State of the LCAP 2025-26

2025-26 edition · an independent analysis from Gobo

806 plans, one picture. Every dot behind this page is one California Local Control and Accountability Plan, read cover to cover and translated into structured data. Taken together, they tell a single, comprehensive story about where our schools are focusing their energy, how resources are allocated, and what the numbers mean for the future of California's students.

The LCAP landscape

Each year, every school district, charter school, and county office of education in California writes a **Local Control and Accountability Plan**. Far more than a routine compliance exercise, the LCAP is the primary document where local educational agencies (LEAs) map out exactly how they will use state money to support positive student outcomes.

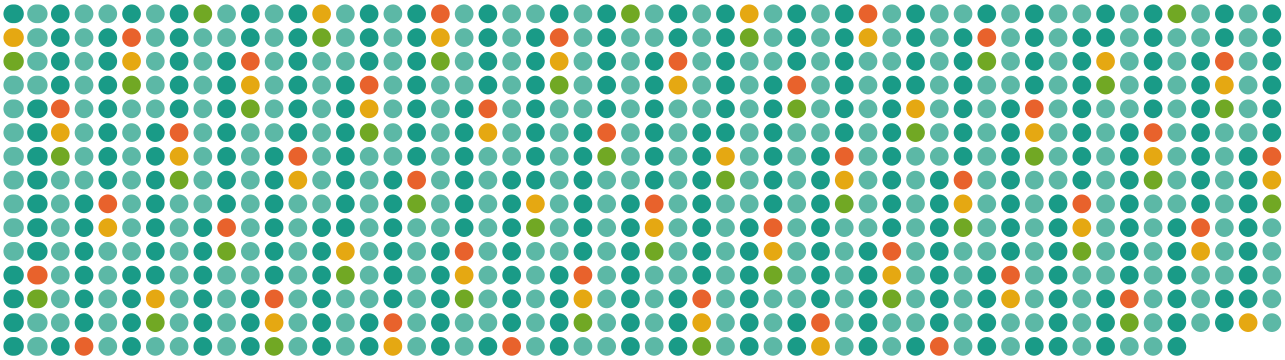
Because these documents govern how California funds its public schools, they carry immense structural weight. Together, they direct billions of dollars in state education funding for nearly six million students. Wherever state dollars meet a decision affecting students, that strategy is supposed to be explicitly written down in the LCAP.

This setup makes the LCAP the ultimate tool for local transparency. Yet there is a massive gap between a document being public and being truly accessible. The typical plan runs about 110 pages of dense, template-driven language. When you multiply that by roughly a thousand agencies publishing a new plan every single year, the system becomes invisible to anyone trying to read it one document at a time.

That is the gap this project closes. By using computational data analysis backed by over a decade of hands-on experience working with LCAPs, we processed and analyzed more than 800 plans simultaneously, a macro-level view that is impossible to achieve through manual reading alone. The result is this report: an overview of what California’s school plans actually say, whether the strategies they outline are moving the needle, and what the system looks like when you can see all of it at once.

THE CORPUS

● = one LCAP we read



806 LCAPs

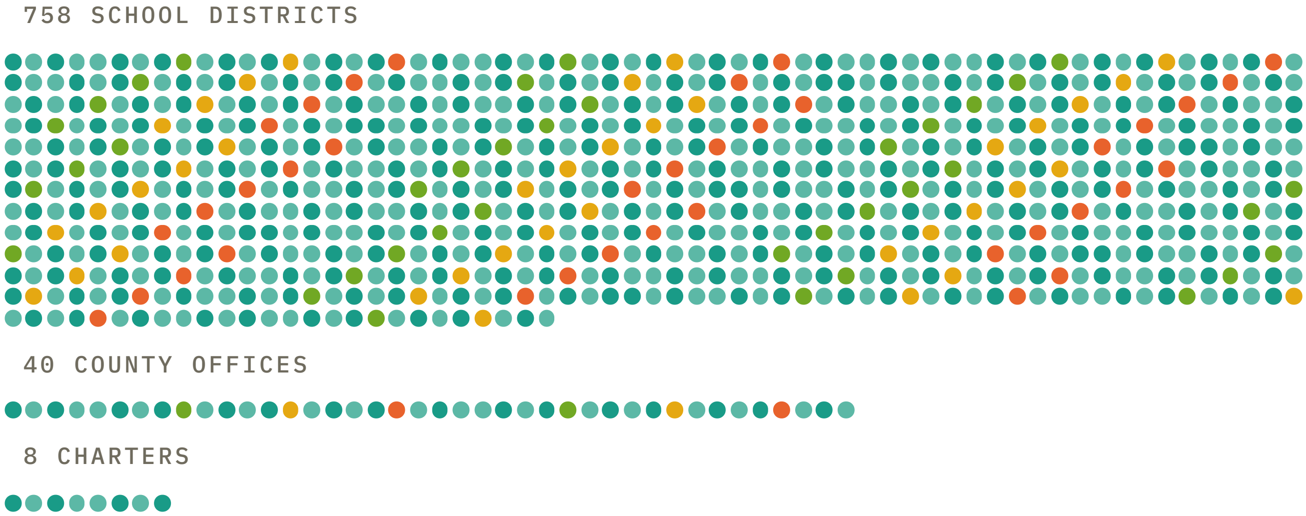
02 · THE DATA SET

The 2025-26 data set

For this year's report, we collected 806 adopted 2025-26 LCAPs: 758 school districts, 40 county offices of education, and 8 charter schools. This dataset covers roughly 81% of the State's school districts, 69% of its county offices, and encompasses just over four million public school students. While this initial analysis focuses primarily on school districts and county offices of education, we plan to expand toward a more comprehensive set of charter schools in future editions.

Together, these 806 plans put a massive amount of real money on paper: **$35.6 billion** in planned spending documented directly inside the plans across nearly seven thousand schools. This report follows that specific funding footprint.

806 PLANS · GROUPED BY AGENCY TYPE



$35.6B
PLANNED SPENDING

~4M
STUDENTS

~7,000
SCHOOLS

each dot = one LCAP · 806

To look across these plans, we ran every document through a data pipeline to extract its contents verbatim. This allowed us to align every goal, every budgeted action, and every performance metric side by side, instead of leaving them isolated inside 806 separate PDFs. (For a detailed look at our data processing, open HOW WE DID THIS.)

This report outlines exactly what we found. We start by examining the baseline anatomy of a normal LCAP, track how goals and actions are organized, evaluate documented student outcomes, and close with the most significant regulatory finding in this year's data.

03 · THE TYPICAL PLAN

The anatomy of a typical plan

What does a normal LCAP actually look like? When you look at the midpoint of the State's data, a baseline emerges quickly.

The median plan sets **4 goals**, funds **26 individual actions**, tracks **32 performance measures**, and runs **110 pages**. Most plans across California cluster incredibly tightly around this exact footprint; in fact, more than half of the plans we analyzed set exactly three or four goals.

THE MEDIAN PLAN

4
GOALS

26
FUNDED ACTIONS

32
TRACKED MEASURES

110
PAGES

unit = the median plan · n = 806

04 · GOALS

LCAP goals: the strategic framework

An LCAP's goals are the high-level pillars that organize the rest of the plan. Every budgeted action, resource allocation, and performance metric is tied directly to one of these central aims.

The State template asks agencies to classify each goal. Broad goals are wide banners, like "all students graduate ready for college and career." Focus goals target a specific student group or school site. Maintenance of progress goals are designed to protect existing gains.

In practice, however, the distribution is heavily lopsided: **72.6% of the 3,256 goals we analyzed are broad goals**. This pattern exists for a simple, practical reason: a broad goal lets a district group a wide variety of diverse, district-wide initiatives under a single, overarching category.

GOAL TYPES · SHARE OF 3,256

Broad · wide banners aimed at everyone	**72.6%**
Equity Multiplier	**15.4%**
Focus	**6.7%**
Maintenance of progress	**4.8%**

unit = share of 3,256 goals · area = share · 0.5% unclassified or legacy-label, not shown

LCAP actions and spending

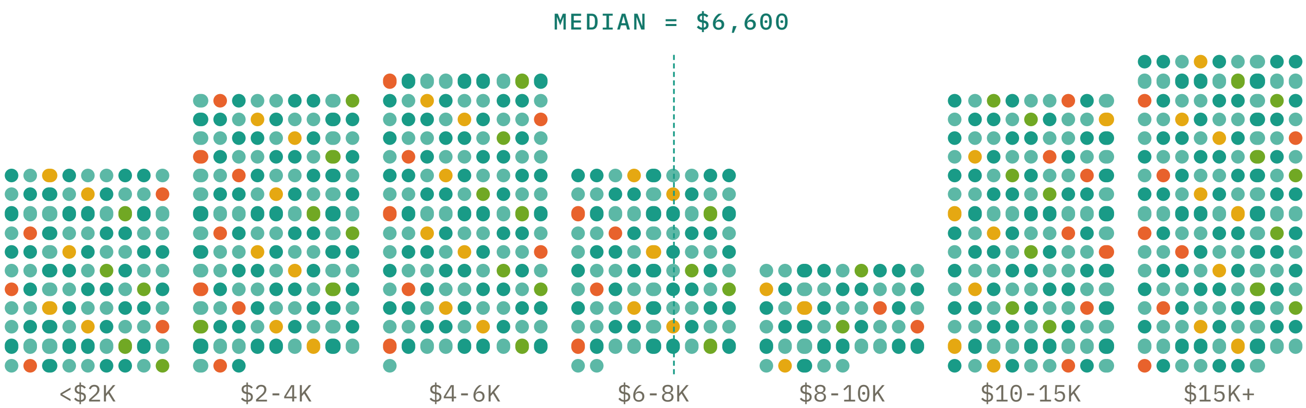
If goals define what a district wants to achieve, actions are how they intend to get there. This is the section of the plan where strategies translate into concrete expenditures, ranging from broad staffing payrolls to highly specific local interventions.

In the median plan, this planned, LCAP-routed spending comes to about **$6,600 per student**. This does not represent a district's total operating budget; rather, it reflects the spending districts plan and account for within the LCAP itself.

LCAP DOLLARS PER STUDENT

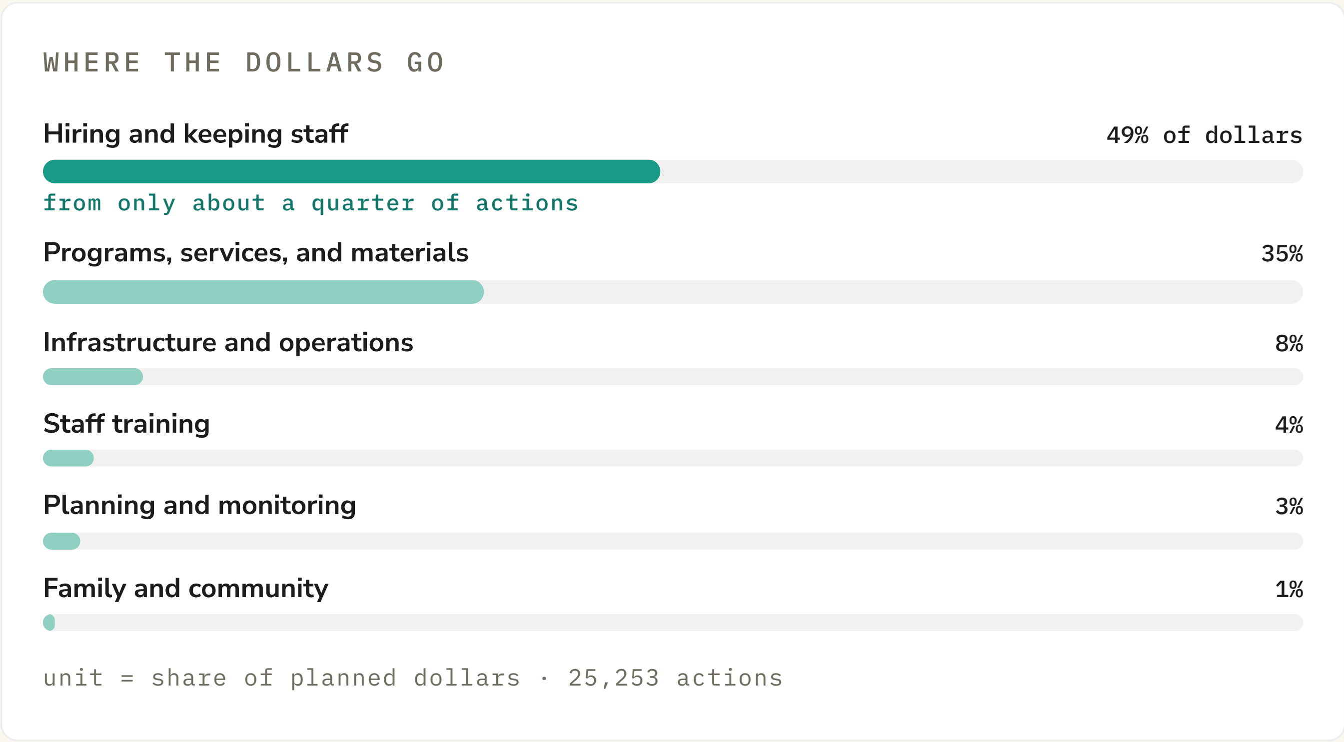
$6,600

PER STUDENT · MEDIAN PLAN



each dot = one plan · 792 of 806 with enrollment data

When we look across all 25,253 actions, the absolute clearest pattern is that the **money is concentrated in people**. Hiring and retaining staff carries nearly half of all planned LCAP dollars (49%), despite accounting for only about a quarter of written actions. Districts write fewer personnel actions, but they back them with much larger budgets. Programs, services, and instructional materials come second, at 35% of planned dollars.



Funding is also highly concentrated within individual plans. Rather than distributing resources evenly, the typical LCAP leans heavily on a few major initiatives. In the median plan, **the single largest action accounts for 31% of all planned spending**, and the top three actions combined make up 62% of the budget. A normal LCAP is not a long list of equal line items; it is anchored by a few significant, high-cost commitments with a long tail of smaller, localized programs.

HOW MUCH OF THE BUDGET SITS IN THE BIGGEST ACTIONS

31%

THE SINGLE LARGEST ACTION

62%

THE THREE LARGEST TOGETHER

- The single largest action: 31%
- The next two: taking the top three to 62%
- Everything else: 38%

A few big commitments with a tail of smaller ones.

unit = the median plan's planned spending

06 · OUTCOMES

Outcomes: tracking progress

Everything up to this point is the local control side of the plan: what an agency decides to do and what it spends. The other side of the ledger is accountability. For every goal, a district must set measurable targets and report their actual progress against those targets every single year, in public.

When a district adopts a goal, it records its baseline data and sets a target for where that measure should be at the end of a three-year cycle. Every year in between, the district reports its current, actual results right next to that target.

HOW LCAP TARGETS WORK

BASELINE

where the measure starts, recorded when the goal is adopted

↓

YEARLY RESULT

reported next to the target, every year, in public

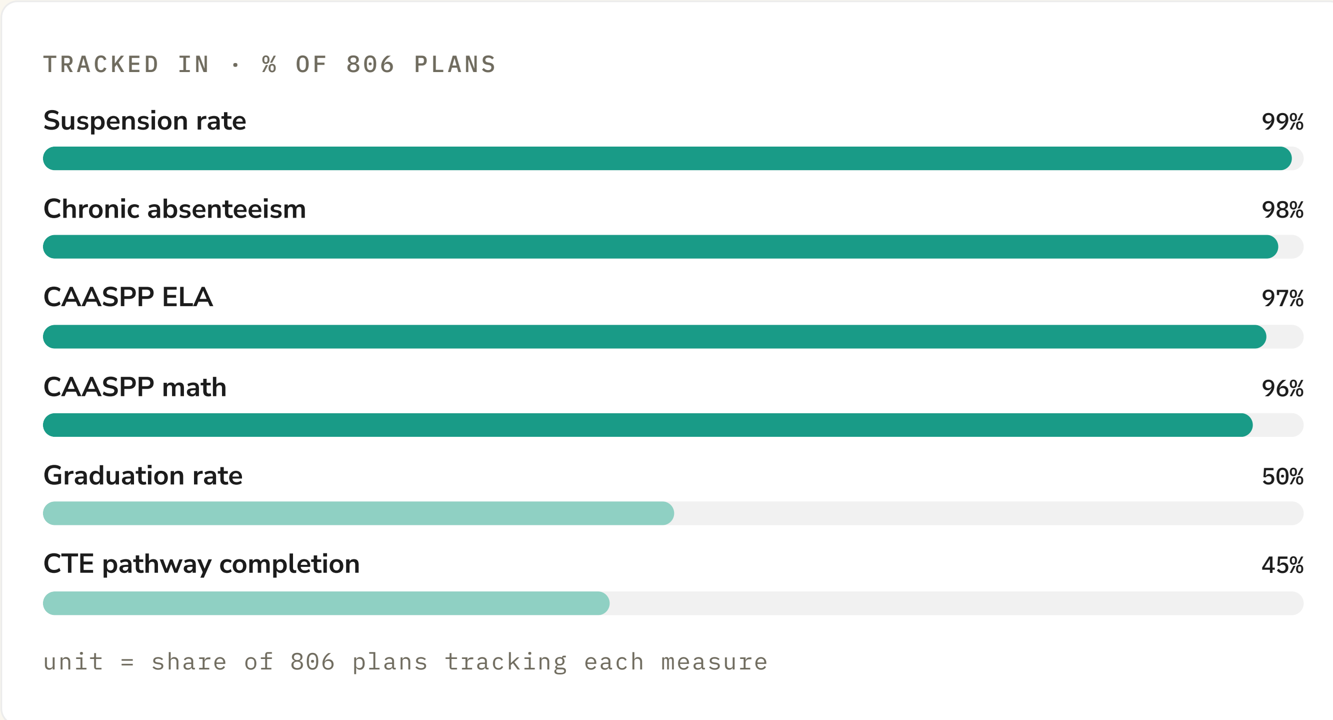
↓

THREE-YEAR TARGET

where the measure should be at the end of the cycle

the template's own mechanism

Suspension rates and chronic absenteeism appear in almost every plan, at 99% and 98%. Both are tracked by the State's accountability dashboard, as are state ELA and math test results, which appear in 97% and 96% of plans. Past that shared core, plans pick measures that fit the specific grade spans they serve, like graduation rates and A-G college preparatory completion appearing in high school districts.



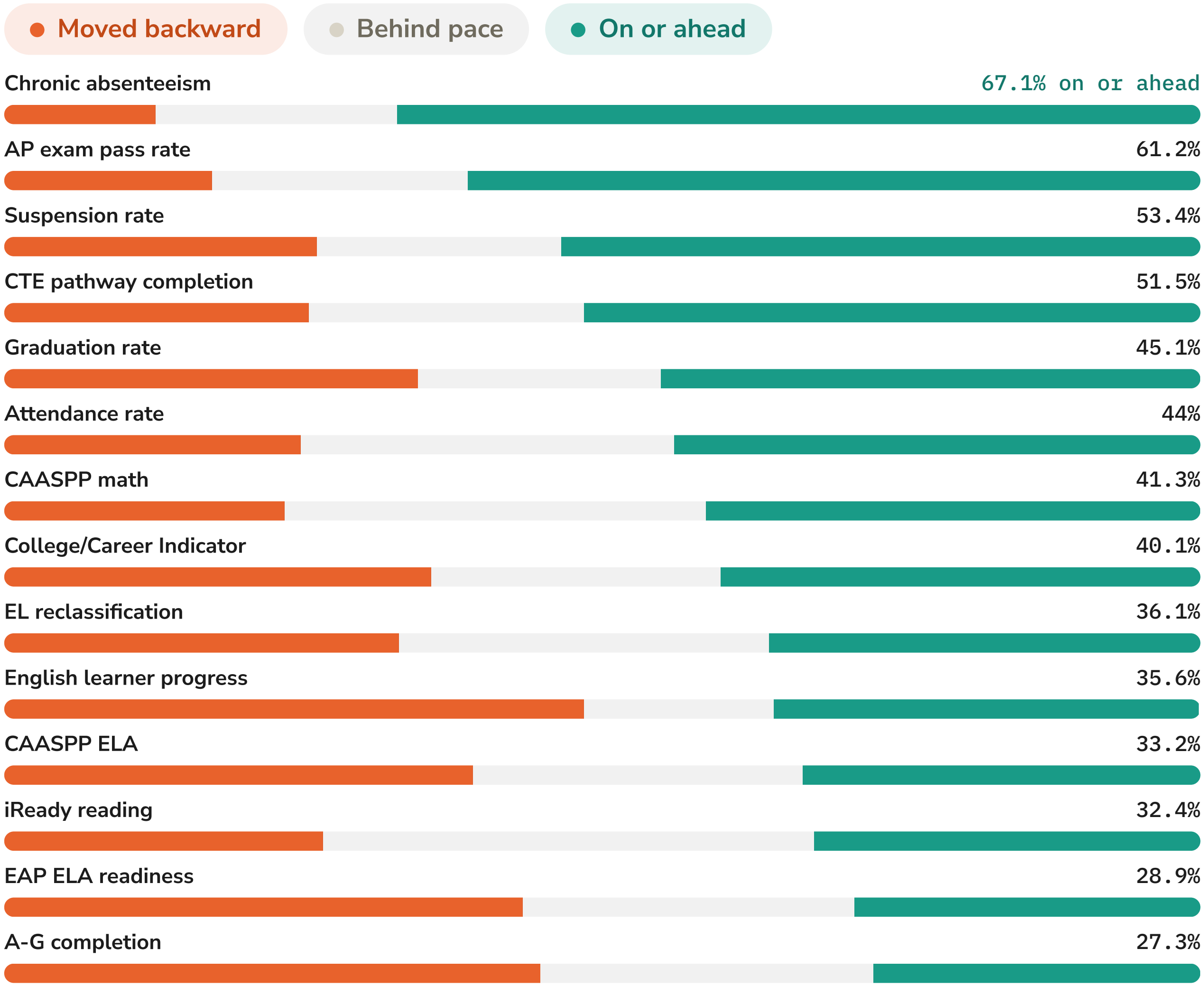
Now that we are a year into the current three-year cycle, the self-reported results documented within the plans show a sharp split by subject.

On attendance and behavior, districts are largely keeping pace with their targets. Among plans that set an improvement target we could check against reported results, **67.1% are on or ahead of pace** on chronic absenteeism, and **53.4% are on or ahead** on suspensions. Some context is important here: statewide chronic absenteeism spiked to 30.0% in 2021-22 and fell to 20.4% in 2023-24, the latest outcome year most of these plans reflect. While districts deserve credit for local efforts, these attendance targets have clearly been aided by a recovering statewide trend.

On academics, however, progress is lagging significantly. Across the core academic indicators, including state ELA and math tests, A-G completion, and college-and-career readiness, **about two thirds of plans with a checkable improvement target are behind pace or moving backward**. In fact, most plans are off pace on every single one of these academic measures individually.

This isn’t the State grading these districts. This is a reflection of districts falling short of the benchmarks they set for themselves.

ONE YEAR IN · KEEPING PACE



one year of a three-year target

unit = share of plans with a checkable improvement target on each measure

07 · THE ANNUAL REFLECTION

The annual reflection

Each year, for every goal, a district must look back and answer two questions in writing: did we implement the actions we planned, and did the results move? A district could easily treat this as an empty box to check, paste in placeholder text, and move on.

The data shows they don't. An overwhelming **98% of districts** explicitly identify at least one area where a goal fell short, and **86% of individual goals** carry a substantive, honest account of what happened.

THE PLANS' SELF-REVIEWS

98%

of districts identify at least one place a goal fell short

86%

of goals carry a substantive account of what happened and why

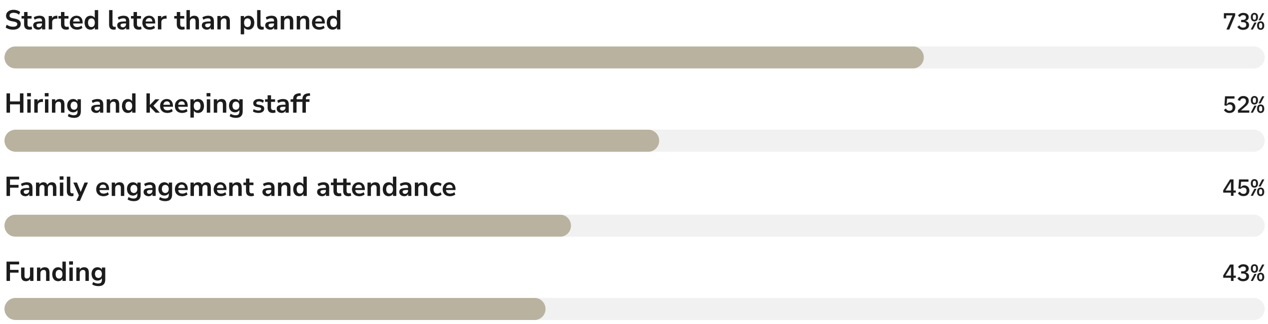
unit = districts and goals · from the plans' own reviews

The operational hurdles they name are highly consistent: work that started later than planned (named in 73% of goals reporting a challenge), trouble hiring and keeping staff (52%), difficulty getting families engaged and students to school (45%), and funding constraints (43%).

The entire LCFF system rests on the trust that districts will assess themselves honestly in public. On the evidence of these self-reviews, that trust is being honored. The write-ups are candid, specific, and often harder on the district than an outsider would be. **Honest self-assessment is a part of this system that is genuinely working**.

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

% OF GOALS NAMING A CHALLENGE



Shares of goals that name each obstacle in their own self-review; a goal can name more than one.

unit = share of goals naming a challenge

08 · EQUITY MULTIPLIER

The Equity Multiplier

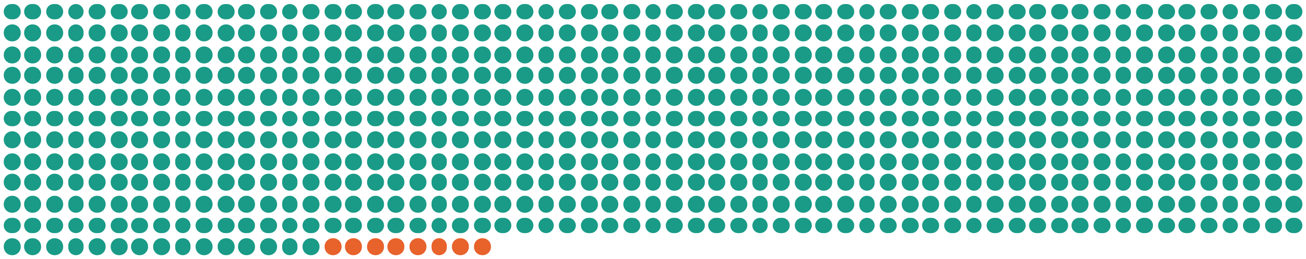
The Equity Multiplier is a state program, created in 2023, that drives resources directly to its highest-need school sites. Backed by $300 million annually, the program sends money straight to individual schools rather than through general district-wide allocations. Eligibility is set by two thresholds: schools where more than 70% of students are socioeconomically disadvantaged, and where the prior year's enrollment nonstability rate tops 25%, meaning a large share of students did not stay enrolled at the school through the year.

The money comes with a strict planning requirement. If a school site receives Equity Multiplier funds, the district must include one or more focus goals in its LCAP that address that school by name, targeting the specific student groups and performance gaps that show red on the State dashboard. A single goal may cover several of these schools when they share the same needs, but each school and its metrics must still be identified. In plain terms: the plan is not allowed to ignore the school the money is for.

Because this mandate is only two years old, this year's plans are the first real look at how districts would respond. Our analysis reveals a powerful compliance story: **686 of the 694 eligible schools in our corpus (98.8%) are covered by an active, school-specific Equity Multiplier goal**, and those schools account for over 99% of the Equity Multiplier dollars our plans cover.

ELIGIBLE SCHOOLS WITH THE REQUIRED GOAL

686 of 694 SCHOOLS



Covered · 686 — Without their own goal · 8

each dot = one eligible school · 694

More importantly, look at *how* they did it. The State requires specific contents for these goals but leaves the structure open: a district may write a dedicated goal for each school, or one shared goal for schools with common needs. Given that choice, the field overwhelmingly chose local specificity:

- **68.5% of Equity Multiplier goals** (326 of 476) are separate, dedicated goals written for one individual school.
- **Another 20.0%** are built directly around the specific state dashboard indicators that triggered the school's eligibility.
- **Exactly one district** in the entire dataset wrote a single, generic catch-all goal to cover all of its eligible schools at once.

Faced with a new rule that allowed lighter paths, California's educational leaders didn't default to minimal, copy-paste compliance. They actively chose localized accountability.

HOW DISTRICTS WROTE THESE GOALS

- One goal per Equity Multiplier school — **68.5%**
- Built around the triggering indicators — **20%**
- Other structures — **8.8%**
- Carryover, continuing prior-year work — **2.7%**

bar = share of 476 Equity Multiplier goals

09 · INCREASED OR IMPROVED SERVICES

Increased or Improved Services

We close with the most significant finding in this year's dataset, and it centers on the rules governing **increased or improved services (IIS)** for high-need students.

THE MONEY AT STAKE

Supplemental and concentration grants

EXTRA STATE FUNDING

→

- low-income students
- English learners
- foster youth

TOGETHER · HIGH-NEED STUDENTS

→ actions counted toward increasing or improving services are flagged in the plan as contributing

The money at stake is the State's **supplemental and concentration grants**: extra funding districts receive in proportion to the high-need students they serve, meaning low-income students, English learners, and foster youth. Across the 806 plans we read, that comes to about **$10 billion**, a little over a quarter of all planned LCAP spending. The law requires districts to increase or improve services for these students in proportion to that funding. Every action a district counts toward that obligation is flagged in the plan as contributing. When a district meets that obligation through a district-wide initiative rather than services directed to specific schools or student groups, the law requires a written justification for that contributing action. The district must explain how the broad approach still principally serves the high-need students who generated it.

However, the State holds districts to two completely different standards, based on their students. The line sits at 55% high-need enrollment:

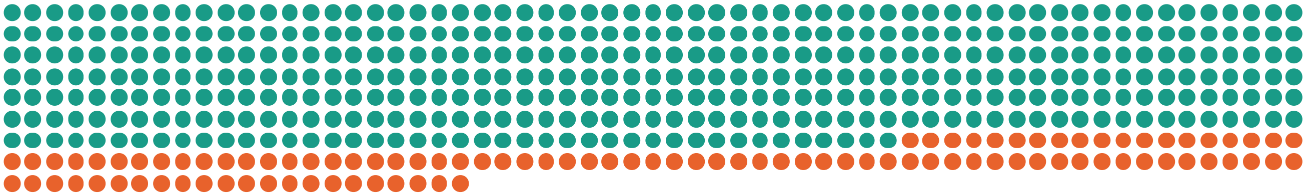
- **The basic standard (districts above the 55% line):** where most students are high-need, most district-wide spending naturally reaches them, and a basic explanation is enough. 510 of our plans sit on this side.
- **The strict standard (districts below the line):** where a smaller share of students generate the targeted money, the bar rises. These districts must explicitly prove that district-wide spending is the most effective use of the funds, describe the alternatives they considered, and cite the research or evidence behind their choice. 232 plans sit on this side.

THE FINDING

We evaluated all 12,787 of these individual justifications across 793 plans, each against the standard its own district faces. The results split cleanly along that 55% line. For districts held to the basic standard, compliance is the norm. An impressive **80% (408 of 510)** made a complete case, meaning zero insufficient justifications anywhere in their plan.

80% made a complete written case

408 OF 510 · THE BASIC STANDARD · RESOLVED



Fully justified Fell short

each dot = one LCAP held to its standard · 510 basic + 232 strict + 64 other = 806

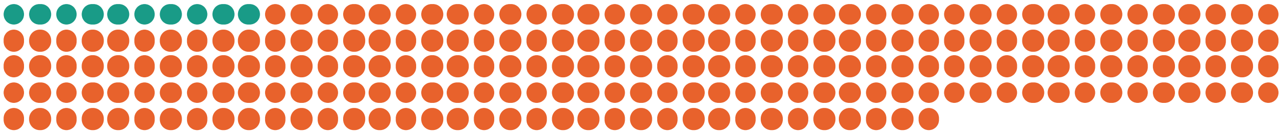
For districts held to the strict standard, the results are almost completely reversed. **Only 10 of 232 (4.3%)** managed to make a complete case. The other 95.7% of plans had at least one insufficient justification, and in the median strict-standard district, **72.2% of the plan's written justifications fell short**.

09 · INCREASED OR IMPROVED SERVICES

10 of 232 · 4.3%

plans held to the strict standard made a complete written case

THE STRICT STANDARD · RESOLVED



Fully justified Fell short

each dot = one LCAP held to its standard

Counted one by one, **just 2.5% of justifications fell short of the basic standard, while 80.6% fell short of the strict one**. And when you read the failing justifications, they almost always fail at the very last step. Districts successfully name the service and connect it to their high-need students. What's missing is the highly technical, legalistic finish the regulation demands: the explicit case that broad spending is the most effective route, the alternatives considered, and the evidence named.

HOW WE READ THEM · A JUDGMENT NOTE

There's room for honest debate about how strictly to read these requirements, and we say plainly how we read them: against the regulation's own language, built to err toward passing, and checked with a human review aimed at our own false failures (we pulled the 542 insufficient verdicts where an over-flag was most likely; 11 were overturned). However you calibrate it, the gap between the two standards doesn't close. A stricter or looser reading moves 2.5% and 80.6% a little. It doesn't move them toward each other.

CAPACITY, NOT BAD FAITH

This is a documentation gap, not an audit of actual spending. A justification that falls short on paper is not evidence that resources went to the wrong place. It reflects a disconnect between a specific regulatory standard and the local capacity to meet it.

That burden lands heaviest on the districts least equipped to carry it. Among districts held to the strict standard, **91.6% of justifications from the smallest districts fell short**, compared to **71.5% in the largest**. Smallest and largest here mean the bottom and top quarter of districts by enrollment.

Writing a technical, multi-step legal justification takes specialized administrative capacity that a small district office may simply not have. When a standard is this hard for the field to meet, it raises an honest question about workability. What our reading shows is that a primary mechanism for state transparency is currently underperforming, and that the gap is now visible enough to reckon with.

JUSTIFICATION BY JUSTIFICATION, AGAINST EACH STANDARD

limited-scope justifications excluded from these denominators
one grain below the headline

unit = individual justifications · 12,787 read · standards set by 5 CCR §15496

10 · THE BOTTOM LINE

The bottom line

The plans show a system doing real work. Districts set serious goals, fund concrete work, track the measures that matter, and grade themselves honestly when they fall short. Three things stand out.

- **The culture of honesty is real.** Districts are generally not hiding their struggles. They document where they fell short, write substantive reviews of their own work, and treat the new Equity Multiplier requirements with local care rather than boilerplate.
- **Academic recovery hasn't caught up to attendance.** Districts have been largely successful at getting students back into classrooms, but test scores and college-readiness measures haven't kept up with the pace districts set for themselves.
- **The strict standard is a capacity problem.** Four in five districts held to the basic standard met it in full. Among districts held to the stricter one, 4.3% did, and the shortfall is largest in the smallest districts. That gap says less about intent than about what a small district office can produce.

There is plenty here to be encouraged by. Most of what we found is evidence of hard, honest work being done across the state. The plans also show where the system is holding firm and where it is beginning to strain. We hope this look at the field as a whole helps everyone celebrate the progress made and recognize the work still to be done.

That's the state of the LCAP, 2025-26. We're already reading next year's plans.

How we did this

THE SHORT VERSION

We read 806 adopted 2025-26 LCAPs: 758 school districts, 40 county offices of education, and 8 charter schools, about 81% of the State's districts and 69% of its county offices. Every plan was converted, in full, into structured data, and every number in this report comes from that data. This is a large sample, not a census; a more complete corpus is next year's goal.

WHERE AI FITS, AND WHERE IT DOESN'T

No human team reads 806 plans averaging more than 120 pages, so software did the reading. The extraction, turning each PDF into structured data, was done programmatically, with AI models handling the document reading inside that pipeline. Much of the analysis after that is ordinary computation: counting goals, summing dollars, measuring lengths. AI handled the judgment-heavy parts, classifying actions into categories and grading justifications against the regulation's standard, and everywhere it did, we checked the work before using the result. For action categories, we re-ran a blind sample through a stronger model and it agreed with 91.2% of the calls at the grain we report. For the justification grades, the check ran in one direction on purpose: we pulled the 542 strict-standard insufficient verdicts where a false failure was most likely and put those through human review; 11 were overturned. Verdicts of sufficient were not re-reviewed. Where judgment could err, we built it to err in districts' favor.

THE RULES WE HELD OURSELVES TO

Three rules govern the numbers here. We report what plans document, not what districts did; a plan that doesn't mention something is not proof the work never happened. Where a figure could be overstated or understated, we chose the construction that understates, so several rates in this report are floors, not ceilings. And when data couldn't clear a quality bar, we dropped it with a recorded reason instead of patching it.

WHAT THIS REPORT IS NOT

It isn't an audit, it isn't a ranking, and it never names a district in an analytical result. It's a description of what California's school plans say, at a scale where the patterns become visible.

THE EQUITY MULTIPLIER EIGHT

Of the 694 eligible schools our plans cover, 686 have an affirmative Equity Multiplier goal. Of the eight that don't: four are covered only by a generic umbrella goal rather than one of their own, and four are a genuine documented gap: schools with no qualifying goal at all. We also checked whether the per-school goals were copies of one another, using the same duplicate-text check we ran across the corpus. They aren't: within a district, the closest pair of Equity Multiplier goals shared under half its text, and the typical pair about 3%.

About this report

The State of the LCAP is an annual reading of California's Local Control and Accountability Plans. Each edition covers one year of adopted plans, read cover to cover and turned into structured data, and is published in full online.

Get next year's edition first

One email a year, when the new edition ships. Scan the code or visit the address below.

goboinfo.com/state-of-the-lcap/2025-26

How we did this

The method, the calibration against human review, and the record of what was excluded and why are set out in the appendix to this report.

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