, policy change, and ongoing engagement.

Key Findings

1. Community-led advocacy drives systemic change.

Long Beach shows that when parents, students, and residents are equipped with tools and knowledge, they can directly shape district policies and budget decisions.

2. Partnerships amplify impact.

Campaigns like Every Student Matters and the Long Beach Education Connection demonstrate the power of collaboration between CDF-CA, grassroots organizations, and local leaders.

3. Practical tools build power.

Strategies such as filing Public Records Act requests, crafting effective public comments, and navigating governance processes are essential for sustaining advocacy and can be adapted by other communities.

4. Progress is real but fragile.

While Long Beach has made meaningful gains in education equity and reducing the school-to-prison pipeline, maintaining momentum requires continued commitment and vigilance.

5. Sustained investment is essential.

Long-term change depends on deepening leadership development, advancing equitable policies, and fostering authentic community engagement—not one-time interventions.

Introduction

Children's Defense Fund (CDF) is an advocacy organization with the goals of (1) influencing policy on behalf of Black, brown, and children experiencing poverty and (2) assisting communities in their power-building efforts. CDF-California (CDF-CA) is the state branch that works towards these two goals in California. CDF-CA has a long-standing presence in influencing California policy since 1981 at the state and local levels.

CDF has maintained a longstanding presence in Long Beach, beginning in 2005 with the establishment of a local CDF Freedom Schools site® at Success in Challenges. *CDF Freedom Schools* are a network of enrichment programs that support K-12 students and their families by focusing on academic achievement, family involvement, and civic engagement. This program has been operating since 1995; almost 30 years later, *CDF Freedom Schools* operates in more than 100 cities nationwide.

Success in Challenges was the first *CDF Freedom Schools* site in California and has been continuously operated by the Woods family for almost 20 years. Students in their program have returned as student leaders and matriculated to college or trade schools. Many students and workers think fondly of *CDF Freedom Schools* as a pivotal point in their lives where they felt supported in their education and their new community. Success in Challenges is a local example of the benefits of intensive focus on literacy improvement, family engagement, and connection to necessary resources.

In the late 2000s and early 2010s, one of CDF's national policy priorities was ending the school-to-prison pipeline. CDF-CA was one of the state offices that took up this policy priority and soon, the Education Equity team connected with communities advocating for changes in their local school districts. At the time, CDF-CA was new to local policy advocacy but soon found its niche following the same framework used in CDF Freedom Schools. The Ed Equity team supported youth and families to become more engaged in civic life and learn advocacy skills to support themselves and their communities.

CDF-CA has supported the Long Beach community through youth and parent political mobilization since 2012. Across the state, community campaigns were organizing to end the school-to-prison pipeline through advocacy directed to changing school discipline policies. The California Endowment's initiative, Building Healthy Communities, flooded communities around the state with money to improve lifelong health and wellness for residents. CDF used this opportunity to partner with community campaigns in Long Beach to assist with analyzing local data about school discipline policies and student outcomes and advocating alongside the community to reform school discipline policies. This opportunity marked the beginning of CDF's advocacy support for Long Beach residents and led to the development of strong parent and community leaders for public education.

CDF supports community leaders advocating for: success and achievement for all students in LBUSD, improved family engagement, a community-led school safety department, and reimagining school counseling. These leaders look to CDF and our nonprofit partners (Public Advocates, ACLU SoCal, Californians for Justice, Latinos in Action) for assistance with policy analysis, hosting community info sessions, and support advocating directly with the Long Beach Unified School District.

After over a decade supporting families to become community leaders who change local policy, we have learned a few lessons: (1) change takes time, (2) sustained advocacy (team-building) is vital, (3) every advocate needs to know the systems of power, (4) informed constituents make better decisions than uninformed constituent. People should be trusted with the necessary information to make decisions that impact them.



CDF-CA in Long Beach

CDF-CA has been advocating for youth and families by emphasizing the power of local change throughout the state since the early 2000s. In the early 2010s, the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) and the California Department of Education (CDE) both made significant shifts in how they responded to inequity in educational institutions. The DOE began to take note of the role of exclusionary disciplinary measures and school pushout in the school-to-prison pipeline, and CDE adopted a new method of funding local education agencies through the Local Control Funding Formula.

This combination presented a unique opportunity of:

(1) A strong political momentum nationwide to end the school-to-prison pipeline (2)

Significant changes to local control for education agencies in California

(3) Increased grant funding to achieve these goals.

Thanks to the Building Healthy Communities grant, a place-based initiative to develop a collaborative structure with residents, community-based organizations, and government leaders², CDF supported residents to build power through policy and data analysis of suspension policies and data in Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD).

Alongside partner organizations like Public Advocates (which was instrumental in the passage of the Local Control Funding Formula), Californians for Justice (a youth-powered organizing and advocacy organization), CDF was able to support community leaders in their advocacy efforts to make change in their local school district.

Beginning in 2012-13, CDF-CA was one of many organizations that organized and supported youth leaders working to build supportive schools and avoid school pushout. This youth-led campaign, Every Student Matters³, marks the beginning of CDF-CA's policy involvement in Long Beach.

Since at least 2015, LBUSD (Long Beach Unified School District) has prioritized student academic success, college/career readiness, community engagement, and support for English learners in its budget document, the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP). However, significant changes do not happen overnight; as a result, CDF and other community organizations continued to support local leaders and the larger community by strengthening their understanding of relevant data and teaching them to use critical change-making tools. Interested adults and students became more politically involved and demanded detailed changes to planning documents.

In 2016, CDF-CA and Public Counsel (a public interest law firm) produced a report about the state of school discipline in LBUSD.⁴ Despite LBUSD's reputation as one of the nation's premier school districts, the data about school discipline and school pushout told a different story. We found that special education students, Black, Latino, and Pacific Islander students were most disproportionately affected by LBUSD's punitive disciplinary policies, while Black and Latino students were most disproportionately affected by LBUSD's over-reliance on law enforcement in schools. We recommended that LBUSD should create better school environments by investing in school climate resources that reduce exclusionary discipline and promote school safety through preventative measures (like mental health and social-emotional learning support) rather than responsive measures (like police involvement).

CDF believes that supporting students requires investing in positive school climates, academic support, racial justice, and social-emotional wellness. We called for greater transparency for the district's data related to academics, programs, and the impact of its safety policies. We also called for more genuine community engagement in shaping district policies and priorities moving forward. CDF's support for students and families focuses on ensuring those most impacted are involved and at the forefront of the conversations that shape local policy.

Since 2012, CDF-CA has worked with local campaigns and organizational partners to pursue educational equity. Partnering with members of the community led us to pursue budget accountability, improvements to LBUSD's community engagement model, program monitoring, tracking students' academic progress (including college/career), and changes to LBUSD's current policies and practices specifically related to safety/discipline and students' social-emotional health.

² <https://cdfca.org/about/who-we-are/our-history/> (founded in 98)

³ <https://sites.csulb.edu/HealthEquity/content/building-healthy-communities-bhc>

Supporting local campaigns

LongBeach EducationConnection (LBEC)

In CDF-CA's decade of involvement in Long Beach, we have interacted with hundreds of community members interested in making changes in their school district at various town halls, community-led events, and district-led events. There is no shortage of people who lead and advocate on behalf of their community; however, we have worked regularly with a group of parents and guardians who formed a coalition centered on ensuring education equity for students district-wide.

This coalition, currently known as the Long Beach Education Connection (LBEC), formed in the wake of a legal complaint filed on behalf of Latinos in Action, two parents of LBUSD students, and CDF-CA. In 2016-17, CDF stood alongside community leaders to file a complaint alleging the district's improper allocation of funds specifically earmarked to increase and improve services for high-needs students.⁵ This complaint resulted in a settlement that required the district to invest in students' mental health and social-emotional support, tutoring, and community engagement for three school years and include these commitments in the state-mandated budget document.⁶

Throughout the settlement, LBEC worked to ensure the district was held publicly accountable. LBEC co-hosted budget town halls with LBUSD, mobilized families to get involved in district budgeting, and submitted public recommendations⁷ for the district to adopt. LBEC ensured that LBUSD complied with education requirements. This coalition hosted information sessions for community members to understand public data and how to be an advocate for students in the district.

⁵ Untold Stories Behind One of America's Best Urban School Districts (2016), CDF-CA & Public Counsel

⁶ <https://publicadvocates.org/wp-content/uploads/2017-04-04-LBUSD-UCP-re-LCAP-w.-attachments-1.pdf>

⁷ Settlement achieved: (a) achieve a ratio of 250:1 students to counselors at select high schools, (b) establish regional Family Resource Centers, (c) implement a high school readiness program,

⁸ LBEC's Budget Recommendations

LBEC's recommendations over the past few years have repeatedly focused on meaningful community engagement, academic support, student wellness support, and differentiated support for Black and brown youth. The coalition continued to build on the progress made as a result of community organizing (the Every Student Matters campaign), support from nonprofit organizations ("Untold Stories"), and the legal system (the 2017 complaint).

LBEC has also been recognized as an influential voice in the district's budgeting process.⁹ Since the settlement period ended, this group has been key to achieving significant changes in the district:

- Development of the Black Student Achievement Initiative (BSAI), a comprehensive program that invests funding, programming, and services targeted to supporting Black students.
- Support for Californians for Justice's pitch for wellness centers at middle and high schools.
- Investments in restorative justice practices and policies as alternatives to referrals to law enforcement.
- Prioritizing programs and services for the students and schools that have the highest needs.

LBUSD Academic Performance Data

Looking at a single year of data rarely gives a full picture. Tracking LBUSD's student outcomes over time, across different student groups, reveals both real progress and gaps that community advocacy has helped name and respond to.

The table below shows the percentage of LBUSD students meeting or exceeding state standards in English Language Arts (ELA), by racial and ethnic group, from 2015 through 2025. Data is drawn from the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP), accessed through EdSource.

⁸ LBEC's Budget Recommendations

⁹ LBEC's Public Resources

Student Group	2015	2017	2019	2022 (post-CO VID) 33%	2023	2024	2025
African American Hispanic/Latino	31%	34%	40%		33%	34%	36%
White	33%	40%	48%	42%	42%	43%	45%
Asian	68%	75%	77%	73%	74%	74%	77%
All LBUSD Students	59%	66%	70%	66%	66%	68%	71%
	—	—	—	—	—	49%	52%

Source: EdSource CAASPP database, Long Beach Unified, 2015-2025.
<https://caaspp.edsource.org/sbac/long-beach-unified-19647250000000>

Student Group	2015	2017	2019	2022 (post-CO VID) 18%	2023	2024	2025
African American Hispanic/Latino	17%	23%	28%		18%	20%	22%
White	22%	32%	40%	26%	28%	29%	32%
Asian	56%	64%	69%	59%	62%	62%	63%
	48%	58%	64%	53%	53%	56%	59%

Source: EdSource CAASPP database, Long Beach Unified, 2015-2025.

The data clearly shows progress from 2015 through 2019, a decrease during the pandemic, and a gradual increase since 2022. Black students in LBUSD have consistently performed below white peers by 35% to 40% points in ELA and by 40 points in math throughout this period. These imbalances are what LBEC's advocacy and the development of the Black Student Achievement Initiative was designed to address.

English language learner students faced their own distinct challenges during the pandemic. As the data in this report reflects, English language learners showed increases in ELA testing after 2022, which LBEC has noted as a hopeful sign. The data also shows that English language learner students in LBUSD scored 31.8% proficiency in ELA in 2024-25, compared to the statewide proficiency of approximately 10% for English learners. While LBUSD may be above the state average in this case, the achievement gap between English learners and non-English learner peers remains substantial and demands attention.

Discipline Data and Racial Disparities

Suspension rates in LBUSD have declined over the past decade, a shift that reflects local decisions and broader changes in California's education policy. The district's suspension rate fell from 4.4% in 2013-14 to 2.9% in 2023-24, and further to 1.7% in 2024-25, compared to California's statewide rate of 3.3% in 2023-24. This is real progress and it is directly connected to the advocacy that community leaders and organizations in Long Beach have sustained over years.

At the same time, the racial gap has remained consistent. In 2014-15, Black students made up approximately 14% of LBUSD enrollment but accounted for more than a half of the students suspended, this shows the disproportionate harm. Statewide data from the California School Dashboard showcases that Black students in California continue to be suspended at rates nearly three times higher than the overall student population, and foster youth rates are even higher than that. These are not anomalies, these reflect the harmful structural conditions affecting Black and Brown students in Long Beach.

In 2025, the suspension rate for Black students in California was 7.7%, compared to a statewide average of under 2% for all students. Foster youth were suspended at a rate of 13%. These disparities showcase the importance of restorative justice programs, wellness centers, and safe passage programs. Without restorative life affirming programming, community voices will continue to be silenced, below we continue to highlight community voices with the intent to provide direct insight into the perspectives of Long Beach advocates.

SaferLBUSD

Since the Every Student Matters campaign in the early 2010s, CDF-CA has been involved in the fight to end the school-to-prison pipeline in Long Beach. Through decades of experience, these systems continue to harm marginalized communities at many levels, including the increased presence of police on campus, disciplinary policies that remove students from school, harmful policies that result in a loss of time in schools as well as a loss of education for students, and referrals to law enforcement.

In the early 2020s, LBUSD ended its contracts with police departments and removed the final law enforcement staff from campus. However, the district kept a security department that is authorized to use force, restraints, and chemical sprays on students.

On September 27, 2021, a former LBUSD student Mona Rodriguez was shot and killed by an on-duty LBUSD School Safety Officer (SSO).¹⁰ The officer was fired after a district investigation, but the community was outraged at the fact Mona's life was taken so early. A group of community members came together around the safety policies in the district to examine what needed to be changed so incidents like that never happen again.

The SaferLBUSD Campaign formed in the wake of Mona's killing. The campaign presented three demands¹¹ to the LBUSD district leaders on behalf of a community that prioritizes the safety of young people and making sure that all students make it home safely.

1. Fire the School Safety Officer who shot and killed Mona.
2. Defund and dismantle the School Safety Department and build a Community-Engaged system.
3. Listen to and care for the community.

At the time of this incident, LBUSD had a \$4.5M budget, most of which was spent on SSOs and other armed personnel. SSOs have the power to cite students and use physical force, pepper spray, impact weapons, and firearms.

In response to Mona's killing and years of documented harm to students at the hands of armed school enforcement, SaferLBUSD came together with a unified purpose. Community members, parents, and advocates developed a set of demands centered around the idea that every student deserves to be safe and cared for on school campuses. The demands are outlined below.

¹² Data sourced from CAASPP/SBAC scores

¹¹ 21-22 LCAP pg. 14 & Doug Otto at June 5, 2024 Board Meeting (timestamp, 2:19:30 - 2:20:40)

Safer LBUSD Campaign Demands

Defund & Dismantle School Safety & Build a Community-Engaged Safety System

SHORT-TERM REQUESTS *(by June 2022)*

1. **Commit to immediately disarming all school personnel** and not entering into any contract with law enforcement or private armed security. *(ASAP)*
2. **Collect and regularly report data** on incident reports, citations, referrals to law enforcement, and similar metrics by race, grade, offense, etc. until full dismantlement and transformation of school discipline policies occur. *(Monthly reports beginning December 2021)*
3. **Audit district policies and practices** that hurt students and contribute to their criminalization and exclusion. *(ASAP)*
4. **Form a committee or team** that is majority parents and students of color responsible for developing alternatives to policing. *(ASAP and draft policies to prep for 2022-23)*

LONG-TERM REQUESTS *(by June 2023)*

1. **Defund and dismantle the School Safety Branch** *(by June 2023)*
2. **Develop a School Climate Department** to house alternatives to safety, including mental health professionals, restorative justice practitioners, counselors, social workers, nurses, culture keepers and school climate advocates, and related professional development, including de-escalation training for all staff. *(by December 2022)*
3. **Using the findings of the audit, create alternatives to punitive policies and practices** that encourage and empower students *(by Aug. 2022)*
4. **Reinvest in enrichment programs** such as art, music, dance, theatre, and practical life skills (ex: gardening, trade work, etc.) that are culturally competent. *(by Aug. 2022)*

Listen & Care for Community - *Immediate*

1. **Offer space** for students and the community to process and heal.
2. Create a list of **mental health resources on every school website and all social media** for all students, teachers, staff, and parents/guardians.
3. Commit to fund, support, and partner with the Safer LBUSD Campaign to **hear from students/ families** about what safety could and should look like for their communities.

Since the campaign developed, it has been effective at: (a) collaborating with decisionmakers to replace retiring safety officers with staff that focus on de-escalation and prevention, (b) changing disciplinary practices to prioritize students' instructional minutes, (c) encouraging the district to survey students and their opinions on making their schools safer, and (d) advocating for investment in safe passages programs in high-need areas.

Where are we today?

Our collaboration with the LBUSD for the past few years have helped us achieve some of our goals. We now have:

- Students missing less instructional time
- Less punitive interactions between students and staff
- More investments in support staff, violence intervention, and prevention
- Safer areas around schools due to Safe Passage Programs
- Better understanding of students' feelings of safety and belonging at school
- Better understanding of School Safety Officers' roles
- Utilization of Wellness Centers in middle and high Schools
- Revised position for Director of School Safety to include Violence Prevention and Restorative Justice
- Hired and trained Restorative Justice staff
- Updated Comprehensive Safety Plan for every school
- Transparency around safety shared at school board and community meetings

Black Student Achievement and the Black Student Achievement Plan

Across California, Black Student Achievement Plans, or BSAPs, have become a more visible part of how districts are trying to respond to disparities that have existed for a long time. These plans are meant to address gaps that show up across academics, discipline, and access to opportunity, and for many communities, those gaps are not new. They have been part of the educational experience for years, often shaping how students move through school and what opportunities are available to them along the way.

In Long Beach, those patterns are still present. When you look at the data, issues like suspension rates, absenteeism, and access to advanced coursework continue to show uneven outcomes across student groups. These are not isolated challenges or short-term fluctuations. They reflect deeper conditions that have been built into the system over time. While there have been efforts to address them, the impact has been mixed, and in many cases, the same disparities continue to surface.

LBUSD's Black Student Achievement Plan represents a response to community concern from LBEC and other advocates who named these gaps publicly and demanded resources be offered to those in need. The BSAI invests dedicated funding, programming, and services targeted specifically at supporting Black students. In May 2026, LBUSD appointed Dr. Lushandra Prioleau to lead the newly formed Center of Black Student Excellence, signaling a continued institutional commitment to this work.

In 2025, 36% of Black students in LBUSD met or exceeded the state ELA standard, compared to 77% of white students and 52% of all students district-wide and 22% of Black students met or exceeded the standard, compared to 63% of White students. These gaps show improvement in recent years but have remained largely unchanged since 2015. Efforts like the BSAI are important, but they require consistent effort, accountability, and engagement to make a meaningful and lasting difference.

English Language Learners in Long Beach

Long Beach is a highly diverse district, and that diversity is especially visible in the number of students who are learning English while also keeping up with their academic work. Students come from a wide range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and that diversity shapes the classroom experience in meaningful ways.

At the same time, English language learners in LBUSD face real challenges that community advocates have consistently named. In 2024-25, English learner students in LBUSD scored 31.8% proficient in ELA and 59% proficient in math. While these figures exceed the California statewide rates for English learners by a significant margin, the gap between English learners and their non-English learner peers within LBUSD remains a priority concern. English learners statewide scored approximately 10% proficient in both ELA and math, meaning LBUSD English learners are substantially outperforming their state peers while still facing structural barriers within the district itself.

These gaps are often connected to structural challenges: inconsistent access to language support services, limited culturally responsive instruction, and barriers that make it harder for families to stay connected to schools, particularly for recent arrivals and families with limited familiarity with the U.S. education system. Martha C., whose advocacy work through Latinos in Action California has focused on English learner families, has named this directly: many families do not know what questions to ask, and the system is often not designed to help them find out.

Community advocates through LBEC have consistently recommended that LBUSD invest in robust multilingual family engagement, interpretation at all public meetings and school events, and ongoing support for the Long-Term English Learner population, a group at particularly high risk of falling behind. The state's 2024 California School Dashboard showed that Long-Term English Learners scored 104.5 points below the ELA standard on average statewide. Closing these gaps requires not just programmatic investment but a genuine commitment to building stronger connections with families at the school site level.

***CDF Freedom Schools* and Education Justice in Long Beach**

Schools are only one part of how young people experience education. For many students, especially those navigating systemic barriers, community-based programs play an important role in providing additional support and opportunities for growth.

Programs like *CDF Freedom Schools* are rooted in a long history of community-led education efforts. Originally developed during the Civil Rights Movement, the model was created in response to the lack of access to quality education for Black students. It was never just about academics. It was about building confidence, strengthening identity, and helping young people see themselves as leaders in their own communities.

Today, that approach continues through programs that combine literacy development with mentorship and leadership opportunities. These programs often create spaces that feel different from traditional classrooms, spaces where students are encouraged to engage more fully and connect their learning to their lived experiences. In Long Beach, efforts like this can complement what happens in schools and provide an additional layer of support, particularly for students who may not feel fully served by the system.

As this report develops further, additional information is being gathered to better understand how these programs are operating locally and what impact they are having. That will help clarify how community-based efforts fit into the broader work of addressing disparities in the district.

Foster Youth and Educational Stability

For students in foster care, stability can be one of the biggest challenges affecting their education. Changes in placement often lead to changes in schools, and those transitions can interrupt learning and make it difficult to build consistent relationships with teachers and peers. Over time, that instability can have a lasting impact on academic progress.

Policies in California have been put in place to try to reduce these disruptions by allowing students to remain in their school of origin whenever possible and by providing additional support. These protections are important, but they do not eliminate the challenges entirely. Foster youth often face overlapping barriers related to discipline, attendance, and access to resources, many of which connect to the broader issues outlined in this report.

In Long Beach, supporting foster youth is part of the larger effort to create more equitable outcomes across the district. Doing that effectively requires not only strong policies but also consistent implementation and attention to how those policies are experienced by students in practice.



Connecting Past Advocacy to Current Conditions

Long Beach has a long history of community advocacy focused on improving educational outcomes and addressing inequities within the school system. Many of the changes that have taken place over the years are the result of sustained efforts by families, community organizations, and local leaders who have pushed for a more equitable approach.

Between 2015 and 2019, those efforts contributed to important shifts, particularly in how discipline was approached and how accountability was structured. There was a clear move away from practices that disproportionately affected certain groups of students, along with a stronger focus on tracking outcomes and identifying gaps.

At the same time, more recent data shows that while progress has been made, disparities have not disappeared. Black students and English learners continue to experience uneven outcomes across several key areas. This reflects a broader reality about this work. Change takes time, and it requires ongoing attention to ensure that progress is not only made but sustained.

What emerges from this analysis is the importance of continued collaboration. Addressing these challenges requires alignment between schools, community organizations, and policymakers, along with a shared commitment to responding to what the data shows and what communities are experiencing.

Supporting Students and Families Impacted by Immigration Enforcement

For many students and families in Long Beach, concerns around immigration enforcement are part of their daily reality. These concerns can have a direct impact on school attendance, engagement, and overall well-being. When families are uncertain about their safety or stability, it affects how students show up in the classroom, both physically and emotionally.

Schools and community organizations play an important role in creating environments where students feel safe and supported, regardless of their immigration status. This includes making sure families have access to accurate information about their rights, as well as connections to trusted legal and community-based resources. It also means being intentional about communication, ensuring that families know that schools are spaces where students are protected and supported.

Organizations such as Orale, Immigrant defenders law center, and the LA justice fund are all resourceful organizations that provide aid to those harmed by immigration enforcement.

Immigration assistance org links:

- ORALE: Organizing Rooted in Abolition, Liberation, and ...ORALE: Organizing Rooted in Abolition, Liberation, and Empowerment<https://www.oralc.org>
- Los Angeles Justice Fund Vera Institute <https://www.vera.org> › publications › los-angeles-justice
- Immigrant Defenders Law Center | nonprofit immigration legal ...Immigrant Defenders Law Center<https://www.immdef.org>

Conversations with our Communities: In Their Voice

The voices within this report belong to parents and community members who have lived this work, not observers describing it from a distance. We here at CDF felt the importance of speaking with members of the community because of their perspective on partnership, what has worked and what hasn't. Their insight and perspective is more honest than anything we could write about ourselves.

Four community leaders appear throughout our conversations: Jerlene T., Kim T., Lilia O., and Martha C. Each came to advocacy through a different door, and each has stayed long after the moment that pulled them in had passed.

Jerlene is a parent, entrepreneur, and small business owner who describes herself as having been "birthed by CDF." She has organized for her community for more than 20 years before she had language for what she was doing, and now she moves wherever the community's needs take her.

Kim, an LBUSD parent, stepped into deeper leadership in the summer of 2020, after George Floyd's murder, and has stayed engaged in education advocacy even though her son has since graduated.

Lilia served as president of LBUSD's District Community Advisory Committee and has spent the past decade pushing for equitable education on behalf of district students and families.

Martha founded Latinos in Action California and has spent years organizing around the education of the whole child, work she carries with the same urgency in Long Beach as in the communities surrounding it.

What follows are excerpts from our conversations with them.

Q: What brought you into this work?

JT: My foundation in this work dates back to 2007, when I participated in CDF's Ella Baker training on Alex Haley Farm in Clinton, Tennessee. This training taught me what it means to be a "servant leader" - to stand with my community in times of need, to advocate with my community to achieve our demands.

KT: I have been involved in education issues since my son started LBUSD in kindergarten. My goal has always been to improve outcomes for all students, including their academics, career opportunities, and overall wellness. I was really drawn to advocating for better student outcomes because of Black students, in particular. For decades, LBUSD has been failing its Black students and families by inadequately preparing them for life after graduation. As the mother of a Black child, racial reconciliation and improving student outcomes drew me to this work and kept me tethered to it. After I saw the data about poor academic performance, lack of community engagement, and general failings in LBUSD, I knew I had to stay involved and inspire other parents and guardians to get involved as well. Really, I'm not doing anything new; I'm carrying the work that was started by generations before me.

Q: What does community mean to you?

JT: Community is the unity of people coming together... usually around a united goal or something that binds them. It's really about unison.

KT: Community is your chosen family that you've gone through common experiences with. It's the group of people that come together to improve our lives and our neighborhoods.

Q: What does community mean to you?

LO: Community is an extension of my home and my space. It includes the people I engage and interact with regularly, including families at my local park, my children's doctors, and more.

Q: What brought you into this work?

LO: My children were in Early Head Start (a system of comprehensive care and services that LBUSD offers to families with children from 0-5) before they started kindergarten in LBUSD. When they were in this program, I was an alternative representative at my school site. When my children started kindergarten, I continued to stay involved and served on many committees.

Finally, we spoke with Martha C., a community leader and organizer advocating for the education of the whole child in Long Beach and the nearby area. She is the founder of Latinos in Action California, a group that encourages members to become leaders in their community.

Q: What does community mean to you?

MC: Community is the family that grows around the needs that I have and the causes I support. I feel motivated to continue to fight on behalf of families who are going through struggles I went through. I don't want them to go through these struggles alone, especially the English learner families, because those are the same struggles that I went through alone. Both have helped us make public comment and gave our testimony more value with research, statistics, and structure. CDF and Public Advocates have helped us organize community leaders through LBEC and taught us about new policies that will affect us and policies happening in other places that we can use as models.

KT: CDF and Public Advocates have helped us stay focused and build a structure for our advocacy. Both organizations have helped us develop resources and shared a lot of really useful information. They have helped families understand complex information by really explaining things, breaking them down, giving examples, and finding other districts that we can look to for what's possible. They have always been very professional and helpful. Because of their help, we have a stronger relationship and can rely on these organizations to support us and come to meetings and rallies.

Q: What changes have you seen in your community since getting involved?

JT: I have seen positive and negative changes. There has been a greater respect for parents and stakeholders through the support of CDF. We should be respected just because we're parents. We are customers, and the district should automatically grant us respect, but that has not been the case. With CDF at our side, we have more of a voice, more authority, because they know we have experts at our side. We have been able to expand our thoughts outside of Long Beach and look at other school districts. We can see what they are doing, how they are modeling things, what has worked

MC: I started advocating for education issues, especially for English learners, because of my son and because it was a problem that showed up a lot in my community. A lot of kids were going through these experiences in schools through the years. I didn't know what questions to ask or how to help my son and other English learners, but I knew that other parents were going through similar struggles and still are to this day. I used to think the system was broken, but I learned that it was designed this way. And what has not, and we have been able to integrate that into our own work. We have access to trainings outside of Long Beach that we would not have been able to do. We would not have known that we were able to sit in these workshops and connect with other organizations. But that's only because of the knowledge that has been brought in.

MC: We have had collaborations with the district for community forums, and those have opened doors for more people to know about our work. They found out about our advocacy and knew what we were doing was right. We had different races, cultures, communities come and learn. We also had the opportunity to connect and work more closely with the Superintendent. There have been a lot of possibilities. I have been invited to be part of a legal settlement and community trainings. The fact that we have been able to train and inform our community in education and how to advocate to do certain actions like speaking up and making public comment, all of that really helped our families have the courage to speak up in front of decision-makers and say who they were, why they were advocating, and what was their need. And we've had really good progress mobilizing families.

We've had the support of CDF and Public Advocates to be able to do this. We have had a lot of very important and positive changes. The most positive thing is that now parents are not concerned or worried about being more vocal with the district and being active in advocacy.

KT: I have built good relationships with people on the inside. I have access to more information and I know who to contact if something is happening in the city or at a particular school. Whether it's my kid or another's, I have more access to help. I'm also really glad that there are budget line items to support Black students. School sites are incentivized to focus on learning outcomes for Black students, and it's in writing. It feels very intentional!

LO: LBUSD has given us more chances to express ourselves, and during the pandemic, they really opened up opportunities for parents to communicate with the district. We wanted a more permanent change, but they did offer remote public comment and home visits, and more regular communication with families. Unfortunately, some of these did not continue after the pandemic.

But for [some] low-income families, technology wasn't the best approach method. We're not always up-to-date with the latest technology; there's a barrier, and we don't always have the access or knowledge to utilize it. It seems like the district is paying attention and has heard our asks, but we need a lot of resources. We have asked for a lot of things, and they have made some of them happen. I'm sure there have been more changes, but these are some of the highlights that come to mind.

Q: How have CDF and Public Advocates (support organizations) supported you and the issues you care about?

JT: CDF and other organizations have supported us for years. They have worked with us to train community leaders, create opportunities for families to engage, and support parent voices. They have helped us understand policies and how they connect to the issues we care about. Some of these organizations are still here and doing the work to support our community, but the support has changed over the years.

MC: CDF and Public Advocates have supported us with trainings, researched and shared information for community actions, and always been available and ready to support us as leaders. The community does not always have the capacity to do these things, but there are a lot of leaders who rely on CDF and other organizations to support our advocacy. CDF and Public Advocates have given us guidance to take the next steps in our work and given us fundamental support.

LO: CDF and Public Advocates have shared information for families and made it easier for us to understand complex things like the district budget and how to navigate the school district and different things. I have also learned more about how to help English learners and students in special education.

Q: What is your vision for the future?

JT: I would like to see more collaborative work across all organizations working to improve the success of students in Long Beach Unified School District and the quality of life for the people of Long Beach.

MC: My vision is to have a space where we can host our meetings and be able to share more information with families. I want to continue collaborating with CDF, Public Advocates, and other organizations to reach more families and host more trainings. Workshops, important updates, public policy education, prepare parents for actions and campaigns coming up because things change every year. We need to keep pushing the district, right? Make sure that they're responsible and that they create these policies and implement them appropriately.

CDF envisions a future where marginalized children flourish, leaders prioritize their well-being, and communities wield the power to ensure they thrive.¹² We share our partners' stories and their visions for the future to inspire community leaders across California.

LBEC's Vision for the Future

LBEC has established itself as an important voice in district budgeting, as one of the few grassroots group that regularly shares community feedback with the Board and high-level administrative staff.¹³ This group hopes to continue building power in the community, encouraging political engagement, and supporting young people's success and well-being.

The group plans to bring in a new generation of leaders that will continue to advocate for students across the district for the next decade. Student well-being and success are community responsibilities. LBEC leaders know that effective advocacy takes time and people power.

Q: What is your vision for the future?

JT: I would like to see more collaborative work across all organizations working to improve the success of students in Long Beach Unified School District and the quality of life for the people of Long Beach.

MC: My vision is to have a space where we can host our meetings and be able to share more information with families. I want to continue collaborating with CDF, Public Advocates, and other organizations to reach more families and host more trainings. Workshops, important updates, public policy education, prepare parents for actions and campaigns coming up because things change every year.

We need to keep pushing the district, right? Make sure that they're responsible and that they create these policies and implement them appropriately. That means we really need to have outreach to families and support from organizations. We want families more equipped to take action. I want to help them be more active and learn different ways of advocacy.

¹² LB Post article about School Safety Officer Gonzalez facing murder charge for Mona's death

¹³ Board Member Doug Otto at June 5, 2024 Board Meeting (timestamp, 2:19:30 - 2:20:40)

LO: For the future of education at the district level—well, obviously, for equity. There's a lot of equity missing in school sites. So we have to get rid of those barriers for children who are low-income, who are English learners, who are high-needs. For the schools—to have that support system for students and parents. We always want families to feel welcome, for them to feel wanted at their school site, for them to be treated with respect and dignity. That's important for the school community, the nation, and humanity in general.

Teachers also need resources, tools, and creativity to be able to make sure that students have an interest in education. To make sure students want to be educated, continue to be educated, and for parents to be able to support that at home.

KT: Overall, I want to see us making systemic changes to policies and practices in the district that are hampering the success of students. You know, expanding tutoring and professional development with a racial justice lens. It's happening in little pockets, but it's not a systemic conversation happening with the teachers, the janitors, the admin staff. Everyone should be on the same court as far as how we treat students as our customers. As you know, if there are no students, there's no staff.

So really that's my hope. That enough of us make change to see students have a better sense of belonging. Attendance is not an issue. They're getting good grades. They're able to express themselves. I want students to feel like I really wanna go to school. I love my school.

Q: What more needs to be done?

JT: More education for those who want to do the work. Understanding of how to read a budget, understanding of what a PRA [Public Records Act] is, and what is the effectiveness of it. How to read a policy and understand how it applies to what's happening locally. How to use your voice and tell your story.

MC: Well, we all need more funding, right? So we can do the trainings and continue running our programs. We have a lot of challenges like funding and staff to provide these workshops and trainings. There's also a need for interpretation, so we can be more accessible to other families who are interested and want to come to these. Student leadership programs are in English, but the parent leadership needs help for Spanish speakers.

LO: We need more parents involved. More coalitions around the community. So we need to be creative about how to get people involved. Maybe we don't just share opportunities for public comments; maybe we send a message out to find more people with the same need. We can also ask if there are any needs they have that are not being addressed. People have more needs than they realize, you know. So it's necessary that they get support so we can have more equity in schools. If we start working together to solve our problems and our needs, we'll be able to help a lot of students who share the same needs.

We know that we have a need, a high need, for resources and staff to help the students. For that same reason, we need to involve more parents and continue with trainings and workshops so the community can understand budgets and how they affect our children's education.

KT: Definitely more education to parents and guardians. More ways that they could feel empowered. I hear from so many parents and they feel like, well, I can't do anything. You know, the district, the school site decided we can't do anything. They just have this sense of hopelessness because they don't feel very much empowered. Sometimes, they feel really isolated, and like this is happening to their child and they have to figure it out and sort it out and go up against the principal or district or whatever.

Education looks like different processes and procedures that families need. Like what to do if I need to take my child out of school early, what do I need to do if my child is failing? There is some level of responsibility and accountability that we should have to ourselves to say, "I reached out to the teachers and staff but no one called me back." I'm using education in the broader sense of having a space for families to talk about the basics, you know? Questions like, "Do you know your children's teachers? What are their names? What classes are your children struggling in? Do you know those teachers' emails? Do you have Canvas¹⁴ on your phone? Do you know you can check their grades?" You know, those kinds of things. I would say, you know, even if 10 or 12 of you go talk to the principal, it would make a difference. There's definitely power in numbers. When they reach out to me and Jerlene, we try to connect them with other people at their school so they can move the needle together. Definitely more education on all the things and more ways for them to feel empowered.

What more can be done? Maybe for us to have a way to talk to different people, principals, staff, and students to connect about what we're doing and to get support. You know, whenever I'm at the football games, that's an opportunity to talk to people about stuff, get their input, and find out what their concerns are. So I think about, you know, what would it be like to engage folks when they're here? This is the notion of really meeting people where they're at. They're not going to meetings, not going to the board meeting, DELAC [District English Learner Advisory Committee], DCAC [District Community Advisory Committee], all those meetings, you know.

Getting on the phone to call 10 people and say, "Hey, Sankofa Village is happening on Thursday. Are you in? Are you coming? There's childcare." There's those kinds of things that develop that relationship.

JT: Providing training and opportunities to engage. Sharing resources, funding activities, and funding opportunities for people to do this work. Continue to support parent voices.

Q: How can CDF support this vision?

MC: Trainings and workshops will be really helpful. Offering childcare, snacks or food, interpretation. I would like someone to come talk to the youth and someone to talk to the parents. That makes for a stronger collaboration. We have the people ready to learn—the parents, families, common issues. We would need organizational support to train these families, someone to share the knowledge and expertise.

Also, make sure that the *CDF Freedom Schools* model and program are not just limited to the summer.

LO: Supporting parents to get involved in this process. Like guiding parents, sharing resources, providing the necessary support system like transportation or childcare. Sometimes, create workshops that provide important information to support movements. Sometimes, opportunities to take action, give testimony.

¹⁴ <https://childrensdefense.org/>

KT: The same level of engagement that we've had with CDF. It is a place where I can go if I have questions or if I need help with something, if we need to bring people together. If folks have legal or technical questions, like is this allowed, can schools do X, Y, or Z?, continuing to be available and helpful is a good way for CDF and other organizations to support us. Really keeping us motivated, pushing us, and reminding us of the bigger picture keeps us going. Especially during budgeting seasons when people are on high alert about what was spent, what was not spent, what is left over, and what we do going forward.

Compensating parents and encouraging parent participation is important because there are a lot of parents who have struggled to come to meetings and stay involved because of issues like transportation, childcare, or food. Financial support for really engaged volunteers would be great, because they spend hours on things and it would be great to support these parents with grants to work on some projects.

Q: Why should more people be involved in education advocacy?

JT: If we don't invest in our children right now, if we don't invest in their education, we are not going to have a generation of people to take care of the old people. Education is the foundation, right? Education is the foundation for everything, and then it's an expectation here in the United States that we attend school and take that information to continue educating ourselves—you know, whether it be a trade or a school.

It shouldn't just be parents, it should be anyone who is interested in the well-being of not only our city but the well-being of our country and the well-being of the world. Because our children need to become world citizens, be able to see, be able to understand that what we do here can impact what happens on the other side of the world and vice versa.

MC: It's always going to be important for people to get involved because we always have to be attentive. We have to let the district know that we're monitoring, supervising, ensuring they're doing their job. It's important that more families are able to do this work on their own and share their skills with their communities.

It's important to get more families involved so we can help children reach their full potential and be successful. Right now, we're just doing this at the Long Beach level, but maybe we can coordinate with other districts in the future so we can advocate at the state level with the Department of Education. This can all inform the work that we do and that other groups are doing around the state.

LO: If only one person is requesting a change, then they're not listened to most of the time. When there are more people asking for a change or an improvement, then there's more opportunity for them to say they are in support. If we all work together, we can impact a large number of students.

KT: Politics show us that we need to be much more involved in each other's lives to survive. If we want to leave the world a better place for the young generation, it's important to get involved, because you're doing a service to your family and your community. You're building a village. It helps give you a sense of belonging in your community, and is fulfilling when you know we can come together and feel connected. This is why we get involved, to build community, support our kids, support ourselves, and build a better future. We cannot keep things the way they are.

Q: How do the advocacy tools you learned help your community?

JT: I have a different experience with CDF than most people do. I served as a site coordinator at a local *CDF Freedom Schools* program and attended multiple trainings through the Ella Baker Child Policy Institute. This model taught me tools that I apply to community advocacy and what the bigger understanding means for young people and for children. It was exciting! That greater understanding of what social justice means wasn't my norm; it was something that I learned—access to that and being able to deliver a program and see what it means to engage or to have experience engaging with parents. I also had the opportunity to be part of a pilot program, the Parent Engagement Institute, that was written by Dr. Rousseau from USC. There were things taught on how to engage parents and to be able to tell stories. In that storytelling, we find out what the issue is that needs to be addressed. How do we tie that to our voting rights?



So I have these tools that have been built over almost two decades. I just take what applies or what is useful for the moment, and I apply it. One of the things that is taught in both the *CDF Freedom Schools* model and the Parent Engagement model was how to use your voice. That's the first tool, your own voice. How to use it, how to be comfortable with it, how to tell a story.

MC: You know, once someone has been through trainings and workshops and has those skills, they can use them to support our students. These tools help families grow as leaders. Families who haven't had support now have these new skills and have become better advocates. I encourage people to share their story in the newspaper. Look to your local newspaper and ask to share so others can know about what you went through and how you solved it. We will show that the community is waking up. Other parents and community leaders will see the work that is happening and want to collaborate.

LO: We need to keep utilizing them, keep insisting that we want the students to achieve success, keep letting the district know what our goals are. There are problems that are happening at school sites and the district, and we use these to help make the community aware and hold the district accountable. Even though we want to advocate for students, sometimes it's necessary to have a focus, a target, where to begin. These tools give us that clarity and the empowerment to ask for something tangible, something that can actually pass. Something I can point to and say hey, I demanded this happen and this is how it's happening. Even if we don't always get exactly what we ask for, we know how to do it and can use it to advocate for more things that we need. We take it to continue advocating. Students need things, so we need to pay for them. For that to happen, we need to know who to ask and what to ask for, because many times the school sites and the district depend on each other or can only do certain things.

KT: Everything is tied to the budget. If we don't have the budget for something, then we know it's not going to happen. If we think about the whole child, the whole district, all of these things are connected to the issues we care about. Safety, student belonging, enrichment programs. If we are able to see the thread of how it's connected, maybe through storytelling or something like that, then I think that would help with our work a little bit more. I think these tools have helped people see the connections. Oftentimes, it's like families don't want to talk about the budget, but they want to talk about the lack of something happening in their school, right? Not realizing that it's connected to the budget. I think making connections is something we should do a better job at. Not just at budget season, but year-round. Hosting mini budget clips to help people say, we got two million dollars for this, this is where it went, and how to impact what money gets spent on in the future. Oftentimes, the "why" is missing. If people don't understand why this is important from a budget point of view, then they see the end result that they wanted without realizing the other impact this would have. Connecting our work to the budget so people have a real sense of it makes us accountable to each other.

Q: How can people get involved?

JT: That's kind of a tricky question because I think people need opportunities to engage. You know, just telling someone, "Oh, go to the school board meeting" – I don't think that's meaningful. They have to know why they're going to the school board meeting. They have to understand what it means for them to attend a school board meeting. What's on the agenda? How does it impact them? How do the policymakers connect to them in their community? Going back to the education part, part of that education is understanding where they fit in the scope of the work or the district. What are the key relationships?

MC: People can help cover needs. For example, if some parents need help with transportation, families can carpool. If some parents need help with interpretation, a bilingual community member can translate to help make sure everyone understands. Someone can help with childcare. People can share their voice at public comments, emails, in committee meetings. They can join trainings and workshops, especially if there's an incentive for people to come out and no barriers that would stop families from coming.

LO: Not all parents are connected, so an easy way to get involved is to reach out to your community and let them know. Let them know there are groups that they can join to get involved and have their voice heard. Doing outreach is important, but it's hard too. Well, maybe not hard, but it needs a lot of effort to be able to pay attention to everyone you reach out to. And when they decide to get involved, because you have to keep them updated on what the opportunities are to learn things and do things. Then, you have to remember that parents have to work, sometimes more than one job. So that's on the table too.

And why? Sometimes, some people don't understand the importance of being present. School isn't going to do the work by itself a lot of the times. We need to be able to support families to do extra help at home. I think it's changing a little bit, but we can still see that there's a lot of improvement that can be done.

KT: Honestly, I don't know. Not everyone wants to come to meetings, so we should have specific work for folks to do and come in where they can support. Obviously, they can be involved by us reaching out and asking them; but if it's not task-oriented enough, some people won't get involved or stay involved.

Community Advocacy & Legacy in Long Beach

The Long Beach education advocacy landscape has been shaped by grassroots coalitions such as the Long Beach Education Coalition (LBEC) and more recent organizing efforts like Safer LBUUSD. LBEC emerged in the mid-2010s as a coalition of parents, advocates, and community based organizations working to advance education equity, strengthen relationships with district leadership, and hold systems accountable to the needs of students and families. The coalition was most active during a period of heightened community engagement around education policy and school conditions and eventually disbanded in the early 2020s, reflecting both shifts in organizing structures and the evolving nature of local advocacy work.

Similarly, Safer LBUUSD emerged around 2020–2021 in response to urgent concerns around student safety and school policing, particularly following incidents that catalyzed community organizing and calls for accountability within Long Beach Unified. The campaign mobilized families and advocates to push for safer, more supportive school environments rooted in prevention and care. Although it is no longer active as a formal campaign, its impact remains visible in ongoing conversations around discipline, safety, and student support. Together, these efforts represent critical chapters in Long Beach's education justice history, demonstrating the lasting influence of community-led advocacy in shaping more equitable educational systems.

How to Be a Leader in Your Community

Securing dignity, hope, and joy for our youth requires all of us to be involved in their education. These advocacy tools and the Know Your Rights toolkit are a good starting point for developing your leadership skills. If you want our help making change in your community, reach out to CDF-CA.

Organizing & Advocacy Tools

Identify a problem affecting your community. We all have problems like school, jobs, healthcare, taxes, and policing. These problems are usually only taken seriously after many people speak up about the same thing. Collective outcry and advocacy are the best way to make a change you can see in your community.

CDF-CA's Education Equity team has supported communities advocating for solutions to problems like Black student under-achievement, lack of language access for English Learners and their families, misallocation of local education agencies' budgets, safety policies, and supporting students' well-being.



We're always on the lookout for equity issues. If your community is facing any of the issues listed above or other issues like school closures, lack of support for target groups like students with disabilities or foster youth.

Organize around this shared problem

Connect with your community. Ask your family, friends, and neighbors to see if anyone else is facing the same issues as you. Host community meetings, start a text/email chain, and stay in touch on social media. Share resources and things you have learned about this issue.

Once you have identified your community's shared problems and found a group of people suffering from these problems, reach out to CDF-CA to ask for help. Our organization is here to help you build your political power and to amplify your voice.

Know Your Rights

This report includes a set of practical "Know Your Rights" tools designed to demystify how families, caregivers, and community members can engage with public systems and advocate for student safety, educational equity, and accountability. These tools include guidance on providing public comment at school board and district meetings, step by step instructions for submitting Public Records Act (PRA) requests, an overview of how to engage with Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAPs), and pathways for participating in district and community forums that shape education policy and practice.

Use advocacy tools to reach your vision

1. Tool #1:PublicRecordsActRequests

What is a PRA request?

The Public Records Act (PRA) is a California law that allows anyone to request official public records (Cal. Gov. Code 7920.005). You can submit a request for public records to your local government agency, whether that is your local school district, your county's Office of Education, the state's Department of Education, or anything else the government operates.

Most of the time, you will get a copy of these public records. Usually, the government agency will send you a copy electronically or in print. Sometimes the government will not send the records to you, but they will let you go in person to read them. Sometimes, you may have to pay if you want a physical copy of these records.



Although you can get a lot of information from these requests, there are some exceptions. All these exceptions require clear legal justification to deny access to the requested records. Right now, there are more than 50 exceptions to sharing information under the PRA. Most of these exceptions are based on protecting privacy interests, keeping government efficient, and the catch-all reason – “the public interest served by not disclosing the record clearly outweighs the public interest served by disclosure of the record” (Cal. Gov. Code 7922.000).

Why would I use it?

You can use a Public Records Act request to find important information about the agency, program, or service you want to learn more about. For example, PRA requests can help you find the answers about how much your school district spent on literacy intervention, how much your city spent on improving roads, or which businesses got public contracts.

These records can help you develop quick-to-read fact sheets and resources to share with your community. We recommend you partner with CDF or another community organization that can help you analyze the data and understand the records.

PRA requests are one of the most useful tools for California residents to hold the government accountable to the communities it serves. When you combine these requests with some of the other tools, you will build your skills as a community leader and advocate.

How to write and submit a PRA (sample)

2. Tool #2: Public comment and meetings with decision makers

What is public comment?

Public comment is the official term for sharing your opinion at a government meeting. School districts and county offices of education have opportunities for comment during their public meetings. It is your right as a resident, regardless of immigration status, to share your input on government activities.

You can share public comment about anything on the meeting’s agenda or anything not on the agenda if it is related to something within that agency’s control. If you speak on something outside that agency’s control, they have the right to stop your public comment.



For example, if you go to a school board meeting and talk about the conditions of the classrooms at a school in the district, that is okay even if it is not on the agenda. On the other hand, if you go to a school board meeting and talk about the conditions of the local jail, the board can stop your public comment because the school district has no jurisdiction or control over the local jail.

Generally, the government officials will not respond to anyone's public comment directly, but it may be a factor in their discussions during the meeting or at a later time.

Pay attention to the public comment rules at the meeting you plan to attend! Some common rules to look out for are a certain time limit for each comment, a maximum number of commenters, whether sharing can be in-person or virtually, and even arrival by a certain time to provide comment.

Why Would I Use It?

Public comment is your opportunity to share what you think about what the government is doing. The government is required to consider your comments before making final decisions on the topic at hand. These comments are all included as part of official meetings and are included in recordings of the meetings themselves. Usually, the government does not make a transcript of these comments; however, if there was a recording of the meeting, anyone should be able to see or hear the commenters.

If you mobilize your community around a particular issue, make sure you get your voice heard as much as possible! Go to community meetings, share your concerns, and put pressure on your representatives.

How to Make Public Comment (script)

Public comment is not the only way to share your concerns with decision-makers. You can also request to meet with your elected officials and other government staff to share your concerns in more detail. These meetings are important because you can have the opportunity to speak directly with the people in charge. You can share your concerns in more detail, share any resources you have created, and work together to discuss how to achieve your goal.



If you can show that there is community support for your concern or if you can get a community-based organization to help, it will be easier to have these meetings. You should request a regular meeting schedule and come prepared to discuss your concerns and find a solution.

How to Prepare for Your First Meeting with a Decision Maker (including sample meeting questions)

If you can meet with a decision maker, come ready to talk about your issue, solution, and any questions. These meetings are critical opportunities to plead your case and learn more about how to make the changes you want. You should meet multiple times throughout the school year to check in on the progress and share real-time feedback.

Talk About Your Issue

These meetings are about the issues your community is facing. If you have a lot of issues that need to be addressed, make sure you plan enough time in your meeting to talk about them.

Bring any stories from your affected community and any data that backs up your claims. The more information you can point to, the better for your cause. Speak passionately and confidently; you understand the problems and how they affect your community.

Share Your Solution

Imagine that you are in charge of fixing the problem. What is your ideal fix and why? How will it help the community?

These are the questions you want to be ready to answer. Before your meeting, you should be prepared to share your ideas about how to fix the problem. It's okay if you don't have a perfect answer, but if you are prepared with your vision you can have more control in steering the change from the beginning. Don't forget to bring stories from the community and data that back up your solution!

Remember, sometimes change takes time. If your issues are not fixed immediately, keep the pressure on. Keep meeting with decision makers, keep using other tools here, keep reminding everyone that the issue has not gone away and the solution is not in place. Change will only come if you do not give up the fight.

Ask Questions

It's okay not to know everything. These meetings are also a great opportunity to learn more. We've listed some questions below that we recommend you ask during your meeting. You can use these, add your own, or mix and match.

1. What programs and services are available to help with my community's issue?
2. How can we fix this problem for future generations?
3. When can we meet again?
4. Who else can help me with this issue?
5. (If you are told you cannot do something, will it be or is it a legal issue?) ... Why can't it be done? Is it because of political reasoning? Take notes.

Take notes throughout the meeting. Write down the feedback about your issue, contact information for key people, and the answers to your questions.

These will be helpful for you and your community as you continue your advocacy. If you are splitting up tasks among different people, this helps keep everyone up-to-date. It's also helpful for sharing updates with larger groups because you can make shareable resources and track timelines of change.

3. Tool #3: Filing Complaints

What are the types of complaints?

In California, you can file a general Uniform Complaint Procedure (UCP) or a more specific UCP – the Williams complaint.

What is the Uniform Complaint Procedure (UCP)?

The general UCP is what you use to file a complaint about how your school district or county office of education violated state or federal law about specific programs. State and federal programs that receive specified funding like the Local Control & Accountability Plans (LCAP), Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), school site councils, and after school education and safety programs are subject to the UCP.

What is a Williams Complaint?

Williams complaints are school site specific. If you have a complaint about instructional materials, teacher vacancies or misassignments, or facility conditions that pose a threat to students' health and safety, you should file this type of complaint.

Why Would I File a Complaint?

If your school site, school district, or county office of education violates state or federal law, you can file a complaint. Sometimes, demanding change and public shaming are not enough. If your or your student's rights are violated, you should file a complaint to hold the government agency accountable.

If you decide to file a complaint, please seek help from a community-based organization or a lawyer. This is an official complaint that will be resolved in negotiation or potentially through the courts. It's important to have someone who understands the law on your side.

How to File a Complaint (template & instructions)

Your school site, district, or county office of education should have information to help you file a complaint. In California, our education system leans heavily on local control, so you should always look to your local school system to assist you in this process. However, if you want to complain about your county office of education, you will likely file a complaint with the county itself or the state.

For more information, visit the state Department of Education website.

Copy of [LBUSD UCP](#)

Copy of [LACOE UCP](#)

4. Tool #4: Reading an LCAP

What is an LCAP?

School districts, county offices of education, and charter schools must share a budget document—the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP)—every year. California law requires these local education agencies (LEAs) to engage with the community and produce a public document that can hold them accountable. The LCAP is required to include specific goals, actions, and metrics that you and your community can use to keep your LEA in check.

How to find your LCAP?

Search your school district, county office of education, or charter school's website for the "LCAP" or the "Local Control and Accountability Plan." Your LEA should post a timeline for engagement, instructions for engagement, drafts of the LCAP, and the final version.

Example: Go to Google and search LBUUSD LCAP. Make sure the link you click is the official website for your district. Check the timeline for opportunities to engage in public meetings and review the drafts to stay up-to-date on planned spending.

How to Read a Budget (instructions)

Budgets can easily be over 100 pages long. There is a lot of information, but the goals, actions, and metrics are the most important topics for community campaigns to focus on. There are state requirements to include certain information, especially for "unduplicated pupils"¹⁵ in annual LCAP updates.

Hint: Read with your concern in mind.

If you are concerned about extra support for foster youth, look for an action or goal directly related to that target group.

If you are concerned about investments in enrichment programming, look for goals or actions related to out-of-school programs or electives.

If you are concerned about tutoring availability, look for an action or goal that discusses how tutoring will happen in the district.

¹⁵ Board Member Doug Otto at June 5, 2024 Board Meeting (timestamp, 2:19:30 - 2:20:40)

In all cases, it's important to remember that some districts leave things like enrichment programming and tutoring to school sites after making funds available. The LCAP is usually not the LEA's only budget document, but it is one of the most helpful for public accountability.

Follow these instructions to get information from your district's budget...

1. Search your key term (Ctrl / Cmd + F), and pay close attention if it shows up in any of these sections—community engagement, goals, metrics, actions.
2. Once you find the public feedback (hint, look for this in the public engagement section) and district plans (hint: look for this in the goals and actions sections) for that topic, pay attention to the amount of money invested in the topic and how the money is planned to be used.
3. Pay close attention to the programs, services, and metrics the district lays out in this section. The district should share information through the year to show if they are meeting their goals and to reflect on how the plans are going.
4. Keep track of this information through the year at board meetings, through Public Records Act requests, and through meetings with decision makers.
5. Make resources to share this information with your community. Create 1-pagers with easy-to-read data and a few paragraphs to explain what's going on.

If you can't find your key term, read each goal and action to look for your topic of interest. Follow the same steps listed above to stay informed about how your district plans to spend money to support students.

5. Tool #5: Storytelling

What is storytelling?

Storytelling is how you share your story with your community. This is one of the most useful organizing tools and one of the most flexible. At CDF-CA, we think it's important for community leaders to share their stories widely and confidently.



How to Share Your Story

Storytelling can happen in many different ways. You can write a letter to the newspaper, record and upload videos, tell a community organization that can support you, talk to people on your block, or anything else you can think of. Every method of storytelling brings something different to your advocacy, so don't be afraid to use a combination of these.

If you want to record and upload videos, all you need is a camera and access to social media. You can create your own hashtag, page, or group to get the word out.

If you want to talk to your community, you have a lot of flexibility in getting the message out. Go door-to-door, stop folks on the street, talk about it at the park or at your school. Take any opportunity you can to connect with folks about the issues you're facing. Host community trainings to update folks on what you have learned, what data you collected, and how they can use these tools to help move the needle.

If you want to use the news, you should contact tv stations, radio, and the paper. Tell them about your issue and what's happening to your community. Tell them why it's important that it needs to change and what you want the change to be.

If you want to ask a community organization for support, find one that does work related to your issue. Reach out to them just like the news and ask directly for support. You might need to share more information and will likely need to stay in regular contact.

Conclusion and Call to Action

This report reflects years of work led by parents, supported by community partners, and shaped through ongoing engagement across Long Beach. At its core, it tells the story of what can happen when families, young people, and community leaders stay organized, stay consistent, and continue to push for change. The progress captured here is not the result of a single effort or moment. It is the outcome of sustained advocacy, relationship-building, and a shared commitment to making schools safer and more responsive to the needs of all students.

At the same time, this work is not finished. Moving forward, what matters most is how these efforts are carried forward and built upon. That means continuing to pay close attention to how policies are implemented at the school level, making sure commitments translate into real experiences for students, and recognizing that this responsibility is shared. District leadership, community organizations, and families all play a role in shaping what comes next.

For community members, staying engaged remains critical. That can look different for everyone, whether it is speaking during public comment, participating in school site councils, being active in PTA or Sankofa spaces, or continuing to show up in broader coalition efforts. Each of these spaces creates opportunities to stay informed, raise concerns, and help guide decisions that affect students directly. CDF-CA will continue to support this work by standing alongside community members, strengthening partnerships, and investing in leadership so that families and young people remain at the center of this effort.



Acknowledgments

This report would not have been possible without the time, energy, and commitment of the many parents, caregivers, and youth leaders who contributed their voices and experiences. Their insight shaped not only the direction of this work, but also the understanding of what is needed moving forward.

We here at CDF want to extend immense gratitude to Michael Ball who began this amazing work and cultivated community presence with purpose. We want to thank Public Advocates, Public Counsel, Californians for Justice, Long Beach Forward, Latinos in Action California, community leaders and the many organizations, who have shared their expertise, partnership, and dedication throughout this work. Their collective collaboration has helped shape stronger policies, elevate community voice, and uplift opportunities for students and families across Long Beach.

The completion of this report has been led by way of the dedicated efforts of Ryan Bell, Policy Associate for the Education Equity Department at Children's Defense Fund—California. Michael Ball lead the reports creation and Ryan Bell worked to aid the report's finalization, managing the full scope of work required to bring it to publication.

The writing, editing, maintaining relationships with the Long Beach community leaders whose voices are centered throughout, and organizing the data and research that grounds the findings are showcases the care and commitment brought to this work to ensure that a decade of community advocacy was documented with the accuracy and depth it deserved.

We also want to recognize the organizers and community partners who have been part of this effort, often working behind the scenes to keep momentum going and to support families along the way. In addition, we acknowledge district partners and allied organizations who engaged in conversations, shared perspectives, and took part in efforts to improve conditions for students.

What this report ultimately represents is a collective effort. It reflects the work of a community that continues to show up for its students, with a shared commitment to ensuring that every young person in Long Beach has access to a safe, supportive, and dignified learning environment.

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