



# Improving Health Through Equitable School Budgeting

Lamont  
Elementary  
School  
District



# I. Introduction

The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) has provided local school districts with more control to meet the needs of their most vulnerable students. As advocates bring to the surface the connection between education and health outcomes, districts have an opportunity to invest in public education solutions that can produce better health results. This policy brief provides recommendations on how Lamont Elementary School District can improve health and academic outcomes for its most vulnerable students.



# II. Background

Health is an often overlooked indicator and an outcome of educational attainment in the United States. Higher educational attainment is linked to longer life expectancies and superior health outcomes.<sup>1</sup> Two reasons for this are higher wages, and jobs that provide better access to health insurance and care.<sup>2</sup>

Americans with a higher level of education are less likely to have a heart condition, stroke, hypertension, high cholesterol, and emphysema, be obese, overweight and suffer from diabetes and asthma.<sup>3</sup> An important factor could be that educational attainment is linked with positive health prevention practices, such as exercise, health screenings for mammograms, pap smears, colonoscopies, and vaccinations, such as flu shots.<sup>4</sup> The more educated are less likely to engage in risky behaviors such as drinking alcohol, smoking tobacco and using illegal drugs.<sup>5</sup> Early detection and preventative care are key to improving public health.

Education also has an immediate impact on a young person, through the experiences they have in their daily lives while at school. School disciplinary policies and parent engagement are thus two significant factors that not only affect a student's educational outcome, but also their health. Recognizing that schools have the power to impact a young person's physical, social and emotional health, advocates increasingly connect education reforms to health outcomes.

This new recognition comes at an opportune time. In 2013, the state dramatically changed the way it funds school districts across the state by adopting the new Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF). In addition to reversing cuts made during the Great

Recession, the new law directs added resources to higher-need school districts, by giving them "supplemental and concentration" grant funding tied to the number of low income, foster youth, and English learner students in each district. LCFF also gives districts more flexibility than they'd had in the past by replacing a host of "categorical" funding programs, with strict requirements on how state dollars could be spent, with more flexible grants that can be allocated to meet local needs.

To ensure that districts use their new flexibility wisely, the state also required them to meet new transparency and accountability standards. In particular, districts are required to publish a Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) each year, which lays out their priorities and lists the specific actions and funding the district will leverage to accomplish those goals. Districts are required to consult with the community, including students, parents, and teachers, while developing their LCAPs.

The result of these changes means that districts are seeing increased funding from the state while also being called upon to more effectively match resources to student needs. This policy brief provides analysis and recommendations to help Lamont Elementary School District (LESD) take advantage of the changes created by LCFF to improve the health and educational outcomes of its students.

# III. Profile for Lamont

## LAMONT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Lamont Elementary School District (LESD) is located in Kern County, California. It serves more than 3,000 students in Kindergarten through 8th Grade, at four schools — Alicante School (K-6), Lamont Elementary School (K-3), Myrtle Avenue School (4-6) and Mt. View Middle School (7-8).

Demographically, the District is 98% Latina/o and 2% white. In the 2015-2016 school year, 97% of students were identified as high-need through the Local Control Funding Formula, meaning they fell into one of three categories: 1) foster youth students; 2) English-language learners; or 3) students who are low-income and therefore qualify for free or reduced price lunch. More than 88% of students are low-income, and 65% are identified as English language learners.

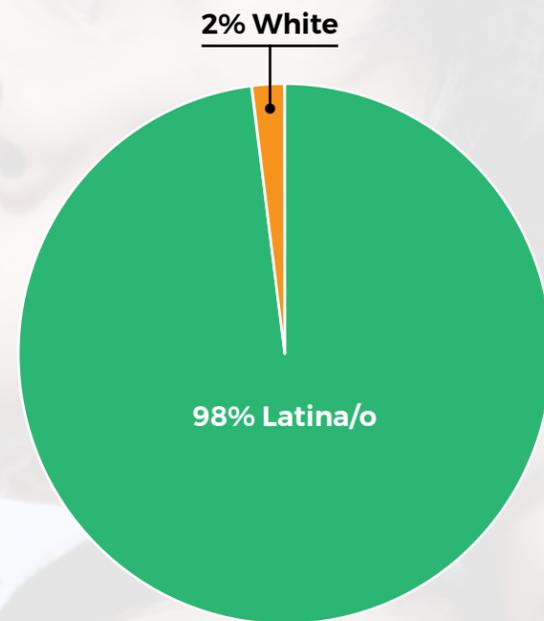
### ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT<sup>6</sup>

In the 2014-15 school year, LESD was slightly below the annual statewide target for English learner proficiency growth, at 58.5% vs. a target of 60.5%.

43% of English learners who have been a cohort for more than 5 years were below the annual target of 51% at attaining English proficiency.

### SCHOOL DISCIPLINE<sup>7</sup>

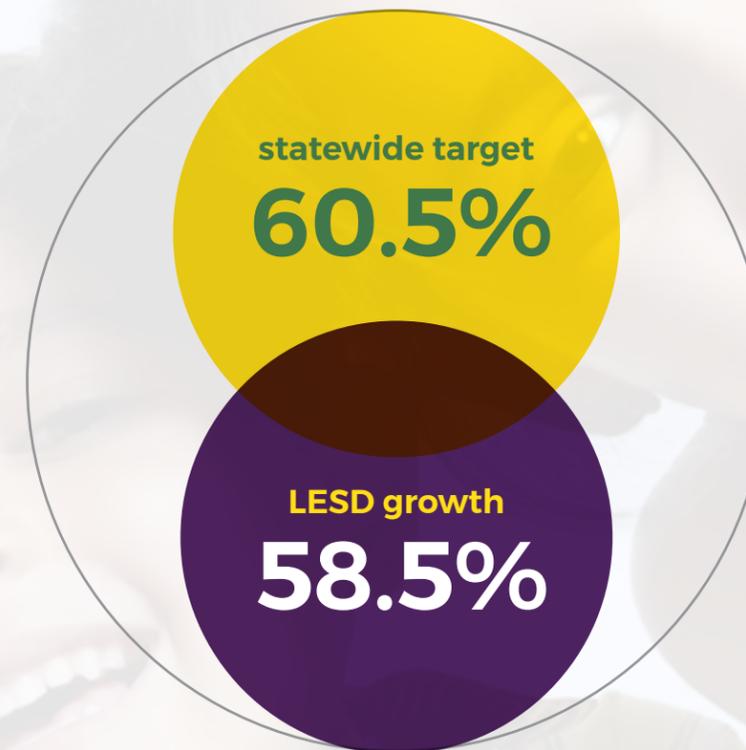
LESD had 99 out-of-school suspensions in the 2014-15 school year, 18 of which were for willful defiance.<sup>8</sup>



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### ENGLISH LEARNER GROWTH



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### HEALTH INDICATORS

15% of 5th graders did not pass the health test for aerobic capacity, which measures respiratory fitness, and 37% did not pass the body composition health test, which measures percent body fat.<sup>9</sup>

In LESD, there's a positive correlation between school connectedness – which measures whether students feel they are treated fairly, feel close to others at school, feel happy and a part of the school, and feel safe at school – and refraining from binge drinking and having lower levels of depression, suggesting that it is a significant protective factor for students. 97% of students with high level of connectedness reported no binge drinking in the last month in comparison to only 86% of students with low levels of connectedness. The least connected students also had the highest rate of depression related feelings, at 42%, compared to 23% of students with high levels of school connectedness.<sup>10</sup>

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# IV. School Issues & Health Outcomes

## HARSH DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES

Schools are supposed to be welcoming public spaces that foster student physical, mental and emotional development to help them reach their full potential.

Instead, for many African American and Latina/o students the opposite is true: schools are pushing them out, leading to immediate and long-term negative health effects. Racial bias from school staff can exacerbate the problem for African American and Latina/o students, who often face harsher punishments in their schools when compared to their white counterparts for similar minor infractions.<sup>11</sup> This is what community leaders and advocates call the 'school-to-prison pipeline'.

The implementation of harsh disciplinary actions such as suspensions and expulsions in schools cause more harm to child and adolescent development than good. When students are removed from class they lose precious learning time, and they lose a sense of school connectedness, which is a protective factor for risky behavior.<sup>12</sup> Suspended students can become alienated, build resentment, and develop distrust of school staff. It is no wonder that they are more likely to have poor attendance, be at risk for failing a grade and for dropping out of school. Further, suspended students are more likely to be in contact with the criminal justice system.<sup>13</sup>

Students who face harsh disciplinary actions in school are also more likely to engage in risky behaviors, including substance abuse.<sup>14</sup> In a longitudinal study, seventh grade students who were suspended were found to be twice as likely to start using tobacco less than a year later, when controlling for prior use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs. Researchers and advocates both agree that suspensions profile and label students negatively amongst their peers. Some studies suggest that students may begin engaging in risky behaviors in order to fit into the negative reputation that the suspension assigns them in the school context.<sup>15</sup>

## RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Harsh disciplinary action in schools can hurt students and affect their social, emotional, and physical health. The key is looking for disciplinary policies and practices that increase a student's connectedness to their peers, teachers, and administration. When students feel connected to others, including adults, it serves as a protective factor that can prevent them from engaging in drinking, smoking and other harmful behaviors.

**Students who have strong connectedness to their schools have better mental health, report having lower levels of emotional stress and are also less likely to attempt suicide.<sup>16</sup>**

Restorative justice has been critical to moving away from damaging a student's relationship to their school when harm occurs. Restorative justice is a shift in attitude that moves away from alienating students and removing them from school, and instead focuses on resolving the conflict between all parties involved. Instead of pushing students away, it forces them to address the conflict and repair any harm they may have caused.

When implemented, restorative justice has been shown to increase student connectedness. Researchers found that restorative justice programs reduced student absenteeism by 50% and tardiness by 64%.<sup>17</sup> Restorative justice schools also saw a significant increase in graduation rates when compared with schools that use traditional disciplinary practices.<sup>18</sup>

## FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

While many schools have historically not been effective at establishing strong relationships with students, the same can often be said for their connection with students' families. Many schools assume parents have little to offer or have little interest in contributing to their child's well-being.<sup>19</sup> As a result, parents often report feeling disconnected from their children's school.<sup>20</sup>



# IV. School Issues & Health Outcomes

## FAMILY INVOLVEMENT continued

School practices can be a major factor for either encouraging or deterring parent involvement. Many school districts do not adequately invest in training employees on effective parent engagement practices. School events may be inaccessible to parents due to language barriers, lack of available translation, and events that occur during typical work hours when parents are unavailable. Many parents also report feeling uncomfortable and unwelcome during school staff interactions.<sup>21</sup> Previous experiences with racism in the public school system also deters many African American parents from participating in school events.<sup>22</sup>

If we are to improve health and academic outcomes for children, parents play a critical role. Parent engagement decreases the chances that their children will engage in risky health behaviors such as using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. It decreases emotional distress, promotes healthier eating habits and decreases the likelihood of suicide.<sup>23</sup> Parents can also improve their children's mental health by simply being present in their education and in their lives. And this improvement in emotional health and behavior translates to improved academic achievement.<sup>24</sup>

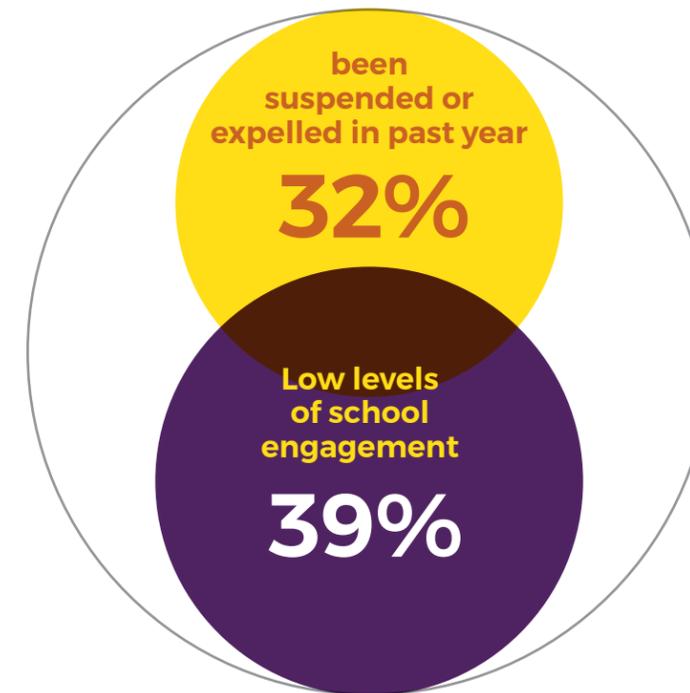
**Parent engagement makes a significant difference in a child's relationship to school and long-term educational success. Studies show that students exhibit stronger attendance, pass more classes, earn more credits, are more likely to graduate on time, and are less likely to drop out. Students earn higher grade point averages and score higher on standardized tests. Students also improve in their behavior both at home and school.<sup>25</sup>**

Research demonstrates that parent engagement is more than traditional volunteering for the school dance or attending a teacher-parent conference. There are a multitude of ways parents can be involved from setting expectations at home, monitoring their study habits and behavior, and directly engaging with educators. While all

of these are important, a parent's expectation for their children's academic success has been found to be the most significant.<sup>26</sup> Even if a parent may not be able to participate in a parent conference or volunteer at a school event, they can still play an important role by setting high expectations for their children's achievement. Early parent participation also has the most long-term impact. Students in grades 2-4 make greater improvements in their academic achievement when parents are involved in comparison to older students.<sup>27</sup>

School districts can learn from these practices by investing in resources for parent engagement and professional development for all school site employees and faculty, training them on how to be more inclusive and welcoming to parents. School districts should start training early childhood and elementary school educators early to maximize parent engagement. At every age level, school sites can work with parents to set high goals and expectations for students through workshops, parent conferences and personal home visits. When parents support their children, it serves as an immediate protective factor for their health and helps them to be successful over the course of their life.

## FOSTER YOUTH, AGES 12-17



## FOSTER YOUTH STUDENTS

Students in the child welfare system are of significant importance as they are more likely to have to health problems and be disconnected from school than their counterparts, with a lower level of connectedness at an earlier age.<sup>28</sup> Since school engagement usually decreases with age, this puts foster youth at greater risk for low school connectedness.

In a study, 32% of foster youth students ages 12-17 had been suspended or expelled from school and 17% had skipped school in the past year.<sup>29</sup> In the same study, 39% had low levels of school engagement defined by initiative to complete homework assignments, motivation to complete schoolwork, consistency with completing assignments and attitudes towards school. Nearly one-third of foster youth are not involved in any after-school activities, including sports, and student organizations. Because school connectedness is a protective factor for health and academic outcomes, school districts need to target limited resources for foster youth students on best practices that increase their engagement in school.

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# V. Equity and Spending in Lamont Elementary School District

## THE NEED FOR EQUITY

LCFF changed traditional approaches to public education funding and provided school districts with additional funds for foster youth, English language learners, and low-income students. Achieving true equity requires more sensitive approaches, however.

For example, just looking at qualification for free and reduced lunch to identify low-income students treats a student in a family of four with a household income of \$40,000 the same as a student in a family of four with an income of \$8,000. Clearly, there are students who are at a much greater disadvantage and who should be prioritized when funding decisions are made.

In addition, many school boards and superintendents do not consider funding equity within their districts, opting to distribute resources evenly rather than targeting the highest-need students and campuses. Districts should instead follow the lead of the California Department of Education by implementing an equity-based formula that identifies the unique needs of their school sites.

We have produced a research-based ranking of Lamont Elementary School District's schools by need for additional funding under the LCFF. This ranking, based on a Student Equity Need Index (SENI), not only measures student performance and achievement in the classroom, but also takes into account the neighborhood conditions that can negatively affect a student's academic success. The index also incorporates duplicated numbers, counting students twice or more if they fall into more than one of the three high-need student populations highlighted in the LCFF. Districts should use the SENI to target LCFF funding towards the highest need schools in order to ensure that resources are distributed to the students who need it the most.

The SENI is calculated using duplicated counts of LCFF/LCAP targeted students (free and reduced lunch, English learner, and students in foster care) in addition to various other measures that take into account school and student indicators. This includes data on academic achievement, suspensions, and physical fitness. The information is pooled to rank the schools from highest need, to the lowest — this can help prioritize funds to the students who need it the most.

**RANKING OF SCHOOLS FROM HIGHEST TO LOWEST NEED:**

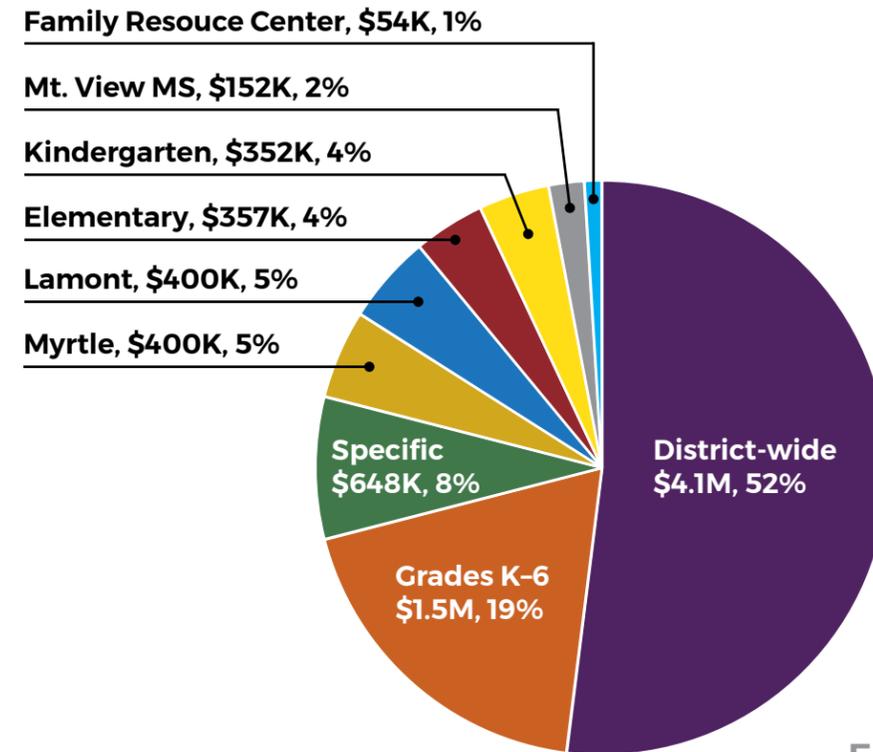
- Mountain View Middle
- Alicante Avenue Elementary
- Lamont Elementary
- Myrtle Avenue Elementary

## LESD'S SPENDING OF EQUITY-BASED FUNDING

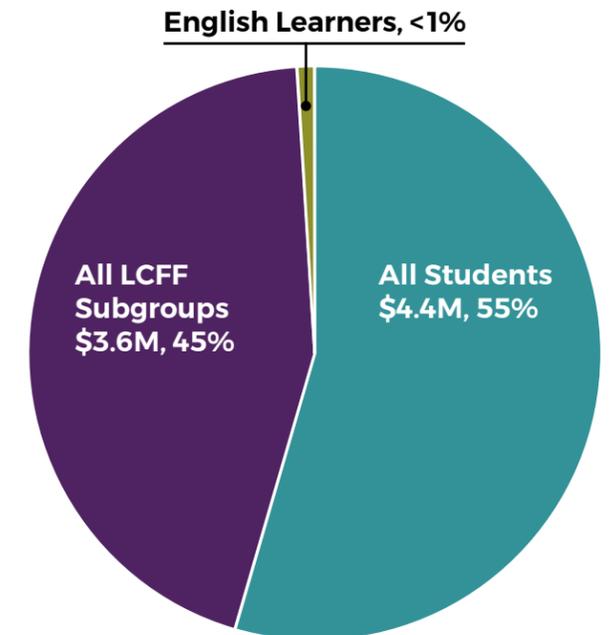
For fiscal year 2016-2017, LESD is receiving \$7.9 million in LCFF supplemental and concentration grants, which are equity-based dollars generated by high-need students. The District plans on spending \$8.1 million in equity based dollars this year, and is allocating 52% of this funding to district-wide expenditures (\$4.1 million), while the remaining 48% (\$3.9 million) will go to targeted school sites and grades.

Lamont Elementary School District's proposed spending of equity-based dollars allocates about 55% of funds (\$4.4 million) on programs that benefit all students. 45% (\$3.6 million) will go to all LCFF subgroups, and less than 1% (\$35,000) will go exclusively for English learners – far below their 65% share of the student body.

Equity Based Spending – Sites



Equity Based Spending – Student Population



While it is true that Lamont Elementary is a very high-need district, with 97% of students falling into one or more of the LCFF targeted populations, it does not appear to be especially rigorous about conceptualizing its investments in terms of which students will specifically benefit from extra funding produced by low-income, English language learner, and foster youth students. By becoming more transparent and accountable to the community, parents, and students that it serves, the District could better meet students' needs, and make faster progress towards the goals of LCFF.

# VI. Policy Recommendations

## RESOURCES FOR FOSTER YOUTH

The District does not specify spending for foster youth, instead including those services in broader categories. As a threshold recommendation, the District should separately report foster youth program investments, to enable advocates and parents to better understand how these students are being prioritized. Additional recommendations include:

1. Appointing a youth counselor for each school site to conduct an annual review of foster student education records, and ensure that foster students receive the necessary academic support and services.
2. Training school-site personnel on foster students' rights to remain in their current school, even when foster placements occur.
3. Allocating funds to provide transportation to keep youth in their current school.

## FULLY RESOURCED PARENT CENTERS

Parent Centers are an important and essential link toward creating an integrated and inclusive school environment. Parent Centers serve parents, teachers, social workers, and advocates; they have a vital role in breaking down barriers, addressing issues of parent engagement, and provide training and information to parents in a language they can understand.

LESD has budgeted \$159,000 in equity-based dollars for parent engagement in FY 16-17, including \$54,000 for a Family Resource Center advocate position. While the district is making an effort to dedicate more funding to these programs, it does not report site-level funding – so it is unclear what type of parent services are available on each campus, or whether the high-need communities are seeing an increased, and equitable investment.

The District should establish fully resourced parent centers in high-need schools that:

1. Establish a parent-engagement action plan with measurable outcomes for each school site with representatives from all major stakeholders, including parents,

- administrators, teachers, and counselors.
2. Ensure programs are relevant and meet the needs of parents to ensure programming is impactful.
3. Be pro-active and create welcoming environments for all parents regardless of their socioeconomic status, language, race, or gender. Parent activities and trainings should be accessible by providing translation, hosting events during non-traditional school hours, and be pro-active by personally calling parents to events.
4. Provide technology education for parents to increase access to financial aid, scholarships, college applications, and school website information.

## RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Overall, LESD has made a commitment to support restorative justice practices on school sites, but should increase its commitment in the highest-need schools in order to promote positive mental and physical health for students. In FY 16-17, they have allocated \$579,000 in equity-based dollars for school climate investments, including PBIS implementation at each site, professional development training, and truancy advocates, which lays important groundwork for a successful program, but more remains to be done.

Districts should provide resources sufficient to implement restorative justice programs at the highest-need schools. With these resources, school sites should be able to:

1. Review school site disciplinary policies and practices, and transition schools to use restorative justice and positive behavior intervention and support as an alternative to harsh disciplinary practices.
2. Provide training for teachers and all school staff on restorative justice.
3. Establish a “School Climate” committee to assess school site implementation and accountability.
4. Provide students and their families real-time data on school disciplinary practices, disaggregated by race and gender to support tracking and accountability.
5. Increase and improve mental health services for students and their families.
6. Pilot a “Home Visitation Program” to recover students, increase attendance, and decrease drop-out rates.

# VII. Resources

1. Dolores Huerta Foundation<sup>30</sup>
2. Faith in the Valley<sup>31</sup>
3. California Rural Legal Assistance<sup>32</sup>
4. Centers for Disease Control: Parent Engagement: Strategies for Involving Parents in School Health<sup>33</sup>
5. Restorative Practices: Fostering Healthy Relationships & Promoting Positive Discipline in Schools: A Guide for Educators by Advancement Project, AFT, National Education Association & National Opportunity to Learn<sup>34</sup>
6. Centers for Disease Control: Public Health Research, Practice, and Policy. Reframing School Dropout as a Public Health Issue<sup>35</sup>
7. ACLU of Northern California: The Right to Remain a Student: How California School Policies Fail to Protect and Serve<sup>36</sup>
8. Advancement Project: Test, Punish, and Push Out: How Zero Tolerance Policies and High Stakes Testing Funnel Youth into the School-to Prison-Pipeline<sup>37</sup>

# Endnotes

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- <sup>2</sup> Id.
- <sup>3</sup> Cutler, David M. et al. “Education and Health: Evaluating Theories and Evidence.” (July 2006.) NBER Working Paper No. 12352. Retrieved at <http://www.nber.org/papers/w12352>.
- <sup>4</sup> Id.
- <sup>5</sup> Id. at 1.
- <sup>6</sup> Ed-Data. Lamont Elementary School District. Retrieved at <http://www.ed-data.org/district/Kern/Lamont-Elementary>.
- <sup>7</sup> Id.
- <sup>8</sup> Assembly Bill 420 of 2014 eliminated the ability to suspend a student (K-3) for acts of “willful defiance” starting January 1, 2015. The bill will sunset 2018.
- <sup>9</sup> Id. at 6.
- <sup>10</sup> California Healthy Kids Survey, 2011-2013 data. See <http://chks.wested.org/query-chks/>.
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- <sup>16</sup> Blum, Robert W., Rhinehart, Peggy Mann, Reducing the Risk: Connections at Make a Difference in the Lives of Youth 21-24 (1997). Retrieved at <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED412459.pdf>.
- <sup>17</sup> Id. at 13.
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- <sup>25</sup> Wendy Miedel Barnard, Parent involvement in elementary school and educational attainment, *Children and Youth Services Review*, Volume 26, Issue 1, January 2004, Pages 39-62, ISSN 0190-7409, retrieved at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2003.11.002>; A. T. Henderson & K. L. Mapp. A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement. (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2002).
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- <sup>30</sup> See <http://doloreshuerta.org>.
- <sup>31</sup> See <http://faithinthevalley.org>.
- <sup>32</sup> See <http://crla.org>.
- <sup>33</sup> See [https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/parent\\_engagement\\_strategies.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/parent_engagement_strategies.pdf).
- <sup>34</sup> See <http://schottfoundation.org/sites/default/files/restorative-practices-guide.pdf>.
- <sup>35</sup> See [https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2007/oct/07\\_0063.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2007/oct/07_0063.htm).
- <sup>36</sup> See <https://www.aclunc.org/publications/right-remain-student-how-ca-school-policies-fail-protect-and-serve>.
- <sup>37</sup> See <http://www.advancementproject.org/resources/entry/test-punish-and-push-out-how-zero-tolerance-and-high-stakes-testing-funnel>.

**Building Healthy Communities** is a comprehensive community initiative that is creating a revolution in the way Californians think about and support health in their communities. Residents are proving that they can make health happen in their neighborhoods, schools and with prevention—and in doing so, they are creating a brighter future for their children.

Thousands of residents, youth, businesses and organizations are leading the Building Healthy Communities (BHC) South Kern effort to positively change the health of our communities through a shared vision, goals and action plan. Residents in Arvin, Lamont, Weedpatch and the unincorporated areas of Greenfield are proving that we have the power to make health happen in our communities.

**Advancement Project** is a next generation, multiracial civil rights organization. In California we champion the struggle for greater equity and opportunity for all, fostering upward mobility in communities most impacted by economic and racial injustice. We build alliances and trust, use data-driven policy solutions, create innovative tools and work alongside communities to ignite social transformation!

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